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Residents' fears as 1,600 new homes on green belt approved

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Construction of 1,600 homes on land taken from Cambridge's green belt was approved yesterday.

Planning bosses said development of the National Institute for Agricultural Botany (NIAB) site, between Huntingdon Road and Histon Road, would provide desperately-needed houses, plus a primary school and community facilities.

But residents of surrounding streets and nearby villages told a Guildhall meeting they had serious concerns.

Cllr Max Parish, Histon Parish Council chairman, said a lack of measures to mitigate traffic impact on Huntingdon Road meant giving consent would be "premature".

Also representing the views of Impington Parish Council, he said: "It is our villages who will have to pay the price for the failure to get this right."

Cllr Dr Douglas De Lacey, a district councillor and the chairman of Girton Parish Council, said he had concerns about congestion, and the possibility of land being contaminated from agricultural experiments, including the testing of genetically-modified crops.

Cllr Mike Mason, who represents Histon and Impington on South Cambridgeshire District Council, warned the development could trigger flooding downstream.

He said: "The swales and soakaways will not cope with excess groundwater in about one in every 15 years according to current observations."

A long list of conditions was drawn up to ensure the development meets the required standards and exact details of the new community will be subject to individual applications.

Members of the committee said the 1,593 homes, 40 per cent of which will be affordable, were vital for Cambridge.

There will also be a library, health centre, shops, a park, and possibly a supermarket.

Cllr Nichola Harrison, who represents Petersfield on Cambridgeshire County Council, said: "To meet housing need we have to build houses, and we need a lot of them.

"Whether we like it or not, unless we want our children living with us forever and some unsightly features in society, we need to get on with it – in the right way."

Even though permission has been granted, delays in improving the A14 could hold up construction, because the Highways Agency does not want more than 350 homes to be built before the dual carriageway is upgraded.