**Silchester Manor Day Nursery, Bath Road, Taplow, Buckinghamshire SL6 0AP**

**Application 17/02240/FUL; received and validated by SBDC on 22 December 2017**

**Objection by the Hitcham & Taplow Society**

The Hitcham and Taplow Society has been in existence for over 50 years and represents a significant proportion of residents. Its main aim is to ensure that all development within our area is of the highest standard and preserves the character and quality of the environment. Its supplementary objectives include the celebration of our heritage.

The Society wishes to register its objection to this application for what it considers would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt resulting in the loss of an important heritage asset.

In the mid-19th Century, three people were instrumental in making Taplow and Maidenhead a magnet for Victorians. William Skindle offered fine fare and discretion at The Orkney Arms. George Higginson brought the Brigade of Guards Boat Club to Taplow’s riverbank. And Jonathan Bond made a fortune hiring pleasure-boats to day-trippers and dashing guardsmen. Bond invested in a plot of land on which he built Cedar Lodge, his home from the 1860s. His continued success was reflected in Brook Side, a bigger home at the far end of the plot to which he moved in the 1880s. And between them in the 1930s, his grandson George built Kanellan for his three sisters. These three houses – Cedar Lodge (now Norfolk House Hotel), Kanellan and Brook Side (once Silchester House School, now Silchester Manor Day Nursery) – align in visual and historic contiguity. Together, they represent a significant heritage asset with their vital contribution to the character of Taplow’s stretch of the Bath Road where the deep setback of Edwardian and subsequent homes creates an openness that contrasts distinctively to the essentially urban stretches to the east and west.

The Society objects to the proposed demolition of Silchester Manor, the primary element of this heritage asset, and contends that building anew on an advanced building line would be:

* Contrary to Paragraph 80 of the National Planning Policy Framework, which cites as one of five aims for Green Belt the need “to preserve the setting and character of historic towns”;
* Inconsistent with SBDC decisions (made in 2015) to preserve this vital openness by:
  + Requiring the new Old Court (across the Bath Road) to be built to its original frontage line;
  + Dismissing an appeal against a refused 2014 planning application for Silchester Manor because “the [then] proposed redevelopment would have greater [detrimental] impact of openness than existing [and was] therefore inappropriate in the Green Belt and “harmful to the character and appearance of the area such that it would conflict with the Framework and with Policies GB1 and EP3 (Use, Design and Layout of Development) of the Local Plan”.

This stretch of the Bath Road already becomes extremely congested twice a day, and it can be expected that this problem will be even worse once the dwellings in the new Mill Lane development are fully occupied. It is therefore essential to consider any possible changes in anticipated traffic movements very carefully. The applicant’s argument that the redevelopment of Silchester Manor would result in no material change in traffic volumes relies upon there currently being 176 children in attendance, a capacity deriving from the maximum number of pupils at Silchester House School from 1910 to 1991, a period in which traffic volumes were lighter. Anecdotal evidence from parents that little over half this number now attend regularly is reinforced by Ofsted’s 2016 count of 92 children, which would generate 368 traffic movements plus 54 for staff totalling 422 per day – only 57% of the 758 movements claimed by the applicant’s Design & Access Statement. Consequently, the forecast of 704 post-development movements per day would not be a decrease of 3% as suggested but an increase of 72% – most of which would be at peak times when the Bath Road is nose-to-tail.

The 2014 application claimed various benefits – reduced flood risk, reduced energy and water use, lower CO2 emissions, enhanced setting, biodiversity and landscaping, four additional three-bed houses (with 16 to 20 residents), refurbishment of one of the existing buildings and provision of construction jobs – amounted to “very special circumstances” which would outweigh any potential harm to the Green Belt. SBDC rejected these claims, many of which were highly questionable. Few apply to the 2017 application which not only proposes the demolition of all existing buildings and a reduction in openness but also a greater number of residents (perhaps 30 or more), who would generate more CO2 and consume more energy and water.

With the final phase of Cliveden Gages and the developments in Mill Lane and Institute Road, Taplow will soon have some 50% more residents than counted in the 2011 census. The Society advocates strongly that Taplow should be permitted to come to terms with this dramatic increase in population before any other new housing is added. Further, it cannot be logical for SBDC to conclude that the more intense 2017 proposals for redevelopment of Silchester Manor would do less harm to the Green Belt than the 2014/15 application already refused on appeal for being “inappropriate [due to] loss of openness in the Green Belt” and unconvincing in these claims of “very special circumstances”.

The current application relates only to the redevelopment of the northern section of the site. The layout proposes a road extending right across this section, possibly to provide potential future vehicular access to the seemingly redundant area to the south, which is otherwise inaccessible. This raises the question of whether the future intention is to build yet more dwellings there, adjacent to the railway embankment, thus increasing further the overall intensity and density of the total development. The Society contends that, if indeed this is the applicant’s ultimate intention, it should be made plain now so its full impact can be considered, and if it is not made plain, any permission for the current application should be granted only on condition it applies to the whole site, not just to the northern section.