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'Downton' village fights new homes

DOCTORS and residents in the village where Downton Abbey is filmed have said its surgery cannot support hundreds of residents new homes could bring.

They fear Bampton – where the population is currently about 3,000 – lacks the infrastructure to support an extra 280 homes.

Developers have put in outline plans for two major estates on green field sites, one of 127 homes by Gladman Developments and the other of 160 by Richborough Estates.

Bampton hit the headlines after ITV's hit drama was filmed in the village.

The Grade I-listed 12th century St Mary's Church was used as the place where Lady Mary Crawley, played by Michelle Dockery, married her cousin Matthew Crawley, acted by Dan Stevens, at the start of the third season.

But the Bampton Medical Practice and locals fear for the future of the village and say the GP surgery cannot cater for hundreds more people.

Practice manager Sue Gooding said: "It would have a significant impact on the surgery and as we stand at the moment we could not accommodate that number of extra patients."

Roger Jones, editor of the British Journal of General Practice, agreed, saying: "It seems clear that the resulting additional population will put unsustainable pressure on Bampton's infrastructure, including its roads and health care."

He said Dr John Uden from the surgery had said it was now at full capacity in terms of space and clinical resources.

"Without substantially increasing the provision of primary health care services, well in advance of any increase in population size, these developments strike me as potentially hazardous," he said.

Resident Lesley Campbell said her 89-year old mother Marjorie Holloway had moved to Bampton because of the surgery.

She said: "It is a fantastic surgery. For existing residents, there are not issues with capacity at the moment but we want to keep it that way.

"It is quite a scary feeling when you aren't able to see a GP because they are full."

Fellow resident Phil Waite said: "The GP surgery and Bampton primary school would not be able to cope with an additional 600 people."

West Oxfordshire District Council is set to decide on the outline plans for the smaller development on Monday, December 16. Officers have recommended refusal.

The larger proposal is due in front of the council for a decision in January.

The council said that consultations have shown there is some capacity to cater for extra patients.

Gladman Developments, the company behind the smaller housing scheme, was unavailable for comment.

Richborough Estates could not be contacted for response.