

PL/21/4584/OA

Response to Link Park for demolition and redevelopment to comprise a data centre of up to 55,000sqm

This response is from and behalf of The Colne Valley Regional Park

The Colne Valley Regional Park was founded in 1965 when local authorities – including Bucks County Council – agreed to work together to preserve and enhance the area for recreation and nature conservation.

It is supported by more than 70 member organisations including local authorities, businesses, residents' associations, environmental charities and user groups. Groundwork South acts as the Colne Valley Regional Park's managing agent.

The Colne Valley Regional Park has six objectives:

<https://www.colnevalleypark.org.uk/whats-special/>

Landscape

The Colne Valley Regional Park (CVRP) covers eight local planning authorities. As a result, the valley is rarely considered at a landscape scale.

The creation of a Green Infrastructure Strategy <https://www.colnevalleypark.org.uk/green-infrastructure-strategy-downloads/> for the Colne Valley Regional Park aims to bring the green and blue on the map to the forefront of planning policy and decisions, and feature the landscape of the Valley as a whole, rather than from the perspective of its various council boundaries. These boundaries are an administrative convenience – they don't exist as real barriers to people and wildlife.

This cross-border approach is entirely consistent with Green Belt policy in the National Planning Policy Framework.

Summary of response

The whole site is within the Colne Valley Regional Park and Green Belt.

Government Policy states that the Government attaches great importance to Green Belts (para 137 of the NPPF). The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.

This site is in a particularly sensitive and vulnerable part of the Green Belt. In the strategic Green Belt review undertaken by Arup and published by former South Bucks and Chiltern District Councils in 2018, this zone was categorised as part of the coherent 'London Fringe' zone. The report highlighted the characteristics and sensitivities of the part of that zone around the application site, referring to: "... a strategic arc of open spaces separating the large built-up areas of Greater London and Slough, and smaller settlements such as Iver, Iver Heath ..."

"...a number of narrow bands of Green Belt are vitally important in preventing merging of settlements"

“...these gaps are essential in protecting the merging of the major urban settlements of Greater London and Slough (and the smaller settlements of Iver and Richings Park) ...”

“ ... any change within this area could act to significantly compromise the role played by the Green Belt in maintaining separation between these two large urban settlements.

The developers have not justified that Green Belt land is the only option for this development and have not appeared to have carried out an exhaustive examination of possible employment sites both within Buckinghamshire and along the M4 corridor to take advantage of superfast fibre connections. As reported in *The Times* on January 6, 2022 (<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/we-started-digging-and-instead-of-oil-we-found-fibre-optic-cable-pfmwbs5m6>) Slough Trading Estate, a matter of just a few miles away, has become a significant data centre hub, utilising brown field post-industrial sites in an entirely urban setting. The CVRP views a long-established urban trading estate as the place for such a scheme, not this area of Green Belt.

The impact on the Park is significant in terms of the visual impact of 28m high buildings which are much higher than other buildings in the area. The height of the proposed buildings will ensure they are visible from a considerable distance. This will have a negative impact on the character and appearance of the landscape of the Regional Park to its detriment.

Loss of Green Belt land requires compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of remaining GB land. (para 142 of NPPF).

The Colne Valley Park fundamentally objects to this proposal because it is harmful to the Green Belt, is not justified by Very Special Circumstances and offers insufficient mitigation.

If Buckinghamshire Council is minded to approve this application, substantial mitigation of the impact on the Green Belt and the Colne Valley Regional Park should be included. This must be informed by the Colne and Crane Valley Green Infrastructure Strategy and should include:

- Path through the poplar plantation and natural woodland to connect footpath IV21/3 and the Colne Valley Trail With Mabeys Meadow nature reserve and West Drayton
- Gifting of natural woodland and popular plantation to CVRP, local authority or other local body along with an endowment to manage and maintain for biodiversity, landscape and public access (along the path described above) in perpetuity. To include resources to produce a woodland management plan and implementation of a strategy to restore the poplar plantation to mixed broadleaved woodland over 10-20 years.
- Significant contribution to enhance nearby waterways of the River Colne, Bigley Ditch and the Colne Brook.
- Improvements to the Colne Valley Trail near the site and a link from the Trail to the site for walkers and cyclists
- Contribution to The Ivers Active Travel plan and ambitions so to encourage workers to travel to site by walking or cycling to Iver and/or West Drayton Train station.
- Contribution to nearby green spaces including Thorney Park, Kingfisher Gardens, Mabeys Meadow and biodiversity/footpath enhancements at Thorney Golf Course.
- Biodiversity net gain to exceed 10%