

The Shaw Residents' Association (SRA)

**Summing up – Ridgeway Farm Public Inquiry**

Kevin Fisher

The SRA believes this appeal should be rejected.

To approve it would be un-democratic and result in a significant negative impact on the quality of life of local residents now and for generations to come.

Having sat through every day of the inquiry thereby hearing all the evidence, speaking on behalf of the SRA and the local community, I remain convinced of the validity of these objections.

Receiving 665 emails of support primarily initiated by an article in a free monthly publication (The Link) demonstrates the considerable public opposition to this proposal. Furthermore, it is rare to witness cross party agreement on any issues and yet the SRA received letters of support from the leaders of all three main political parties within Swindon Borough Council.

The SRA evidence was accompanied by a print out of all 665 emails. Respondents were simply asked to provide their names and addresses and yet, the majority chose to provide their justifications for refusal of this appeal, with virtually all comments focusing on issues surrounding West Swindon's current road infrastructure.

During the inquiry, members of the public, eight councillors from both Wiltshire and Swindon and a Swindon MP spoke against the development using arguments based on policy and quality of life impact for existing residents.

It was interesting to note not a single third party spoke in favour of the appeal despite the obvious business benefits local shops, pubs and restaurants would enjoy from this development. Indeed one local business even sent an email of support to the SRA.

The appellant advised the inquiry that their consultations with the local community resulted in changes to the proposal in order to satisfy any concerns; in so doing they attempted to lead the inquiry to believe significant issues had been resolved. Since the SRA has an in depth knowledge of the community, as evidenced in the 665 emails received, we find this hard to believe. Nothing short of withdrawal of the application or the construction of the Thamesdown Drive to Great Western Way relief road would satisfy many of the communities concerns.

The concept of placing a spine road through the centre of the development and 'shared space' at the urban square was criticised by third parties. The appellant contended that the severance created for communities either side of the spine road was within acceptable norms and yet proposes to place seven pedestrian crossings along its length.

A play area for children is proposed for the south east corner of the site which is the closest point to Sparcells. The appellant agreed that unaccompanied children from Sparcells may choose to walk the short distance from their homes to this new play area. He also agreed the road they would need to cross has poor visibility to the east for pedestrians and carries about 3000 vehicles in one direction during peak times. The SRA concludes this will create serious safety concerns for these children as they cross this very busy road.

There was much discussion about the impact of this development on both West Swindon and Wiltshire's roads. The appellant advocated the impact would be minimal thereby justifying their decision not to carry out a detailed assessment in order to understand the impact on the residential amenity.

The appellant advised that for such an assessment to take place the existing road must be 'at capacity' and be expected to increase by a further 30%. Whilst this may be the official guidance, the SRA contends that most members of the public will be appalled by this revelation.

The appellant's traffic numbers were brought into scrutiny by a number of third parties. A task I personally found difficult given my minimal experience and knowledge of these matters. However, logic, common sense and local knowledge are on the side of the SRA.

Despite my lack of technical expertise in this area, I was able to highlight the data used by the appellant for Swinley Drive was erroneous in two critical measurements. Firstly, the appellant's morning peak time south bound volumes were noted as 80 pcu's whereas my physical counts revealed about 250 vehicles, a number the appellant agreed was more realistic. Secondly, the appellant advised the road width was 7.3 metres when in fact it is 6.75 metres.

Since my research only focused on one road it is not unreasonable to take a position that many other modelled numbers provided by the appellant, particularly for minor roads, may also be incorrect.

The appellant's traffic model (technical note – supplementary transport evidence, table 1) shows three Swinley Drives. Line items 10 and 11 are clearly in error and should read Peatmoor Way. These line items show a vehicle number reduction half way along the road which can be accounted for by the access to Hillmead Industrial Estate. However, the appellant was unable to answer whether the modelling was based on a fully utilised industrial area or one at about 40% capacity (which is currently the situation for this estate). He could only advise the numbers came from Swindon Borough Council.

The appellant agreed that, in general terms, extending a straight part of a road would lead to higher speeds. He contended that although the northern relatively straight part of Swinley Drive would be extended by about 300 metres, the design with side roads, bus stops and the slight kink to the right on the existing road would serve to reduce speed.

However, he also agreed that Swinley Drive today has all these features and yet speed activated 30 mph warnings are placed at both ends of the road. It therefore seems logical that vehicle speeds on Swinley Drive will increase as a result of this development, heightening the risk of a tragic accident.

Much debate occurred about the impact Ridgeway Farm will have on volumes of traffic along Swinley Drive and other West Swindon residential roads with the appellant advocating the roads have capacity, though of course realising that since Swinley Drive is now narrower than their data suggested its capacity is 190 vehicles fewer.

Whilst the SRA cannot provide conclusive evidence to suggest Swinley Drive traffic will approach capacity or indeed offer a percentage increase from Ridgeway Farm, we can list some observations which would indicate the increase in traffic on this road will be substantial:

1. Both parties agreed Mead Way is over capacity today at certain times. Rat run traffic as a result of this congestion is already significant as demonstrated in the content of the 665 emails sent to the SRA
2. The Swinley Drive extension runs only slightly to the west of the north to south centre line of Ridgeway Farm. Therefore the majority of new homes will be closer to Swinley Drive than they are to Mead Way meaning these new residents will be more likely to use Swinley Drive as the southern exit simply based on geographic location. Ridgeway Farm will generate 567 vehicles in the morning peak period using SRA data and 311 vehicles using the appellants data
3. The numbers of vehicles today that would enter the new development from the north is over 500 in the morning peak period. Given that pedestrian crossings do cause some delay to motorists, drivers will be faced with a choice of seven pedestrian crossings and one 'shared space' if they keep to the spine road towards Mead Way or fewer pedestrian crossings with no 'shared space' if they turn right onto the extended Swinley Drive. Alternatively, by turning right before entering the new spine road, drivers can follow the existing B4553 past the Casa Paolo Restaurant and join Swinley Drive and in so doing avoid all pedestrian crossings
4. HGV's entering from the north will have the same choices as in point three above

The SRA advocated in its evidence that crossing Swinley Drive is a dangerous activity today and will get worse should this development come on line. Whilst the appellant did not agree entirely with this statement, the only substantial comments he made was that one hedge at the point of the Nightwood Copse crossing needs to be removed to improve visibility.

We can analyse official data on 'severance' and of course from this conclude there is no problem with Swinley Drive. However, this theoretical evidence is massively outweighed by the factual evidence portrayed in many of the 665 emails sent to the SRA. Parents are worried for their children's safety today, the road is crossed at every single point along its

length today and children from the west side of Swinley Drive do walk to both Peatmoor and Brook Field primary schools.

As noted earlier there has been no modelling to measure the impact on the residential amenity and no review of the additional traffic this development will bring to Cartwright Drive. This is a residential road running through Shaw, has a primary school at its western edge and is even more winding than Swinley Drive. The appellant was not able to advise how many vehicles on reaching the southern end of Swinley Drive turn onto Roughmoor Way towards Cartwright Drive. I advised the appellant it was about 70%. It is therefore reasonable to postulate that Cartwright Drive will see a similar increase in traffic volumes, including HGVs, as Swinley Drive.

Whilst a part of one of the SRA's surveys provided in its proof was flawed in as much as it did not define peak times, the follow up data (document ID46), representing 427 homes clearly shows a peak hour (08:00 – 09:00) departure level of 0.81 representing a figure almost double that suggested by the appellant.

It was argued by the appellant that whilst the new survey was better it still did not give the "right" answer since it asked "on an average day (Monday to Friday and excluding holidays), how many cars leave your household during the 07:00 – 08:00 period and how many during the 08:00 – 09:00 period". The appellant suggests that since the words 'on average' were used the responses could include double counting. I countered that where residents told me they were not on the road at these peak times for some of the days of the week, some were discounted and some included. Additionally, many residents stated zero cars during these periods citing the words 'on average'.

The appellant agreed that across the country departure rates for the 07:00 – 08:00 period are approaching those of the 08:00 – 09:00 period. Given that the SRA survey in document ID46 shows the departure rate for the earlier period is 89% of that of the later, the credibility of the data is further enhanced. It also shows factual evidence that a significant percentage of West Swindon residents are leaving earlier than the official peak hour due, in part, to existing congestion problems.

Given the flaws in the appellant's data for Swinley Drive and the credibility of the SRA data based on the relationship of the 07:00 - 08:00 and 08:00 - 09:00 departure rates noted above, I leave it to the Inspector to decide which departure rate carries the most weight (the appellants 0.445, the SRA's 0.81 or indeed a number somewhere in between) and the consequent impact this will have to the appellants traffic predictions for Swindon's existing residents.

The appellant offered no additional evidence to counter predictions that visits to Peatmoor Village centre would increase by 46% and vehicle volumes would increase by 59%. He did agree that the car park at the centre today is very busy and, when commenting on the

photographs in the SRA proof, stated that he could not dispute them. The only statements made by the appellant to the SRA evidence was that the facilities were designed to take more people and that as the car park becomes more constrained, people will be encouraged to walk. This is a mantra that rarely survives the test of reality. No explanation was offered as to why parents choose to drive their children to school during the school run even when there are no parking spaces provided and the appellant agreed that someone is unlikely to walk for 15 minutes on a wet winter evening to buy their fish and chips.

The SRA remains convinced this development would result in a catastrophic break down in the ability of traffic to operate safely within Peatmoor Village Centre.

To re-quote Greg Clarke MP “..it leaves people ‘done to’ and imposed upon – the very opposite of the sense of participation and involvement on which a healthy democracy thrives”

The appellant suggests building new homes on Ridgeway Farm over and above a democratically derived Core Strategy will encourage additional jobs to come to Swindon. The SRA has an opposite opinion. Ridgeway Farm would lead to the further destruction of Swindon’s crown jewels e.g. the open countryside that surrounds it, lead to demoralisation of existing residents in the manner in which they are ‘done to’ by the system and burden the travel infrastructure in the west beyond breaking point. Thus perpetuating the poor image Swindon has in the wider community as a place to live and discouraging employers from moving to the town.

The term ‘sustainable’ has been used ad-nauseam throughout the inquiry without any proper definition of its meaning, indeed it was even suggested by the appellant that landscaping would be ‘sustainable’.

The appellant stated his traffic modelling shows that as West Swindon’s roads and Junction 16 of the M4 become more congested, many drivers coming from the west on the M4 seeking to reach the A419 will choose to remain on the M4 until junction 15 rather than travelling through West Swindon, thus resulting in a reduction of traffic through West Swindon. Given that this represents a doubling in the distance these vehicles will need to travel (as measured to the junction with the A419 to the north of Cricklade) it is very clear this scenario paints an unsustainable picture under any definition of the word.

The SRA proof of evidence suggested a definition of “add to growth in the economy whilst not negatively impacting the quality of life for the majority of people in and around the development area”, and suggested that it is clear this development will be contrary to both principles since, poor travel infrastructure leads to both lower productivity and a poorer quality of life for existing and future generations.

The SRA remains convinced of this argument.

The SRA proof of evidence provided to this inquiry has been derived from:

- 1346 residents sending the SRA 665 emails from 660 households with, in many cases, substantial commentary
- 274 households provided responses to a survey asking about their choice of transport to Peatmoor Village centre, their choice should the weather be poor and their choice during the after dark hours
- 304 households provided responses to a survey asking about their peak time travel behaviours and their understanding of the problems with finding a parking space at Peatmoor Village centre
- 427 households provided responses to a survey asking about their travel choices during the 07:00 – 08:00 and the 08:00 – 09:00 weekday periods

This substantial data clearly indicates the evidence the SRA has provided to this inquiry is based on informed factual information about how people travel in the very area of the proposed development. As such, the SRA ask that due consideration is given to its traffic analysis when assessing the validity of 'official' traffic information.

The SRA believes it has presented compelling evidence to support the rejection of this appeal and we respectfully ask the Inspector to take it into account, along with all of the other evidence, and conclude that the appeal must be rejected.