



The countryside charity
Avon and Bristol

20th June 2024

CPRE OBJECTION to EPIC Proposal for Planning Permission

The next few years and the path to CPRE's centenary in 2026 are critical for our countryside. We want a thriving and beautiful countryside for all; rich in nature and playing a crucial role in our response to the climate and emergency.

As a result, we have paid close attention to EPIC's proposals, North Somerset's Draft Local Plan, North Somerset's existing Local Plan and the various objections put forward by statutory bodies such as Historic England that align with our core values.

As such, CPRE OBJECTS to EPIC's proposals for the following reasons:

The site is within the North Somerset Green belt. Policy DM12 of the North Somerset Local Plan explains that the greenbelt is a planning tool that prevents the urban sprawl of Bristol and shapes the pattern of development in North Somerset. It keeps land permanently open, prevents towns and villages merging together and protects the countryside. In both Historic England and CPRE's opinion, the land that is the subject of this development proposal is the **very definition of green belt land**, providing as it does an effective buffer between Long Ashton and Bristol.

In addition, Policy DM12 supports the broader principles established by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Paragraph 138 of the NPPF states that the Green Belt serves five purposes: a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas; b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another; c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment; d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

In both Historic England's and CPRE's opinion the land that is the subject of this application serves all FIVE of these stated objectives.

CPRE also notes the very detailed objection submitted by Long Ashton Parish Council as well as the thorough objection submitted by the Parish Councils Airport Association. Both objections lay out a position that CPRE entirely supports. In addition, CPRE notes that various other parish councils across North Somerset have submitted objections as well.

CPRE notes that in April 2024, Natural England points out that the application could have potential significant effects on the North Somerset and Mendip Bats SAC and requires further information in order to determine the significance of these impacts and the scope for mitigation.

Natural England has concerns about

- The proximity of development to both sides of the central woodland;
- The design of the roads in the west and south of the development and their proximity to important connecting landscape features;
- Severance of commuting routes across and around the site by loss of habitat and through the impacts of introduced lighting.

Since then, we understand from some of our local members that some significant work has been done to the western track that marks the perimeter of the site upgrading it from a meandering footpath through trees with a rural feel to a wide stoned track with a semi-urban feel.

CPRE has also heard from its local members that the Long Ashton Cricket Club has been promised the land that is shown on the Landscape Painting Palette resubmitted in May 24 as an 'Orchard Fruit & Nut Tree Planting Area'. So what is it to be?

In June 2024, Active Travel England reiterated its original objection stating that:

"The application fails to demonstrate that it will deliver the correct conditions and infrastructure necessary to enable, encourage and embed active travel from the outset in line with government policy. Therefore, ATE is not currently in a position to support this application and is requesting the following key revisions to the application".

It's also pertinent and of concern to CPRE to note that in June 2024 National Highways states that

"Although it may be considered that Epic can exert a high degree of control over the travel patterns of their employees, the site could transfer to another occupier without requiring subsequent planning permission.

National Highways have been consulted on a number of planning applications for sites in North Somerset which have come forward as speculative development in advance of the new Local Plan.

For this approach National Highways require the applicant to demonstrate how the proposed transport measures will be funded and secured to ensure the outlined access strategy can be achieved. We will also need to understand the scope, funding and delivery strategy of any mitigation that would be delivered if development traffic were to exceed the thresholds predicted in the outline vision-led approach.

National Highways would therefore welcome a meeting with the applicant to discuss the above requirements to enable us to revise our current recommendation to the application."

In conclusion, CPRE fully supports the position expressed in Policy SP7 of the North Somerset Local Plan Review that states:

‘The Green Belt in North Somerset will continue to check the unrestricted urban sprawl of Bristol, preserve the openness of land and meet the national purposes of Green Belt. In doing so, it will protect rural settlements maintain their character and separate identities.’

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