

To: Rugby Borough Council – Local Plan Consultation Team

Subject: Formal Objection to Site 73 (Lodge Farm)

Dear Planning Officer

Willoughby Parish Council (WPC) is writing to object strongly to the inclusion of Site 73 (Lodge Farm) in the Preferred Option Local Plan Sustainability Appraisal as a ‘reasonable alternative scenario’ to Rugby Borough Council’s preferred infrastructure-led, dispersal strategy. WPC does not consider that Lodge Farm is a ‘reasonable alternative scenario’ and, therefore, it should not be included in Rugby Borough Council’s Regulation 19 Submission Plan.

No Change in Circumstances

There has been no material change in circumstances since Lodge Farm was found unsound by the Planning Inspector in 2019. Since then, the evidence against it has only grown stronger. The site is unsustainable in terms of transport, landscape, community infrastructure and deliverability. Its proposed scale has nearly doubled, yet no new, significant mitigation has been proposed.

The reasons for Lodge Farm’s previous rejection are still entirely valid, and in many cases, have become more acute.

- **Transport Infrastructure:** The developer-commissioned City Science report proposes speculative ‘visions’ for sustainable transport but fails to demonstrate viable, deliverable solutions—particularly for Dunchurch. All the evidence shows that the Lodge Farm site will be almost entirely dependent on private car travel.
- **Landscape Sensitivity:** The Lepus Landscape Sensitivity Assessment (2025) identifies Lodge Farm as having significant sensitivity to development. Lodge Farm would cause irreversible damage to the Leam Valley - one of Warwickshire’s most ecologically important rural corridors.
- **Infrastructure:** Lodge Farm is a disconnected, greenfield site far from existing town infrastructure and has no meaningful public transport, cycling or pedestrian connections to the main urban area of Rugby. No new funding or commitments for a secondary school, GP surgeries, or highways capacity have been secured to support the scale of growth proposed by the promoter.

The Aecom Sustainability Appraisal (5.2.56) states that *‘The Inspector’s Report also says much more besides, and the great majority of the concerns raised remain entirely applicable at the current time.’*

In short, the case against Lodge Farm is even stronger in 2025 than it was in 2019 when the planning inspector told Rugby Borough Council to remove the site from the Local Plan.

There is little/no likelihood that the need to travel by car will be reduced to any significant degree and the impact of the thousands of additional cars through Dunchurch, through Willoughby, and on the narrow, rural roads connecting villages will cause immense harm, not only to any potential future residents at Lodge Farm but also to all those who live in the surrounding communities and further afield.

In his report in 2019, the planning inspector stated that *‘the majority of employment opportunities, and all of the main retail, leisure and other community facilities likely to be accessed by most residents of the development, are situated off-site. These are principally within Rugby, but for employment in particular, also at Daventry, Coventry, Leamington Spa, Warwick and other surrounding locations.’*

The promoter’s Transport Strategy Report, submitted for the proposed, much smaller development at that time stated that *‘around 32% of trips generated from the site would be to destinations in Rugby, around 15% each to Coventry and Daventry and the remainder to other settlements in Warwickshire, Northamptonshire and Leicestershire. Whilst there may be potential for journeys to Rugby to be made by bus or cycle and to Coventry and Daventry by public transport, almost 40% of trips from Lodge Farm would be to destinations where there is no realistic alternative transport other than the car.’*

Working from home may serve to reduce these percentages to some degree but the proposal for Lodge Farm has now almost doubled the number of homes to be built, so even some reduction in the percentages would still lead to thousands more vehicles on the A45, including residents and visitors of various types (family, friends, deliveries, tradespeople and so on).

The promoter's Vision document for Site 73 acknowledges that one of the key site constraints for Lodge Farm is the main road with '*potential noise and traffic from A45 running through the middle of the site*'. The noise and traffic is not 'potential'; it is a certainty.

The A45 is already a fast and dangerous road. Over 2,600 homes would mean that more than 4,250 additional vehicles owned by residents will have to access the A45. The government's National Travel Survey (31 August 2021) states: *Households living in the most rural areas are more likely to own two or more cars, with 58% of households living in rural villages, hamlets and isolated dwellings having two or more cars, more than twice that of those living in urban conurbations (23%) in 2021.*

Analysis of traffic data indicates that each household will generate 6 - 7 trips per day. This means that there would be between 16,000 and 18,000 additional trips for the proposed housing number. Highways' conservative estimate puts the upper limit at 25,000 trips per day (Stage 2 Site Assessment Report, pp 1 - 3)

The dramatic increase in the number of vehicle movements onto the A45, together with the apparent proposal in the promoter's Transport Overview Note for two accesses to the A45 (presumably roundabouts as in the previous proposal), and a reduction in the speed limit to 20mph - 30mph between these two accesses, is going to mean that high volumes of traffic will be in a traffic jam in the middle of Lodge Farm, particularly during peak hours morning and evening. This will do nothing to reduce the effects of traffic on communities, neither on Lodge Farm should it be allocated, Dunchurch or any of the surrounding communities which all have to drive through Dunchurch. It will only greatly increase current issues of noise, danger to all road users, and air pollution on the A45.

The difficulty of driving through the Lodge Farm section of the A45 and through Dunchurch and the unrealistic assumption about the SWLR route, means that traffic will increase substantially on our local, narrow (often single lane) roads as drivers seek 'rat runs' to reach their destination. This is already a problem in Willoughby, where onroad parking is also an issue, and any inclusion of Lodge Farm in the Regulation 19 Submission Plan would have a totally unacceptable impact on our residents.

Traffic congestion into Rugby from the site will also discourage residents from shopping and trading in Rugby town. Residents, as they currently do in Willoughby and surrounding villages, will choose the trading centres on the outskirts of Coventry, in Daventry, Fosse Park Leicester via the A45 thus depriving the town of revenue and increasing the shopping miles by car. This would directly run counter to the Preferred Options Objective 2 'Support the revival of Rugby town centre' and Objective 3 'Reduce emissions and adapt to climate change'.

Modelling the impact of traffic south of the Lodge Farm site

Given the delivery of Lodge Farm would increase road traffic dramatically, there is a need for modelling that shows the impact of traffic southwards beyond the Lodge Farm site, not just through Dunchurch and Rugby. This modelling should include the potential 'rat runs' through surrounding villages along Longdown Road/The Ridgeway/Willoughby/Grandborough/Flecknoe and so on. Given the proximity of the site to the A5, M1J18 and J16, M40 and M6 the area assessed should extend to Daventry, and all villages in the area and take account of the main employment areas. The relationship of prospective residents of Lodge Farm with these areas should be fully explored or a study should demonstrate why they have been excluded.

Such modelling would indicate whether or not a sustainable transport network can be created with credible traffic reduction or mitigation measures that do not depend on third parties, and are in addition to the SWLR, which appears to be the only mitigation on offer.

Conclusion

The substantial increase in traffic would have a major, negative impact on surrounding communities and all those who use the Dunchurch crossroads. Even if a confirmed and funded infrastructure plan does appear, the Lodge Farm (Site 73) would still militate against Objective 3 'Reduce emissions and adapt to climate

change' in the RBC Preferred Option Consultation document, because of the distances that would be travelled by car.

The traffic generated by thousands of additional vehicles going to and from the site, through the Dunchurch crossroads and into Rugby, would mean a significant increase in air pollution (despite the increasing use of electric vehicles) and militate against the work being carried out to ensure air quality continues to improve.

Dunchurch and Rugby are part of a designated Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) as a result of highly problematic traffic congestion locally.

Section 6.2. of the Aecom Sustainability Assessment states: '*... it is appropriate to flag a concern with the two higher growth scenarios. In particular, there is a concern with Scenario 5, given limited potential to walk/cycle from Lodge Farm to key destinations and because of a concern regarding traffic through Dunchurch.*

The growth scenarios referred to in the Sustainability Appraisal are 3 and 5, the two which include Lodge Farm. Since, a serious concern is flagged for Scenario 5 because of Lodge Farm, it is odd that the exact same concern is not expressed in more detail for Scenario 3 which also includes Lodge Farm. In addition to the thousands of cars and vans owned by any potential residents of over 2,600 homes on Lodge Farm, there would be many thousands of visitors to and from the site each month including friends, family, deliveries and tradespeople. And, the Sustainability Appraisal is clear that there is limited potential to walk/cycle from Lodge Farm to key destinations and, even if a 'potential' bus service did materialise, it would do little to mitigate the impact of so many journeys in private motor vehicles.

There is little/no likelihood that there will be any significant shift away from the use of the private car to other forms of travel including walking, cycling and public transport because of its remote location in the middle of open countryside.

The promoter's documents make vague reference to future improvements to the already dire transport and traffic situation in the local area — including high quality bus services/bus stops, cycle paths, and upgraded junctions, but there is no confirmed or funded infrastructure plan and viability issues will mean that some/most of these the improvement referred to will not happen or will happen years after they are required.

Buses

The promoter's documents suggest that the size of the site will enable a high-quality bus service between Daventry and Rugby, but this is not a guarantee and, without such a facility, the larger scheme will generate considerably more car journeys than the smaller scheme, previously proposed for the Local Plan (2019 - 2031). In addition, the site promoter does not propose a direct bus service along the A426 to Rugby. Any bus service to Rugby would almost certainly have to go via South West Rugby, to be viable, and the majority of people will opt to use their private vehicle, rather than spend a considerable amount of additional time on a bus.

The Aecom Sustainability Appraisal (5.4.82) notes the following: '*A larger scheme would assist with securing a high quality bus service between Rugby (SW Rugby SUE) and Daventry via Lodge Farm and Dunchurch, which is an important consideration, although major concerns would still remain regarding how to avoid problematic traffic through Dunchurch.*' It should also be noted that a high quality bus service to Daventry was proposed by the promoter of Lodge Farm previously but this was dropped by the time of the Examination in Public in 2018.

In addition, unless the promoter of site 73 is able to confirm that direct bus services would be provided to the train station in Rugby and the new Parkway Station near Houlton, the sustainability of the site would be additionally compromised, as residents use their cars to get to the stations.

Promised mitigatory measures such as enhanced bus services and new junction constructions have a history of under-delivery. For example, similar schemes in other rural areas have seen bus services drop by 40% post-subsidy (Transport Analysis Note, SLR, pp. 11–13).

Cycling and Walking

There are suggestions of potential improvements to cycling and walking infrastructure but nothing is confirmed and no funded infrastructure plan has been provided. All would be expensive to deliver which, given the serious viability issues associated with large sites, means they are unlikely to materialise.

Conclusion: Nothing has changed since May 2019 when the planning inspector wrote ‘*Lodge Farm is not a location where either the need to travel would be minimised or the use of sustainable transport modes can be maximised. Neither does the evidence submitted or my analysis of it above persuade me that Lodge Farm is a location which could be made sustainable in transport terms as expected for significant development in paragraph 17 of the NPPF.*’

The inclusion of Lodge Farm (Site 73) in the Regulation 19 Submission Plan would have a devastating impact on the landscape and environment of the Leam Valley and the Rainsbrook Valley.

Environmental Impact

The Lodge Farm site lies within the southern Leam Valley—a landscape defined by:

- Extensive open farmland and ancient hedgerows
- Sparse, historic settlement patterns
- County-priority habitats and high species richness (Warwickshire State of Habitats Report, 2025, pp. 1–5)

The proposed development would urbanise 105–110 hectares, or roughly one-quarter of this valued landscape, severing its ecological and visual continuity.

This level of encroachment directly contradicts national policy in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2024, Paragraph 187), which calls for the preservation of the “intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside” and a commitment to biodiversity net gain.

The 2025 Landscape Sensitivity Assessment prepared by Lepus Consulting concludes that Lodge Farm is of ‘high sensitivity’ to large-scale residential development. The report highlights:

- ‘Open, rural character’ with long views to surrounding countryside
- ‘Loss of agricultural land’ and irreversible landscape change
- ‘Fragmentation of green corridors’ and wildlife habitats

This landscape provides a vital visual and ecological buffer between the urban edge of Rugby and surrounding villages. Its development would fundamentally undermine the borough's landscape character and contradict both national and local planning policies that seek to protect valued countryside.

Further, the environmental impact extends beyond landscape harm:

- Loss of biodiversity in an area home to protected species and adjacent to priority habitats

Numerous priority species would be affected by this development, including:

- Farmland birds such as skylarks, lapwings, linnets, and yellowhammers—species that are nationally declining
- Protected mammals like brown hares and bats
- Great crested newts and barn owls, both of which require undisturbed green corridors
- Increased surface water runoff and flood risk in a low-lying, clay-rich zone
- Deterioration of air quality, already a concern in Dunchurch and along the A426 corridor

Local surveys (e.g. Toft Farm, near Dunchurch) record some of Warwickshire’s highest densities of these birds. Natural England guidance recommends a 400-metre buffer zone around their nesting habitats—yet this proposal would place dense housing directly in the centre of their known breeding area (Natural England, 2019, pp. 16–18).

This harm cannot be mitigated through green infrastructure tokens or landscaping screens. The damage would be permanent and widespread.

Flooding

There is no coherent flood risk assessment for the Lodge Farm site and no detailed mitigation plan available so risks currently remain unknown, especially with reference to the impact on neighbouring villages.

The change of greenfield land to concrete/impermeable surfaces will create water runoff with a corresponding reduction in the capacity for permeation and collection of surplus water. This is especially significant in a valley-floor zone susceptible to flooding from periods of persistent rainfall, thunderstorms, the Rainsbrook and Leam River.

Flooding occurs regularly on the A45 and in Willoughby, Grandborough, Sawbridge and other surrounding villages. Because of the flooding, it is reasonably foreseeable that the additional water run off rate into the Rainsbrook and the Leam River will cause back up in the Leam River, resulting in corresponding flooding of neighbouring villages and land.

The Lodge Farm (Site 73) would have a negative impact on the Historic Environment of the Upper Leam Valley which has evolved over centuries.

The upper Leam Valley settlement pattern and agricultural use has evolved from feudal times and is documented in Domesday (1087) through to Inclosure around 1760. The medieval open fields were cultivated in 'strips' creating the distinctive Ridges & Furrows (R&F) visible in many fields across the valley. This type of farming led to the ownership and rent of land across different parts of each open field system and in neighbouring open field systems to enable rotation of crops.

In 2011, a proposal to develop a crematorium and cemetery at Willoughby led to research that demonstrated that the remaining R&F around Willoughby and neighbouring Braunston, Wolfhampcote, Shuckburgh, Grandborough, Barby and Onley was extensive and interconnected (e.g. The 1760 Inclosure of Willoughby included land in Grandborough/Woolscott and Onley). As a result of extensive analysis, Historic England (then English Heritage) provided advice to Ministers and said:

'Overall, therefore, it is evident that the entire landscape of ridge and furrow surrounding the modern village of Willoughby is of national importance by virtue of its extent and the proportion of the medieval area under plough which it represents'

The advice went on to say that protection of such areas should be managed through the planning process referring to the then PPS 5. Policy D4 in the current Preferred Option Consultation document reflects the updated planning guidance in this regard which is fundamentally unchanged.

The scale of the proposed Village (Town) is such that it would be a significant intrusion on the valley floor, extending the urban edge of Dunchurch/Rugby south of the M45. It would also change the appearance of the southern edge of the Rainsbrook Valley as it meets the Upper Leam Valley – instead of curving around the bottom of Barby Hill to Onley, it would appear visually as a right angle at the A45.

In addition, the assessment for the Oxford Canal Conservation Area above Onley in neighbouring West Northamptonshire states, *'The land use policies for the canal seek to allow for the expansion of all canal uses including transport, whilst seeking to conserve the character of the canal Conservation Area, which is the main factor in generating those uses'*. It describes the area at the Lodge Farm site as *'open countryside with few other intrusions'*. Clearly the proposed Village (Town) would fundamentally change the character of the Conservation Area.

The proposed development at Lodge Farm:

- 1) Would be detrimental to the historic Feldon landscape of open aspects and small settlements.
- 2) Damages the setting of the Nationally Important R&F landscape referred to above.
- 3) Works against the intentions of the Oxford Canal Conservation Area and would have a severe adverse impact.

In short, the proposed development would have an entirely negative impact upon the Historic Environment of the upper Leam Valley, contrary to the aims of the NPPF, proposed Policy D4 and proposed policy EN2 A, B and C.

The ‘potential’ innovation hub, neighbourhood hub, academy centre and primary school(s) would only provide opportunities for a small fraction of the residents of over 2,600 homes to work locally in line with ‘sustainable transport’ options.

In addition, Willoughby Parish Council seriously questions whether these facilities would ever materialise as, should the viability of the site come into question, as seems likely given viability issues on other large sites, it is probable that some/most of these facilities will not materialise. leading to even fewer opportunities for residents to find employment within the site.

In support of the contention above, the Aecom Sustainability Appraisal (6.2.35) referring to Lodge Farm states ‘...and there would be a range of major infrastructure and wider costs with implications for development viability and, in turn, likely a need to accept compromises including around masterplanning / place-making’ [emphasis added]

Words such as potential, could and up to appear throughout the promoters’ Vision document.

- the Village Centre Neighbourhood Hub facilities could include community hub, up to 2500m² GIA for a mixture of convenience retail, health, cafes and public houses, Innovation Quarter, mobility hub, new 2FE primary schools and potential secondary school, sports pitches and pavilion
- potential repurposing of existing Lodge Farm buildings into community uses
- a potential academy centre and subsequent incubation uses
- a potential e-bike hub
- potential for 2 primary schools and a secondary school
- potential to deliver connections to cycling infrastructure via existing public rights of way
- potential improved public transport connections to Rugby in the north and Daventry to the south
- up to 1,500m² GIA flexible community space to include hall with room flexibility and separate home work hub.

Nothing in the promoter’s Vision document is agreed in writing or guaranteed. The risk is very high that Site 73 will be unsustainable in terms of providing opportunities for residents to work locally, in line with ‘sustainable transport’ options and it should not be included in the Regulation 19 Submission Plan.

The likelihood of a secondary school on the site is minimal, meaning there would not be good access to school for hundreds of secondary-aged children living on the site.

Warwickshire County Council has advised that a secondary school is required to the northeast of Rugby to address the current capacity shortfall in the north and this is included in RBC’s Preferred Option document. The proposed secondary school at Lodge Farm would do nothing to address this issue.

It is highly unlikely that a secondary school to the northeast of Rugby and a secondary school at Lodge Farm would be delivered, given limited funding available to deliver schools and the *Stage 2 Site Assessment Report - Lodge Farm (pages 1 - 3)* notes that, while a primary school might be incorporated on-site, there is no justifiable basis for a secondary school given the site’s isolated location. As a result, any future allocation of Lodge Farm would have to take into account where hundreds of secondary-aged pupils would go to school and the significant increase in traffic on the A45 to transport them there and back, as well as the cost to the taxpayer of arranging transport should their school(s) be more than 3 miles away.

Any convenience store on the site would be totally inadequate to meet the food shopping needs of the residents of over 2,600 houses and the site is a number of miles from any supermarket.

The nearest local supermarket to Lodge Farm is Sainsbury’s on the Rugby Road, accessed via Dunchurch crossroads. The site promoter does not make any mention of a direct, regular, bus route along the A426 to Rugby, throughout the day, so many residents will get in their cars to do their shopping, adding significantly more traffic onto the A45 and at the Dunchurch crossroads. Few, if any, people would cycle or walk such a distance and carry their heavy shopping bags back home using these modes of travel.

The other main option for a supermarket is Tesco in Daventry. Again, this would mean a significant increase in traffic and would exacerbate the traffic issues at the dangerous junction in Willoughby at the A45/Longdown Lane junction ((**17 Collisions** in total from 01/01/2021 to 13/01/2025 - 7 Personal Injury Collisions and 10 Damage-Only Collisions.))

There would be a very high risk that the long lead-in time to any houses being built on Site 73 (Lodge Farm) would mean that our village (Willoughby), and other villages in the borough, will face planning applications from developers to build houses wherever they choose, without residents or Rugby Borough Council (RBC) being in a position to stop them, because it does not have a 5 year housing supply.

In their briefing to Parish Councils on 31 March 2025, RBC planning officers were clear that they need housing supply in the short term and that, because of this, they need more deliverable sites with less lead-in time. A large site, such as Lodge Farm, would not start completing houses until 7 years after validation of an application (based on national averages). The officers estimate that Lodge Farm would be 10+ years away from beginning to complete houses.

Given the size of the site, any future allocation of Site 73 in the Regulation 19 Submission Plan, would not deliver on infrastructure objectives alongside affordable housing (which would be 30% for Lodge Farm).

In their Vision Document containing nearly ten thousand words, the promoter of Lodge Farm only mentions 'affordable housing' three times (and two of those are because the same image is used twice!). This site will do nothing to deliver affordable housing in Rugby Borough.

In their briefing to parish councils (31 March 2025), planning officers from RBC noted that they knew from their viability study *'that sites for 500+ homes are considerably less viable because of increased infrastructure costs. It is unlikely that sites of this size (referring to Lodge Farm) will be able to deliver 30% affordable housing.'* They also noted that *'SW Rugby and Houlton have faced major viability challenges, e.g. Houlton is delivering zero affordable homes'* so their concerns about the high risk of Lodge Farm not delivering either the necessary infrastructure nor the required 30% affordable housing is completely justified.

In addition, the remoteness of the site will significantly reduce the practicability for unemployed or lower income families to live there due to the lack of public transport and limited access to private transport, as well as the additional cost of travel to schools/college/supermarkets/leisure facilities. This is assuming that any genuinely affordable housing would be provided, rather than executive houses for those on higher incomes.

Conclusion

The evidence from Rugby Borough Council's documents, experts, the lived experience of residents in the Leam and Rainsbrook Valleys, and even from sections of the promoter's own documents shows that Site 73 (Lodge Farm) is unsustainable in many respects and would potentially be unviable or, at least, unable to provide the infrastructure and affordable housing required by policy, or the 'potential' community services promoted in the promoter's Vision document and associated documents.

Any allocation of this site would conflict with both national and local planning policies, undermine Rugby Borough Council's spatial strategy, and carry significant risks, particularly when it will do nothing to enable the Council to meet their requirement for a five year housing supply. Accordingly, we respectfully urge Rugby Borough Council to ensure that Lodge Farm is not included as an allocation in the Regulation 19 Submission Plan.

Yours faithfully

Joanne Jarman, Parish Clerk, Willoughby Parish Council

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