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To: Consultations
Subject: FORMAL OBJECTION TO MERTON PARK DEVELOPMENT

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To Canterbury City Council,

I am a local resident and am writing to express my formal objection to the unsafe and legally non-compliant Merton Park Development in the Draft Local Plan 2040.

I am incredibly concerned that the Merton Park development will have an extreme negative effect on lovely Wincheap. The plan is unsound and legally non-compliant based on transport and brownfield regulation failures.

Wincheap Road is, as every resident or visitor of Canterbury knows, incredibly busy. At most times of day, especially rush hour in the morning and evening, the road comes to an almost standstill. It is quite frankly unable to host the amount of traffic it currently has. Adding >2000 more houses, with the main direct access point coming onto Wincheap road is poorly thought out, unsafe and irresponsible. It shows a complete lack of consideration for Wincheap's current residents. Whilst I understand the council is under government pressures to produce a plan, their priority should always be to protect their residents which this plan and this development does not do. Your own draft transport strategy admits the poor planning will leave the A2/A28 Wincheap interchange severely congested, and there is no signed legal agreement with national highways accepting this. This is not only unsafe, it is legally non-compliant.

There is also talk of plans to develop on the industrial estate land. This is an idea I wholly support as a local resident, as this brownfield space could be utilised very well to provide housing or for services that benefit the community. However this adds to the issue further as traffic from both this site and Merton Park site would be catastrophic and make Wincheap Road practically inaccessible and very unsafe. The industrial park should be developed, Merton park should not. The priority should be affordable housing on brownfield sites, not luxury building on greenfield sites. This is dictated with national policy, and rather than seeking this route the council is sacrificing historic green spaces to build low density luxury homes, rather than regenerating brownfield space to create high density eco friendly housing options.

Towards the west end of Wincheap road, and up the many side roads that this development would impact in terms of traffic and access, the pavements are incredibly narrow. It is not possible to allow a buggy or wheelchair to pass without stepping into the road. This is already incredibly unsafe for pedestrians and residents. Additional traffic will worsen this, and put the safety of children, vulnerable adults, and frankly all pedestrians using the pavement at risk. This will be especially prevalent around the area of Wincheap primary school, where the access points are proposed to pass through. Children's safety has not been considered in the slightest. Pupils leaving school at peak rush hour times, only to be walking and travelling down roads that are trying to hold far more traffic than they are built for. This is unsafe and cannot go ahead. As a young couple hoping to have children in the future, I am extremely concerned that my children would not be safe living in the area if this development were to go ahead as planned.

As a doctor working in the local area, I also cannot understand the need to further pollute the area of Canterbury that already has the highest air pollution rates. NPPF 199 (2024 p.57) states planning decisions should sustain and contribute towards compliance with national objectives for pollutants, and take into account the cumulative impacts from individual sites in local areas. Canterbury City Council Draft Air Quality Action Plan 2024 showed annual mean objectives for nitrogen dioxide were achieved at majority of receptors in Canterbury, but that exceedances were indicated at five receptors all located along Wincheap Road. Research in recent years has highlighted the severe impact of air pollution on children and adults, causing long term health conditions such as asthma and even being a major contributor to heart disease and cancer. This plan's utter disregard for the health and wellbeing of Canterbury's residents and children is shocking. And in addition to adding 2000 houses worth of cars, traffic, and pollution, the plan proposes to remove the areas only accessible green space/countryside. The orchards is a beautiful area for Wincheap residents to walk, exercise and for children to play. Green space is proven to be absolutely imperative to physical and mental health. Destroying this beautiful area will mean residents either lose that vital access, or have to drive to access green space, once again increasing traffic and pollution!

I also know as a Doctor working within EKHUFT, that the local trust is in a dire position. It is struggling to manage the patient load from the current population let alone the addition of thousands more residents. The plan also appears to rely on all of these residents working locally, which is not feasible in the slightest, given that the biggest local employer has had to put a freeze on all new hiring due to ongoing NHS funding concerns.

In addition, the orchard provides vital views of the Cathedral, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and also forms the key backdrop to the cathedral that has been present for centuries. To destroy this completely disregards our cities vibrant and incredibly history and possible violates laws protecting vital heritage sites. As mentioned in the council meeting on Thursday 5th, a passionate member of the public brought to attention that the council has not sought the necessary approval from UNSECO to destroy this historical view which is incredibly concerning.

As previously stated, I do understand that many of the pressures for increased housing come from central government. However it is your job as our councillors not to bend to the will of a corrupt government, but to stand up for the residents of your city and home. The Merton Park development is unsafe, poorly thought out and legally non-compliant. I urge you to re-consider the Merton Park Development and consider the severe and devastating impacts this will have on the health and safety of Wincheap residents and the disastrous and irreversible damage to the culture and history of our town. At a bare minimum, the plot should be significantly decreased in size, and leave a significant green belt between Wincheap and the new development that allows residents to maintain access to the beautiful green space and does not impact cathedral views. Any access to future plots should entirely avoid Wincheap road, and should instead come from the A2/Nackington area with a park and ride service connecting the plot to Canterbury, as Wincheap road simply cannot cope with further traffic or air pollution.

I urge you to listen to the concerns of the hundreds of residents who are scared, and dismayed at this plan and how it will impact our lives.

Kind regards,
Dr Lucy Dowd

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