

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Residents of historic village fear impact of plans for industrial-scale chicken farm, despite flood of objections

- Plans will churn over one million broiler chickens a year for meat production, less than 500m away from historic rural village in Nottinghamshire
- Residents fear for health and environmental risks, along with impact on local observatory which will have its work compromised due to light and thermal pollution
- Over 400 objections received in total, including local MP Ruth Edwards, ward councillors, the local Wildlife Trust, the Ramblers Association, the Nottingham Astronomical Society (NAS) and the Astronomer Royal
- Residents question integrity of the planning process, with key details and objections ignored or omitted from final officer's report

Nottingham, Tuesday 11th October: Residents of Owthorpe are urging Rushcliffe Borough Council to reject the plans for an industrial-scale chicken farm on the edge of their village, due to major concerns relating to impacts on health, a local astronomical observatory and the integrity of the planning process.

The application, submitted by farmer and landowner Richard Barlow with the support of agricultural consultants Ian Pick Associates, is proposing a 100,000 sq. ft facility less than 500m from the historic village, which has a population of less than 100 people.

The village of Owthorpe, near Cotgrave and located at the bottom of a hillside in the Vale of Belvoir, dates back to 1086 and is characterised by its traditional and rural charm, with a 12th century Grade I listed church, significant mediaeval farming features and unspoilt surroundings, mostly arable farmland owned by small-scale farming families.

Figure 1: Aerial view taken from an objection of the proposals, showing the underdeveloped 1km radius around Owthorpe, its proximity to the proposed poultry rearing facility and the size of the proposed development.



Even though the application has been met with over 400 objections, including residents, local MP Ruth Edwards, both ward councillors, the local Wildlife Trust, the Ramblers Association, the Nottingham Astronomical Society and the Astronomer Royal, the council has recommended the plans be granted planning permission ahead of a committee meeting on Thursday 13th October, where councillors will discuss the proposals and make a final decision.

Summary of the proposals

The proposed facility is set to house nearly 200,000 broiler chickens in four huge flocks, where they will reside for 7.5 weeks before being sent to slaughter, meaning the facility has the capacity to churn through over 1.3million animals per year, bred for the sole purpose of cheap meat production.

The scale of the operation requires several buildings to be erected as part of the plans, along with a generator, large feed bins, gas and water tanks, blending stations, a new slip road off the A46, concrete paving and a car park. There are also plans for an incinerator which has been left off the planning application itself.

Local campaigners object to the proposals for a myriad of reasons, but the main three are as follows:

1. The lack of clarity over health risks from intensive poultry farming
2. The Nottingham Astronomical Society observatory which will have observations made from it severely compromised by the light and thermal pollution
3. The integrity of the planning process to date, with key objections ignored and left out of the planning officer's report to committee

Outlined below is a more detailed summary of each issue.

Intensive poultry farms linked to health risks

Intensive poultry farming has been the subject of controversy over recent years for its health and environmental impact, explored by multiple academic papers but yet to be fully understood. The risk relates to the emission of bioaerosols (very small particles shed by animals and birds that can easily be transferred by the wind), which lead to respiratory illness, from asthma to lung cancer. Intensive farming is also known to generate high levels of phosphate and ammonia, by-products of the large quantities of animal waste created, which can also be linked to respiratory illness, heart and pulmonary disease.

There are now thousands of these schemes across the UK. Many have subsequently raised concern for the health and environmental impact on residents and surrounding areas. It has even prompted one local authority, Hereford County Council, to launch a review into this very issue, announced in March 2022.

Paul Townsend, a resident of Owthorpe and village spokesperson, comments: *"It does not take long to find article after article highlighting the health risks related to intensive poultry farming. As the full extent of this is insufficiently understood, even by the scientific community, we are utterly flabbergasted that the council think it is acceptable to press ahead with these plans. Many of the residents in Owthorpe are elderly and retired, and some also work outdoors in the village or on adjacent farmland, and so the risk of contracting respiratory illness or symptoms from the pollutants is extremely concerning."*

"We totally appreciate the need for farmers to diversify. Our village is built around a family-run farm, and so we are well aware of the struggles they are facing, but this is not a standard, agricultural farm. This is a factory operation that holds zero regard for animal welfare and the environmental damage it is knowingly creating. Should the proposals be granted consent on Thursday, we will not stop our campaign. We may be a small village but we are building a collation of influential supporters who are all absolutely resolute in our view that these proposals are fundamentally flawed and negligent."

Proposals "disastrous" for local astronomical observatory

The proposals will severely compromise the work of the Nottingham Astronomical Society (NAS) observatory, potentially overturning 40 years of work, voluntary commitment and investment by the Society.

The NAS observatory is located approximately 1000m to the north of the proposed facility, which is planned to sit directly in its critical southern viewing aspect [see Figures 2 and 3]. The predicted light pollution and heat haze emitted by the facility will make long-exposure astrophotography impossible. There can be no mitigation of the effect of heat haze. The Society's concerns are supported by leading academic astronomers, the Astronomer Royal, the Commission for Dark Skies and Jodrell Bank Observatory.

Despite this representing a significant effect of the proposed scheme, the planning officer's report which has been presented to the committee does not properly respond to the objections made.

As part of its objection, Dr Fred Hopper, former President of the NAS explains: "...there is no way to mitigate the thermal pollution this site will cause. The heat produced will end up in the atmosphere above the site and this will make it impossible to use the NAS observatory for astrophotography. This is why so many eminent astronomers from around the country have been so vocal in adding their support to the NAS' objection to this development. It is important nationally that such developments close to, and due south of British Observatories, are prevented..."

Figures 2 and 3: Positioning of the proposed farm in relation to the NAS observatory



Omission of key details from Rushcliffe Borough Council

While failing to acknowledge the NAS' objection and detailed supporting background material, the planning officer's report also avoids adequately responding to multiple concerns submitted by two separate planning experts, highlighting the proposals' contravention of both national and local planning policies.

This includes a very narrow consideration of design matters relating to the scale, bulk and mass of the proposed development, which rivals the entire village in its overall size. In addition, it lacks a proper assessment of the impact of night-time flood-lighting when flocks are being collected throughout the year. These issues go to the heart of the development's acceptability, but instead of requiring this information provided upfront as stated by independent planning experts, the council has sought to reserve the matters to conditions, representing a lack of upfront consideration of fundamental issues.

Residents therefore fear that planning committee members will be basing their discussion and decision on only half the picture.

In addition, the lack of consideration of local voices is concerning at a time when the Government is advocating for planning powers to be put in the hands of local residents.

ENDS

Notes to editors

The planning application reference is: 22/00243/FUL

To view the full planning application, please click [here](#).

To view the planning offer's report, please click [here](#).

For media enquiries

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