

500 Words on the Coley Farm Planning Application

Cold Ash Parish Council

On the 2nd July 2019, West Berkshire Councillors unanimously declared a Climate Emergency. This was followed six months later with the Council's Environment Strategy 2020-2030.

A central part of that strategy involves re-evaluating policies and decisions inherited prior to the Emergency and, as with all emergencies, acting urgently and resolutely before events overtake us.

- Paragraph 6.2.5 places great stress on reviewing planning with a view to carbon neutrality.
- Nature recovery (6.2.6).
- Protecting and Enhancing our Natural Environment (6.1.5).
- Healthy Communities (5.3). This crucial section is about sustainable transport, walking and cycling, which is especially relevant to Coley Farm – “to encourage active travel, such as Go Kinetic, Walk to School Week and Bikeability.”

West Berkshire's commitment and leadership on the Climate Emergency is impressive but, as with all things that create short-term costs and challenges, the key to such policies is, will the Council actually follow through? In the vernacular of our time --- 'will West Berkshire Council put its money where its mouth is'?

Because it is difficult to find a planning proposal that is more at odds with that widely admired and supported Environment Strategy than this development at Coley Farm. On every single count, it fails, and fails badly.

In a word, it's a development that is not just a blight on open countryside and a lovely lane, it's a BLIGHT on the Climate Emergency.

The very idea of a child walking to school from an estate at Coley Farm is nonsense. Up a one in twelve hill, then down a dark, narrow road – very few adults will walk, let alone children. To the shop, the doctor, the bus? It's simply not going to happen. People will go by car.

There's flooding, too. There's concreting over a beautiful field. There's terrible traffic access. And incredibly steep estate streets, enough to deter the most enthusiastic cyclist.

Why is this development even being considered? Because of a perverse decision many years ago to include these fields in the DPD, when West Berkshire Council was behind on housing supply, well before signing up to the Climate Emergency.

The DPD was then, this is now. It's time all of us acted with the sensibilities of our planet in mind. The Council's Environment Strategy specifically requires reviewing planning decisions.

Today, there is no need to go ahead with this development anyway. West Berkshire Council is ahead of governmental land supply requirements, and the developer does not see Coley Farm as any kind of priority. Otherwise, why would they have delayed for over three years?

So, the question for every Councillor is inescapable: Do you want to ignore the declaration of a Climate Emergency and rip up the Council's Environment Strategy? Or will Councillors vote against this flawed and environmentally backward development? If so, perhaps it will be the first indication that West Berkshire Council really are taking the Climate Emergency seriously.

Bernard Clark. Vice Chair, Cold Ash Parish Council