



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Mr Rob Walker
Executive Director of Place
Breckland District Council
Elizabeth House
Walpole Loke
Dereham
Norfolk
NR18 1EE

Wednesday 21st November 2018

Ref: 3PL/2015/1490/O – Application for a residential development of a minimum of 291 dwellings, link roads, open space and recreational space on land off Shipdham Road, Westfield Road and Westfield Lane. AMENDED PROPOSAL to include demolition of existing railway bridge at Westfield Lane and construction of a replacement two-way railway bridge (instead of traffic signalling works at the junction of South Green and Tavern Lane)

Dear Mr Walker,

I am writing, further to my letter of 10th January 2018, to put on record my concerns about the above application for 291 homes on land off Shipdham Road, Westfield Road and Westfield Lane. As you know, this application was refused permission earlier this year and, therefore, this is an amended proposal now also including the demolition of the existing railway bridge at Westfield Lane and the construction of a replacement two-way railway bridge (instead of traffic signalling works at the junction of South Green and Tavern Lane).

While I understand that the site in question is a designated site in Breckland's Emerging Local Plan, the serious concerns of my constituents, the Town and local councillors must continue to be taken into account. You will recall that approximately 200 objections had been made to the proposals when they were heard by the Planning Committee earlier this year, and further objections have been submitted in light of the amendments that have now been included.

As I highlighted previously, the potential impact of the proposed development on the pre-existing traffic problems already affecting Dereham is of particular concern to the local community. Although I will not reiterate all of the points that I have previously made on this issue (and have instead enclosed a copy of my previous correspondence so that the Planning Committee members can re-familiarise themselves with those points – which I stand by), I will repeat the fact that parts of the town regularly come to a standstill at peak times of the day – and, increasingly, at non-peak times.

The addition of at least 291 more homes will inevitably exacerbate this already very difficult situation further.

In the absence of a proper, strategic traffic plan, this development (along with others that are likely to come forward and/or are already being considered) will seriously compromise the sustainability of Dereham as a functioning community. That's why I have been so vocal in calling for an overall plan for the Town – which I am delighted the Town Council are actively working on.

Last month, in an EDP article, I supported the assertions of Dereham Mayor, Hilary Bushell, that it is no good for specific developments to be viewed individually as only adding "a small percentage to the end of queue". Indeed, this application is only one of a number of major applications in Dereham and, therefore, it is imperative that the Planning Committee consider the likely impact it will have, especially with regards to traffic (but also in areas such as services and infrastructure), within the much broader context. If this grave traffic problem is not properly taken into account, managed and remedied, then the implications for Dereham as a community will be significant – and I believe all potential developments in the town must be judged against this backdrop until such time that proper town and traffic plans have been adopted.

I also understand that the applicant has not carried out an assessment of cycle links that should be provided to accompany a development of this size. This is despite the Breckland Transport Study (carried out by White Young Green and forming part of the evidence base for Breckland's Emerging Local Plan) clearly stating that there should be good cycle links for developments to the south of Dereham. Development must be accompanied by appropriate infrastructure and, in the absence of an assessment by the applicant, Dereham Town Council have commissioned their own assessment to look at this issue – the findings of which are to be completed before Christmas.

Given the serious traffic problems outlined, alternative forms of transport, such as cycling, must be considered and, therefore, if the Planning Committee decide the application is to proceed, I believe a deferment on any decision must be allowed until such time that these findings have been released and evaluated.

In addition to these serious traffic concerns, I raised the issue of visual amenity and environmental impact on this south eastern corner of the Dereham development area too in my letter earlier this year. Given the site's low-lying position alongside the River Tud, and that it slopes down towards the River (which then runs through the Badley Moor SSSI (SAC)), there remains considerable concern in Toftwood, as well as surrounding communities, that pollution from the site will flow into the river and, in turn, cause lasting damage to this important conservation area. Drainage concerns also persist due to the existing issues in the town and the fact that this area is a low-lying piece of wetland.

There also continues to be widespread concern that urban sprawl will lead to an undesired hard-edge to Dereham – as well as a significant loss of amenity and the all-important green spaces between the town and its surrounding villages, which are integral parts of their character, identity and sustainability.

I have long held concerns about the high number of planning applications in this part of Norfolk – many of which are, often, on a scale out of keeping with the heritage and identity of our largely rural area, place considerable pressures on our local services and lack the necessary infrastructure



required to make them sustainable in the long term. As a result, they are clearly in breach of the sustainable development criteria set out in the National Planning Policy Framework and 2011 Localism Act.

I have also reiterated on numerous occasions how vitally important it is that public trust in the planning system is maintained. Decisions taken by the Council – on the advice of Planning Officers – must be based on proper due process and rigorous and balanced assessment of all of the relevant criteria. The views of residents, locally elected councillors and the MP should carry particular weight on issues in their areas.

At the Dereham Plan Partnership Summit that I convened last year (attended and supported by Breckland Council), it was clear that people want to see “strategic” investment in infrastructure alongside new homes, and a relief road to the A47 designed to solve the Toftwood congestion crisis. I fundamentally believe that no large scale development to the south of the town must be allowed to go ahead until such a relief road is constructed – and I would like to ask the Council for guarantees that CIL/S106 monies will be directed towards funding such vital infrastructure should future development be granted permission there.

Development after development cannot go on being built in Dereham until proper measures are put in place to deal with, and then manage, the problems already being faced. Therefore, for all of the reasons outlined in this letter, my previous letter and in the recent EDP article, I request that the Planning Committee refuse permission to this application – particularly until proper transport infrastructure is in place.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "George Freeman". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined.

George Freeman MP