



The countryside charity
Bedfordshire

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**CPRE Bedfordshire Comments under “Right to Speak” made to
Bedford Borough Council Planning Committee Meeting
Monday 14th October 2024
Re: Hybrid Planning Application 22/02193/MOF 500 new dwellings
Sharnbrook (Full application 304 dwellings, Outline application 196
dwellings)**

This is a very large and important planning application for 500 new homes.

It represents an increase of 50% to the size of the village of Sharnbrook which has around 1,000 dwellings.

The application itself and the manner in which it has been handled by the Council has been the cause of much concern.

Originally put forward as a major outline application for 500 dwellings in 2022.

It was then withdrawn and changed to this Hybrid application in 2024.

The application number however remained the same.

The only change made was to the final 3 letters – from MAF to MOF.

This has caused of much confusion.

Sharnbrook Parish Council also had a problem in this respect.

We are not speaking on behalf of the Council this evening but we refer you to their letter to the Planning Officer dated 8th May 2024.

The first paragraph the letter states – “... *the Parish Council are both disappointed and disgusted at the delay in informing us of this re-consultation.....”.*

It then explains in detail, the issues it has with the application over an extensive 21 pages.

CPRE Bedfordshire has never seen such a letter in our many years of working on planning applications across Bedfordshire.

Ladies and Gentlemen, something is very wrong when this happens and we suggest that you seek clarity on the matter and determine precisely which organisations and residents were consulted and when.

With regard to the application itself, CPRE Bedfordshire has the following concerns:

1. Privatisation of Open Green Space and Children's Play Areas

I refer the Committee to section 2.10 of the Officers report.

In the final sentence of page 47, it is stated that the
“...areas will be retained by a management company...”

The Committee will be aware from our previous comments to Committee, that CPRE Bedfordshire has very serious concerns regarding this matter.

This is instead of the Public Open Spaces being passed over to Parish Councils for ownership and management.

Management Companies are charging residents between 2 and 4 times the amount that a Parish Council would charge for the same service.

There is:

- No democratic accountability.
- No limit on the Management charge increases year on year.
- Profits in perpetuity for developers/landowners.
- In short, a “rip-off”, with memories of the leasing scandal.

Unlike Borough Councillors, Parish Councillors are volunteers, they receive no salary and no expenses.

This evening, CPRE Bedfordshire is very pleased to report that the Government's "**Competitions & Markets Authority**" has recently issued their report into housebuilding.

Their conclusion on the "Private Management of Amenities on Housing Estates" is firmly against the practice.

The CMA is calling on the UK government to prohibit the establishment of management companies and to introduce consumer protection measures for households living under these arrangements.

The CMA report is in-line with CPRE Bedfordshire's demands and completely vindicates our actions over the last few years to try and protect local people from this "rip-off".

In light of this report, we suggest that the Council withholds both this application and the Clapham application in order to consult with Government on the way forward.

If the Council goes ahead with this "privatisation" of Open Green Space, local residents could take legal action against the Council.

2. The second area of concern to us is sewage capacity and pollution of the River Great Ouse

This development will use the Odell Sewage Treatment Plant already operating at capacity.

In 2023 the site recorded a massive 1,054 spillage hours of untreated sewage from 79 separate incidents.

The largest spillage anywhere along the Bedfordshire Great Ouse.

The Odell Sewage Treatment Plant is just a few hundred metres upstream of Felmersham where adults and children regularly swim and where Sharnbrook School and others launch boats.

The Environment Agency, in its response to the first MAF application highlighted these issues and stated that Anglian Water should confirm that it could accept the foul water from the development without exceeding its Permit limits.

No such commitment has been received from Anglia Water.

For some reason the Council will not take into consideration the Environment Agency comments on the first MAF application.

Furthermore, most unusually, the Environment Agency has not commented on the MOF application.

We have never seen a Major Planning Application that the Environment Agency has not commented on.

- Did they receive notification of the application?
- Are there other reasons why they did not comment?

The Council has a “duty of care” to its residents.

If there is a possibility that swimmers and boat users could be made ill by untreated sewage at Felmersham, then the Council should urgently seek clarification from both Anglian Water and the Environment Agency, that residents will not be adversely impacted before pursuing this application.

Again, the Council could be open to legal challenge by residents who fall ill after swimming or boating at Felmersham.

3. No affordable homes for Social Rent included in the development.

It is totally unacceptable that not one affordable home for social rent will be made available on this site, despite the recognised desperate shortage of such accommodation for those on the lowest incomes.

Ladies and gentlemen this application should be refused or, at the very least delayed, to allow for further consultation with Government, the Environment Agency and Anglian Water on the issues we have brought to your attention.

Thank you for your time this evening

CPRE Bedfordshire