

Press Release

Hunts Grove Parish Council is disappointed to have to publicly announce “enough is enough Crest Nicholson”

Community feels abandoned by national housebuilder, two years of neglect, council inundated with residents’ complaints, alleged breaches of legal planning conditions and failure to address serious safety concerns.

Hunts Grove, Gloucestershire, September 20, 2021: Hunts Grove Parish Council (HGPC) voted unanimously at its full council meeting of 13th September 2021, to publicly raise awareness of continuing issues with national housebuilder Crest Nicholson plc., the overall responsible developer for the 2,500 home Hunts Grove development in Gloucestershire.

*“Councillors thought long and hard before taking this step. It is not something we do lightly and is not representative of the way we like to work collaboratively with all stakeholders”, said Chairman of the Parish, Cllr. Mark Ryder, “this follows almost two years of frustration, with matters getting considerably worse over the past six months. Failure to resolve a child-safety highways issue was the final straw for our councillors. **This is a red flag**”.*

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Summary of issues raised:

1. **Management of construction traffic / Safety of school children.** The approved traffic plan for the site planning permission prohibits construction traffic passing in front of the Hunts Grove Primary Academy, to safeguard child safety. Construction traffic for Bellway Homes, Crest Nicholson and Bovis / Vistry Group, must use the B4008 construction route built for the purpose and not pass through completed residential areas and in front of the school. The parish council has video evidence from councillors and residents going back more than nine months now. This evidence includes 30-tonne HGVs travelling at shockingly high speeds past the school drop off area. This evidence has been passed to Crest Nicholson and other developers for many months now, and whilst we receive assurances of action, very little has changed over that period. The council has formally written letters to Crest Nicholson senior management on July 12, 2021, and again on August 17, 2021. **Crest Nicholson has not acknowledged or responded to these letters.**
2. **Maintenance of verges, open spaces and parks.** The village has been totally neglected over the past two years and has been on the council action list with Crest Nicholson for more than a year now. The covid-19 pandemic has had impacts on all businesses, however these issues pre-date the pandemic. The situation over the spring and summer, with weeds growing up to 4ft high in some areas, forced some residents to do maintenance around the village themselves. Crest Nicholson is responsible for most landscape maintenance at Hunts Grove, apart from small areas within specific housing parcels by partner developers. The council has been **inundated with complaints** from residents regarding the deterioration of the village, however, unfortunately is not responsible for the maintenance (something the council is proposing to change). Things were looking so bad at the entrance to the village that councillors themselves acted in August to remove weeds and tidy up the area. A report showing this work and the state of other areas of the village was produced in August. A full survey of the village was conducted early September that comprises 19 pages of issues to resolve. HGPC is publishing that report today along with this press release.

Late Note: Following our announcement (HGPC Facebook page post 15 September 2021), we have been contacted by other Crest Nicholson developments nationwide that unfortunately have experienced the same challenges as Hunts Grove. One such development, Tadpole Garden Village in Swindon even set up a change.org petition (*2) to demand resolution of ongoing issues with the site, that currently has over 300 signatures. The residents also established an action group on Facebook that currently has over 600 residents' members.

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3. **Alleged breaches of planning permission.** In addition to construction traffic management and the open spaces maintenance strategy, other areas of operations are also secured under various planning conditions and legal agreements. One such example is the permitted site working hours that ensure that residents can enjoy their evenings and Sundays without the nuisance of construction noise and activities. Following complaints of noise nuisance and Sunday working throughout July 2021, Crest Nicholson apologised to the parish council and assured us that this wouldn't be repeated. Unfortunately, this work continued for three Sundays in August as well, and up to 7:30pm on Sunday evenings. Further works by David Wilson Homes using heavy machinery at their sales centre outside allowed hours further exacerbated the situation for residents. Consequently, the parish council lost trust in Crest Nicholson (and David Wilson Homes) to respect the planning conditions for the site and decided the only recourse was enforcement and penalties by Stroud District Council planning department. For reference, enforcement case S.21/0585/BRCON (Crest Nicholson) was opened on August 23, 2021, and S.21/0606/BRCON (David Wilson Homes) was opened on August 26, 2021.

Late Note: Crest Nicholson response to the enforcement case is that they have no knowledge of working out of hours in July and August. The parish council has forwarded additional evidence and Crest's own emails to the planning enforcement team in the hope it may restore their recollection.

4. **Lack of amenities.** The parish council, via District Councillor, has raised serious concerns at the lack of delivery of planned infrastructure and amenities, and has requested a review of the legal agreements. The village now has over 2,000 residents, yet only a park and open space delivered on one phase out of three. Hunts Grove is isolated from surrounding amenities on all sides by the M5 motorway, A38 bypass, mainline railway and Waterwells Business Park. A major open space for Phase 2 has not been delivered, nor has allotments, sports pitches, community building, neighbourhood centre etc. *"There is very little for children, let alone adults to do recreationally at Hunts Grove and we are very reliant on on-site facilities due to isolation from any other amenities"*, said council vice-chair Demelza Turner-Wilkes. The council seeks an urgent plan of action for delivery of amenities and to review the status of planning applications for the community building, sports pitches and neighbourhood centre that Crest Nicholson have retained on hold with the planning department for more than 18-months now with no visible action.

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5. **Open Spaces and Amenities Management Strategy.** September 2017, planners approved the Crest Nicholson management strategy as part of the 2015 Section-73 planning variation for the site. This strategy is built on the premise that only Crest Nicholson can maintain the village at the very high standard they insist upon to protect the attractiveness of the village to promote new home sales. The strategy requires that all landscaping is done by their own contractors until such time they transfer areas to a management company. The management company controlling power is also by Crest directors, not residents, secured by golden shares for years to come. By inference, Crest Nicholson does not trust the local authority or parish council (organisations they have no control over) to maintain the village to their high standards. This premise has been 'blown out of the water' considering their neglect over the past two years and the terrible state of the village. To add 'insult to injury', some residents have been paying £100's to the management company over the last four years in service charges for "admin" when the management company is not responsible for anything on site at this point (*1). This situation is not tenable moving forward as Crest Nicholson has wholly failed in its responsibilities. The parish council is seeking a reversal of the management strategy and for new arrangements to be made that put residents in control now.

The parish council request an urgent plan of action and genuine engagement from Crest Nicholson to address the issues raised.

Notes:

- (*1) The Hunts Grove Management Company Ltd is not responsible for any maintenance on site apart from the common areas of two Bovis apartment blocks.
- (*2) 100's of residents launch petition at Crest Nicholson Tadpole Garden Village development in Swindon:
<https://www.change.org/p/crest-nicholson-south-west-tgv-voice-seeking-explanations-apologies-action-plans-with-dates>
- The council has been in continuous communication with representatives of Crest Nicholson to raise and resolve issues raised by the Council and residents. This includes phone calls, emails, meetings and participation in full council meetings.
- Crest Nicholson is the master developer for the complete Hunts Grove site infrastructure, amenities, management, and coordination with partner developers. As overall responsible for the site, the council hold Crest Nicholson ultimately responsible for the issues raised above.
- Partner developers (housebuilders) on site include David Wilson Homes, Bellway Homes, Lindon Homes and Bovis Homes. (Lindon and Bovis are part of the Vistry Group).