Objection to OUT/2022/0713 –
260 Homes off of Bennetts Rd at Manor Farm , Richborough Estates

I wish to object to this development on the following grounds. It should be rejected because

- There is grave doubt about the population forecasts for Coventry, and any need for this housing. On the precautionary principle it would be reckless to make decisions now, on bad data, ahead of the census, which will very shortly resolve the matter.
- The Local plan states retention of ancient hedgerows is “essential” but the masterplan for the estate removes ancient and important hedges [H2, H3, H3, & H8]. It is a breach of local plan policies H2 and GE3 which protect “ancient hedges and important hedges, without qualification – the policies say they will be retained, not ‘when practical’ or ‘possible’.
- The Transport modelling systematically underestimates future traffic. Major sources of traffic growth are omitted. Local junctions are currently over capacity and likely to get worse even with mitigation if the true scale of traffic growth is assessed.
- The government this week announced a dramatic change of policy – that housing targets will no longer be enforced, and the people will have control. As such, irrevocable planning decisions motivated by past targets, should be paused until the new freedom of the local authority to make its own decisions, and the powers of the public to accept or reject such decisions, are clear. It would be folly to sacrifice the last best piece of the Warwickshire countryside, - CCC’s own words – when the compulsion to do so is gone.
- Coventry Secondary Schools are oversubscribed. There will be nowhere nearby for children to go to secondary.
- It is more and more doubtful that the new primary school promised for Keresley will be built. Four years ago, Mark Andrews promised that it would happen, that the council was urgently seeking a sponsor, but still no one has agreed to deliver the school. It is an old story. The same thing happened at Banner Brook, and Marconi, where promised schools, and surgeries never materialised. It is unsustainable to build homes, and hope that schools and surgeries will follow.
- The NHS has no capacity for additional growth. Both UHCW and Warwick Hospital are running at 100%. Covid ought to have taught us not to be casual about spare capacity for emergencies. Doctors’ surgeries are all full up too.

1. Lack of need: The Precautionary Principle,
   There is abundant evidence that the population forecasts for Coventry are wrong. On the Precautionary Principle, which is law in the UK under the Aarhus convention, it would be reckless to make planning decisions on the basis of highly questionable figures, when authoritative data from the latest census, will be published in just a month or two – ONS have promised results by “early summer”.

   The sole reason which the inspector gave for removing land from green belt was alleged exceptional population growth. Coventry Council is well aware of expert evidence, previously submitted, that the claimed extraordinary growth has not happened. As such, there is no reason for building unneeded homes on land which Coventry Council described as the best remaining piece of unspoiled landscape in Warwickshire (in the 1995 Coventry Arden Design Guidelines, which remain in effect).

In May 2021 a lengthy investigation from the Office of Statistics Regulation (the official regulator of government statistics) cast considerable doubt over the ONS population forecasts for Coventry, finding

> "the population estimates for some cities such as Coventry, did seem to be inconsistent with, and potentially higher than, local evidence would suggest. This also appeared to be the case in a number of smaller cities with large student populations."

Coventry Council responded, in May 2021 that the findings were "not definitive". While the findings did not give a precise number for the current population of Coventry, this does not invalidate the regulator's strong doubts about the improbability of the existing ONS population figures. They wrote:

> "it is disappointing to hear that our findings are not being considered sufficiently within the council discussions. While it may not feel like it, I would echo Ed's sentiment that our report was one of our more hard hitting pieces
>
> we are convinced that there is an issue with Coventry's figures and that **local sources of data are clearly inconsistent with the ONS figures,**
>
> email of Elise Baseley, Statistics Regulator, OSR, 2 June 2021

The regulators first draft of their report, obtained through FOI, was even stronger

> "fixes have not done enough to address the overestimation of these groups in some areas. **This has led to an over reliance on insufficiently robust data to inform local planning decisions such as the need to build additional schools and housing."**

2. **Traffic**
    1. The Traffic modelling systematically underestimates future traffic
        1. Traffic on the Tamworth Road and Bennetts Road is already bad, with long queues in the mornings. The cumulative effect of the SUE, including this development, will make it worse. Even with mitigation, the Hub study still shows traffic over 100% capacity at some junctions.
        2. The baseline Automatic Traffic Counts in the HUB study for this development (the latest iteration of the traffic modelling) were done in June July 2021, when traffic was suppressed by covid and people working from home – around 10% below previous levels[1]. If the baseline is too low, then all future forecasts of growth, using Tempro and NTEM, will also be too low. The traffic modelling needs to be redone, with traffic counts from a normal time.
        3. The modelling failed to include major sources of traffic:
            1. the new HS2 station, which will have 7,500 parking spaces, 100,000 new jobs, and 4,000 new homes – in 2014, Coventry Council complained in a petition to Parliament about the damaging effect of HS2 traffic on Coventry roads[2].
            2. Passenger growth at the airport – forecast to more than double, from 11m/year to 27m/yr. DfT TAG M4 guidance on traffic modelling requires airports to be included in the modelling, in addition to the use of NTEM

1 https://www.creds.ac.uk/publications/less-is-more-changing-travel-in-a-post-pandemic-society/

2 https://www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/file/15168/coventry_city_council_hs2_petition

and TEMPRO..

“Adjusting NTEM data to take account of surface transport for air passengers

7.3.9 “**Surface travel demand for airports should be considered for all schemes**, [emphasis added] but where there is no major airport within or near to the study area, it may be sufficient to assume that such travel is minimal and make a case to the Department for not analysing it explicitly.”[3]

3. A new corridor from the A45 to the M6.
   Highways England anticipated that the Keresley link road could open up a whole new traffic profile
   “In summary, Highways England has recommended that consideration should be given to other planned growth including Local Plan allocated development (with the Eastern Green SUE being the most prominent), as well as the inclusion of the proposed Keresley SUE Link Road**. The introduction of this would provide a new corridor for traffic to the west of the city and could potentially affect the strategic traffic profile for the whole of Coventry.”**

The traffic impacts need to be re-evaluated. The traffic studies use invalid and misleading standards: the 1993 IEMA guidance. Relying on it, the studies ignore impacts less than 30%. This is misleading. The report itself states that this rule is not applicable to matters of highways “capacity” or “operation”. Current guidance in both Northern Ireland and Scotland states that a 5% impact is significant and on busy roads, even a 1% change can be significant.

> “3.18. It should be noted that the Department of Environment suggests in Planning Policy Note 13 (DOE 1988) that **increases of traffic of 5% are likely to be considered as significant by the Dept of Transport. The context of such a statement relates to the operational and capacity criteria of a highway** and not its environmental impacts. It is suggested that the criteria set out in these paragraphs are more relevant to assessment of the environmental impacts and hence the higher thresholds are more relevant” [from the 1993 IEMA guidance]

It is not assured that the Keresley Link Road will ever be built in full. Highways England has expressed doubts. “the purpose of the additional modelling is to ensure that, from an SRN perspective, we are not committing to a position that relies upon on a final stage of a Link Road scheme that may not come forward but had been demonstrated to be necessary in traffic terms.”[4]

If this came to pass, traffic skirting the north west of Coventry, could end up rat running through the streets of Keresley and Holbrooks to get to Junction 3 M6.

3 TAG UNIT M4 Forecasting and Uncertainty May 2019

4 Highways England to CCC 4 Jul 2019 [our doc 20]

Hedgerows:

Local Plan Policy

> Policy GE3 of The local plan states "ancient hedgerows will be protected against loss or damage"
>
> Policy H2 states that "Table 4.2 identifies…..essential details", and goes on to give as one of those essentials as" Retention of medieval fishponds, ancient woodlands, **important (ancient) hedgerows**." [emphasis added]

Neither of those policy prescriptions is qualified. They do not state "where possible" or "ideally" or use any other words which imply that protecting ancient hedgerows is optional.

Insufficient weight is given to green infrastructure i.e. retaining ancient and important hedges. The local plan makes green infrastructure very important. Hedgerows are the largest and most important wildlife habitat in the country.

> "Green infrastructure is considered equal to all other forms of infrastructure and will be viewed as a critical element in the determination of planning applications" Coventry Local Plan

The Residential Design Guidance SPD states, "Where developments are located on sites with existing trees, hedgerows or other significant vegetation' every effort should be made to integrate these elements into the development". According to the black face meaning of the text, we are entitled to conclude that retaining ancient hedgerows is essential
- No evidence is given that an alternative layout, including all the hedges, is not possible.

Policy GE3, Green infrastructure,

Retaining the existing hedge network is particularly important because it fulfils at least some of the requirement for "enhanced connectivity between the ancient woodlands" (Bunsons Wood and The Alders) in policy H2:1 –

Failure to assess hedges for "importance" and age/ancient

In the tree assessment, the hedges were not assessed to determine whether or not they are "ancient" or "important"

"important" is defined in the Hedgerow Regulations 1997

For this paper "ancient" is taken to be the same standard as for ancient woodlands, more than 400 years old. The charity Buglife says pre enclosures, in 1720, makes a hedge ancient

> "Ancient hedgerows, which tend to be those which support the greatest diversity of plants and animals, are generally defined as those which were in existence before the Enclosure Acts, passed mainly between 1720 and 1840 in Britain. Species-rich

hedgerows may be taken as those which contain 5 or more native woody species on average in a 30 metre length, or 4 or more in northern England and upland Wales"[5]

Without an assessment of the hedges, for 'importance' and for 'ancientness' it is impossible to know whether the local plan requirements to "retain" important (ancient) hedgerows, is complied with. The Wharton Tree Study did not address either of these matters.

Further The Wharton Tree assessment seriously under reports the species present in the hedges.

A survey in May 2022, when the species are in leaf and easily identified, found the following:

	Hedgerow			
Species	H2	H3	H4	H8
Blackthorn	x	x	x	x
Dog Rose	x	x		x
Hawthorn	x	x	x	x
Oak	x	x		
Elder	x	x	x	x
Hazel	x	x	x	
Ash	x			x
Holly	x	x	x	x
Field Maple		x	x	
Crab Apple		x	x	
Honeysuckle				x
average no woody species per 30m, May 2022	5.2	5.2	3.6	4.4
for the whole hedge, number of species, May 2022	8	9	7	7
Wharton Tree study, number species	5	4	7	5
age by Hoopers law[6], years, from the May 22 survey/30m	**572 yrs**	**572 yrs**	**393 yrs**	**484 yrs**
Note: the Wharton paper does not give sufficient information to get the age				

Hedgerows, H2, H4, and H8 will be removed and much of H3, according to the plans. All qualify legally as "important" hedgerows under the Hedgerow Regulations 1997 for the following reasons as given in Schedule 1, part 2 of the Regs: Both are ancient, in the sense of ancient woodlands, being more 400 years old and certainly comply with the Bug life definition of being pre enclosures.

Why they are "important" hedges, according to the Hedgerow Regulation

5 https://www.buglife.org.uk/resources/habitat-management/ancient-and-species-rich-hedgerows/

6 110 years for each woody species

All are habitat for endangered red list bird species. Lists of the species found locally are found below

> “6.—(1) The hedgerow—
>
> (a)contains species listed or categorised as mentioned in sub-paragraph (3); “
>
> Bird species listed as endangered on the latest RSPB BOCC 5 list live and nest in the vicinity – red list species observed within the SUE include
> yellowhammer
> skylark
> marsh tit
> spotted flycatcher
> redpoll
> lapwing
> tree sparrows
> grey partridge
> linnets
> willow tit
> lesser spotted woodpecker
> reed bunting
> (Detailed observational records, from the SUE, collected daily by over 10 years can be supplied)

No consideration was given to the hedges for wildlife, landscape, and history.

Forecast Traffic at the junction of Exhall Rd and Bennetts Rd, without mitigation – way over capacity from the HUB Transport Assessment for OUT/2022/0712 Richborough Estates.

Approach	AM Peak 08:00-09:00			PM Peak 17:00-18:00		
	RFC	Queue	Delay (s)	RFC	Queue	Delay (s)
2026 Do Minimum						
Exhall Rd	1.51	113	1012	0.90	7	79
Bennetts Rd	0.31	1	9	0.39	1	7
2026 Do Something						
Exhall Rd	1.58	130	1152	1.00	14	137
Bennetts Rd	0.40	1	10	0.42	1	7
2031 Do Minimum						
Exhall Rd	1.62	142	1259	0.97	11	118
Bennetts Rd	0.34	1	9	0.42	1	7
2031 Do Something						
Exhall Rd	1.69	159	1401	1.07	23	202
Bennetts Rd	0.42	1	10	0.45	1	7

6.42 **Table 12** demonstrates that the junction is operating over capacity with significant queuing on Exhall Road during all scenarios. This is particularly the case during the AM peak hour.

6.43 However, RFC values of between 1.51 and 1.69 in the AM peak hour are well beyond the modelling capabilities of the Junctions 10 software and, as such, results should be treated with a significant degree of caution.

6.44 Notwithstanding this, on the basis that the junction is operating well over capacity, it is considered that a mitigation scheme is necessary.

6.45 The proposed mitigation scheme and subsequent testing is set out later in this report.

Traffic Forecast, Bennetts Rd Exhall Rd [J2], with mitigation – still over 100%, with no spare capacity. More than 0.85 ratio of flow to capacity (RFC) is considered undesirable by traffic engineers. Coventry Council, in their Connecting Coventry paper of 2017, point to the chaos on Coventry Roads caused by regular closures of the M6 – having recognised such events, there is a mandatory need for reserve capacity on the roads, not to run them at 100% of normal capacity.

1.3 Provide greater resilience to the motorway and trunk road network: **when problems occur on the M6 the A45 and other routes around Coventry are frequently brought to a standstill** and this undermines the attraction of the city as a place in which to invest;. [from Connecting Coventry Jan 2017]

The TA did not consider large new developments at Hospital Lane and School Lane which are likely to feed traffic into Exhall Rd, especially if the Keresley Link Rd is not completed as far as Prologis Park. In so far as the TA systematically underestimates future traffic, the future situation is very likely to be worse than forecast, even with mitigation.

Table 21 – Bennetts Road/Exhall Road Proposed Mitigation – ARCADY Analysis

Approach	AM Peak 08:00-09:00			PM Peak 17:00-18:00		
	RFC	Queue	Delay (s)	RFC	Queue	Delay (s)
2026 Do Something						
Bennetts Rd (N)	0.93	10	54	0.63	2	13
Exhall Rd	1.00	16	109	0.60	2	15
Bennetts Rd (S)	0.58	1	14	0.84	5	29
2031 Do Something						
Bennetts Rd (N)	0.98	16	78	0.66	2	14
Exhall Rd	1.06	26	161	0.64	2	16
Bennetts Rd (S)	0.60	2	14	0.88	7	38

6.99 **Table 21** demonstrates that the mitigation scheme would greatly improve the operation of the junction. This can be compared to the results shown in **Table 12** where RFC values of greater than 1.50 are forecast with delays of more than 20 minutes.

6.100 The mitigation scheme significantly improves the queuing and delays on all arms when compared to the current priority T-junction arrangement. This material benefit significantly outweighs the visibility splay issue at the junction, particularly when one considers the likely risk-taking that will occur in the future by drivers who are required to wait up to 20 minutes at the junction.

From the HUB TA for OUT/2022/0712, Richborough Estates.

Cc Gregory, Mary <Mary.Gregory@Statistics.gov.uk>, Andrew Watson <watson.talton@gmail.com>

Hi Merle,

Apologies for the delay in getting back to you – today is my first day back in the office after a few days off.

I appreciate the gravity of the situation you are in and it is disappointing to hear that our findings are not being considered sufficiently within the council discussions. While it may not feel lik report was one of our more hard hitting pieces as we rarely comment on the policy implications of data being used in this way.

I recognise the challenge around language and this was something we spent a long time considering when writing the report. Due to the way we carry out our regulatory reviews, we could n estimates are from reality as we relied on information that was publicly available or provided to us through evidence submissions. For example, we did not have direct access to administrati to ONS's model for producing the statistics. While we are convinced that there is an issue with Coventry's figures and that local sources of data are clearly inconsistent with the ONS figure suggests we know the true value as we don't have the data sources which enable us to produce the alternative set of statistics.

In terms of the approach we took to carrying out this review, the main analysis was to compare published information from ONS with local evidence and data submitted to us. We also looke might indicate trends of students and local population changes. For example, we analysed the Department for Education's longitudinal data on graduate outcomes which includes data on w universities move to (or whether they stay in the local area). We also reviewed ONS quality and methodology documents over time to assess how methodological changes and decisions we file is essentially a combination of this published material and submissions made to us, I think we would be largely sharing information you have already seen as my understanding is that y submissions made to us. We would need to seek permission from anyone else who submitted evidence to us before sharing it with you.

I am due to meet with ONS this week to get an update on their progress in reporting back to us in July about how they are acting on our findings. If there is anything that might help you that know.

Sorry that I can't be of more help.

Thanks,