**PATCHETTS GREEN RESIDENTS’ ASSOCIATION (PGRA)**

72 Hilfield Lane, Aldenham, Watford WD25 8AJ

**Objections To Planning Application 25/0138/Ful**

**Refurbishment of the Goshala building and erection of new agricultural barn near to the Goshala building. New agricultural barn and replacement of existing polytunnels with glasshouse near to Holland Farm as well as oxen cart and pedestrian footpaths to connect Holland Farm with the Goshala building. Bhaktivedanta Manor Dharam Marg Hilfield Lane Aldenham Watford Hertfordshire WD25 8EZ**

This application provides further evidence of the Manor’s expansionist plans to the detriment of the local community and destruction of Green Belt land by inappropriate development.

The points raised in our objection to their planning application 25/0124/FUL are relevant here as much of the development applications cover the expanded footprint of the Manor.

It must be remembered that the land they acquired known as Holland Farm, has a permitted use as a Farm, and not for any religious, commercial or development approvals that may have taken place on their original site of the Manor.

The applicant claims that this proposal is permissible within the Green Belt, under NPPF exceptions, failing which (surely an admission by them that this application does NOT fall within permissible Green Belt NPPF exceptions), very special circumstances exist so as to allow this in the Green Belt.

Save for the proposed 2 agricultural barns, which could possibly be considered under NPPF exceptions, their claim of “very special circumstances” is as invalid as their claim that the remainder of their plans are permissible under NPPF exceptions.

Over the years, the community has enjoyed a reasonable and harmonious relationship with the Bhaktivedanta Manor. Recent events risk damaging that relationship, with the Manor representatives submitting applications that are outside the terms of the Bhaktivedanta SPD and which would lead to yet further intensification of the activities on site

Recently, the Manor has had to submit FIVE (5) retrospective planning applications to Hertsmere for unauthorised building/adjustments to their site and occupation of villages houses in Letchmore Heath.

More recently, at one of the regular liaison meetings between the community and the Manor, no mention was made of the above application, nor a second one concurrently lodged (25/0124/FUL), despite the fact it subsequently was revealed the applications were submitted a couple of weeks before that meeting and had been several years in preparation.

Clearly the Manor executives have decided that they are aggressively going to pursue expansionist plans, plans that do not meet the original permission for use of the site as a “residential and non-residential theological college and religious community together with use for public worship (including the observance of religious festival days) and a construction of a new driveway and access to Hilfield Lane, subject to conditions (APP/N1920/A/94/241083).”

This use extends only to the use of the original site. Subsequently the Manor acquired over 50 acres of additional farm land, Holland Farm, but this has no planning use for religious occasions. It is just agricultural.

There has been a stated aim of the Manor in its applications of their desire to “enhance and expand the visitor experience”. To this end this application seeks to convert farm land to a visitor centre and accommodation area, whether for their farm workers across their whole estate, religious personnel and even could be used for (paying?) visitor stays for those who wish to enjoy the meditational environment and the yoga centre that this application seeks to convert the farmland into. Indeed, as a visible example of the Manor’s desire to extend their appeal to outside visitors beyond religious ceremonies, they recently leaflet dropped the community inviting people of all faiths to attend yoga classes at the Manor.

Their plans are obviously to attract considerably more visitors - as supported by this application to build a new café in the Goshala.

Back in 1996, approval was given for religious use on the original site and following concerns raised by the Letchmore Heath residents the original access to the site in their village was closed and a new access opened in Hilfield Lane. Consequently, Hilfield Lane has been the sole access for both visitor and commercial traffic visiting or servicing the site. Since 1996, Hilfield Lane has seen its own footprint extended, significantly with the addition of over 50 residential dwellings in The Ridings development.

The Lane itself already experiences an increase in traffic – and has to be closed in the Summer over the week end of the Manor’s main religious festival. Whilst not yet approved, there are planning submissions due for a major expansion of the Elstree Electric sub-station, involving a 5-year build and for a Battery Electric Storage System in land between the Manor and the substation, which will also involve a significant construction project and both projects require both the transportation and siting of heavy equipment. Our Lane could be suffering major disruption, which will be compounded by the Manor proposals.

The plan to widen the access to the Holland Park site itself under 25/0124/FUL indicates that the Manor expects far more visiting traffic, including access for large vehicles not just cars.

The application itself also has a number of proposals that we deem are inappropriate for the site’s original purpose. It appears to be a considerable departure from their “religious and cultural” purposes, branching into a commercial expansion to attract more visitors.

The 2012 SPD. set out a mutually agreed plan (between the local community, the Borough and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness on behalf of Bhaktivedanta) of how policies will be used to control development and are a “material consideration” in the assessment of planning applications.

At that time the Holland Farm was reviewed and considered unsuitable for development. The document stated: “**Entire area west of goshala” (i.e. Holland Farm) “Visible from neighbouring properties and Footpath 28 and Footpath 29**: With the exception of development at Holland Farm this is arable farmland and loss of grazing impacts on viability of the farm**. Impacts on openness of Green Belt:** Interrupts Goshala operation. Unsuitable location for pedestrian connections to Manor therefore access roads and car parking will be required.”

The above is an extract from the applicant’s Statement of Needs for the SPD, ruling out this area for development. The SPD has more than 2 years to run.

PGRA believes there are numerous reasons why at the very least all applications for the Manor be withdrawn and a revised SPD be produced so that we can see what additional development plans the Manor may have in mind. The planning history shows that their plans extend way beyond their initial “religious” purpose with each new development step they take.

These applications, and the lack of transparency by the Manor, leave us highly suspicious of their long-term plans. Clearly the Manor has access to considerable funds, and wishes to pursue its expansionist plans with no consideration to the local community.

On the original site, this application includes the addition of:

* A new manure pile and 3 anaerobic digestors and loading bay. This could have a considerable impact on the adjacent residents with both highly unpleasant odours and potential noise. Moreover, it is unclear whether this venture is purely for use within the Manor grounds itself or could also be intended for commercial sale to outside parties. If the latter, it will have an additional impact on the heavy traffic negotiating our already crumbling and congested Lanes.
* They are proposing a new Oxen Barn, its primary purpose is to release the Goshala for extended and intensified commercial use, and this must militate against their claim that it is an exception for “special circumstances”.
* They are proposing the conversion extension and repurposing of the Goshala, with a training kitchen/café and the current shop will be extended to provide an enlarged farm shop, with a “viewing room” to be formed in the roof space over the proposed training kitchen. This transforms the Goshla’s current agricultural function into an almost wholly commercial function. The floorspace is virtually doubling from its current size and is inappropriate development in a Green Belt Area.
* Only an upgrade to existing footpaths and oxen tracks within the original site are appropriate.

On the Holland Farm site:

* The New Barn would only be appropriate development in the Green Belt if it was purely used for agricultural purposes, but must be built mindful of the impact of landscape and visual aspects of other adjacent building proposed in their application25/0124/FUL
* The glasshouse they propose to build at 943sqm and over 7m high is inappropriate development in Green Belt.
* The planned 1.7km of new footpath and oxen tracks across Holland Farm are again entirely inappropriate development in the Green Belt. **The application’s purpose is to expand the visitor experience, but Holland Farm is not currently part of the visitor experience; as the planning statement confirms, currently Holland Farm is only accessible to farm workers.**

The Manor’s claims that if NPPF is not found to apply, then “very special circumstances exist as it is essential for the site to remain a place of public worship and hold religious festivals”. This is absolutely ludicrous and no merit in justification in any way shape or form. Holland Farm has no authorised planning use for any religious purposes – **it is just a farm**. Religious festivals are already held on the original site and the frequency is limited by a S106 agreement entered into as part of the permission for religious use; no change is needed for these to take place and no additional number of festival days would be acceptable.

This is why we really need to see a stay put on these applications so that all parties have the opportunity to participate in a review the terms of the SPD and agree a new planning framework for the next 15 years after 2027.

The Manor has displayed a total lack of adherence to the planning framework it has agreed to. I trust the Planning Department will recognise our community’s concern that the Manor has been expanding its plans by stealth and that step by step appear to be wanting to extend beyond a religious haven, and to develop into a visitor centre (both for religious and non-religious visitors) expanding their commercial appeal by offering visitor attractions and facilities. This could substantially increase the traffic using and accessing Hilfield Lane and noise from the site

We urge the Council to reject this application.

**Malcolm Sevren**

**Chairman**

**Patchetts Green Residents’ Association**

**26 April 2025**