

Thank you Chair and good morning Members. It will perhaps not be a surprise to anyone that the ward member for Whimple & Rockbeare is appearing to object to an application that forms part of a major extension of Cranbrook, but I will preface my comments by saying that, beyond the in-principle objection that I am here to put, I believe there are genuine further considerations that weigh heavily against the proposal and lead me to substantially disagree with officers' recommendation in favour of the scheme.

I will start, however, with those in-principle objections – and at this juncture I would note that Rockbeare Parish Council have asked me to represent their objections in this vein too. Cranbrook was never supposed to cross the old A30. This application does. The Rockbeare Neighbourhood Plan, in spirit and in letter, categorically sets out to protect countryside within the Parish from further residential development comprising encroachment on open countryside surrounding the main village of Rockbeare, seeking to preserve what remains of the green space between Rockbeare and the ever-growing Cranbrook. While I would not seek to argue that the Rockbeare Neighbourhood Plan should hold more weight than the more recently-adopted Cranbrook Plan, I am seriously concerned that the recommendation before you effectively dismisses the clear provisions of the Rockbeare Neighbourhood Plan, and that encroachment must weigh against the proposal.

Moving to broader considerations, then, I would like to start with the issue of SANGS space, regarding which Cranbrook Town Council have also objected. The application encroaches on land designated as SANGS by the Cranbrook Plan, proposing residential development within the SANGS area. Officer assessment suggests this incursion is mitigated by provision of an additional parcel of land separated from the rest of the designated SANGS space by the access lane to Grange Court. It seems abundantly obvious that SANGS space divided by a regularly-used vehicular access road, and directly bounded by residential development, cannot be of the same quality as a single SANGS area of equivalent size with lesser residential frontage – both from a landscape perspective and that of user safety. In addition, I would point out that if this application is granted, and subsequently every developer in the Grange Expansion Area makes the same proposal to extend residential development and provision “alternative” SANGS space, this will functionally extend the settlement boundary beyond the extent that Council has concluded is acceptable under the NPPF and according to its own strategic planning objectives, in order to suit developers’ profit-seeking preferences. Neither of these outcomes can be compatible with prevailing policy.

Finally, I'd like to turn to the elephant in the room – or, as in the case of this application, the elephant quite categorically not in the room. Those who have delved into documentation submitted with the application will no doubt have noted that the application effectively totally dismisses and glosses over the question of addressing the Climate Crisis, waving off the issue for consideration at condition discharge stage, outside the purview of effective democratic oversight by this committee, and without any evaluation of the carbon impacts of the proposal or proposal of any measures to mitigate the same. The applicant claims that if every development site is required to account for its emissions implications, nothing would ever get built. I'll say simply that I object in the strongest possible terms to the application being granted on the back of this ridiculous assessment. The emerging Local Plan is categorical in its requirements regarding the emissions footprint of new development; by the time this development is actually built, we will be well into the period expected to be covered by this new plan, not to mention national government commitments to reduce CO₂ emissions by around 45% by 2030 to have any material chance of mitigating the horrors of the escalating Climate Crisis. In this context, an application treating the issue with this level of disregard should, in my view, be thrown out on entering the premises.

I would refer Members to my comments contained in the Officer Report for further comment on the issue of pedestrian access and the broader sustainability test, but in the interests of time, I will leave my comments there. For these reasons, individually and in the round, I strongly object to the application, and recommend at minimum that Committee defers considering approval of the proposal until the applicant has provided additional assessment of the proposal's emissions impacts and intended mitigation strategies.