



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Mr Rob Walker
Executive Director of Place
Breckland District Council
Elizabeth House
Walpole Loke
Dereham
Norfolk
NR19 1EE

Wednesday 27th February 2019

Dear Mr Walker,

Ref: 3PL/2019/0010/F – Application for the erection of 54 dwellings with associated roads, parking, hard and soft landscaping and open space on land adjacent to Swaffham Road, Saham Toney

I am writing to formally place on record my support of Saham Toney Parish Council, and many others, in their opposition to the above application for the erection of 54 dwellings with associated roads, parking, hard and soft landscaping and open space on land adjacent to Swaffham Road, Saham Toney (Ref: 3PL/2019/0010/F).

As you will be familiar, I have long held a deep concern about the high number of applications in this part of Norfolk – many of which are, often, highly inappropriate and unsustainable, as well as out of keeping with the identity and heritage of our largely rural area. Unfortunately, I believe that this application is yet another example of such a development.

As anyone who knows the location well will be able to testify, the site is at high risk of flooding – even in only moderate periods of prolonged rainfall. Indeed, I understand that the Watton Neighbourhood Plan Drainage Working Group have recently finished working with Norfolk County Council on a survey of the areas that flood regularly in both Saham Toney and Watton with the aim of identifying suitable mitigation measures going forward. This site has been labelled a ‘priority’ for improvements (perhaps unsurprising given its local nickname of ‘The Nile Field’), and so it seems baffling that a development of this size would be allowed to go ahead on it. Until it has been decided which mitigation measures are required to deal with the current problems, it seems unlikely that the applicant’s own flood mitigation proposals will be able to adequately protect 54 dwellings built on top of it.

Residents have also highlighted with me their concerns about access to a new development here. Visibility would likely be very difficult and could, therefore, put vehicles wishing to turn in and out of the new development at substantial risk. I am informed that, as yet, the applicant has failed to sufficiently illustrate how they would address this important problem.

There are strong concerns that this development would lead to the coalescence of Saham Toney with the nearby town of Watton too – something highly undesirable given the rural nature of Saham Toney and the surrounding area. Were this to happen, the very nature of life in, as well as the aesthetic of, this community would be unjustifiably, and drastically, altered forever. Damaging the local tourism sector, which is key to the local economy.

Since becoming an MP, I have been very vocal in my support of the spirit of 'Localism' – to give local districts, as well as the towns and villages within them, a much greater say in how they wish to grow and develop over the coming years. That's why I have been a strong advocate of Local and Neighbourhood Plans, and why I continue to actively campaign in Parliament for the strengthening of the 2011 Localism Act in order to better protect the communities that have put in the considerable time and effort required to produce a coherent vision for their future.

Saham Toney is one of those dedicated villages working to produce their own Neighbourhood Plan, and I have met with and supported representatives of their Neighbourhood Plan group on several occasions over the past twelve to eighteen months.

As you should be aware, the Plan is currently undertaking a site allocation process, with 16 sites being independently assessed to determine their suitability for being included in that allocation. Clearly, this is not a community of NIMBYs who are wholeheartedly against development in their village. They are a settlement that wish to ensure that future development ensures "the right homes go in the right places", and they are following the proper processes to try and make that happen. The active participation of locals at Neighbourhood Plan meetings is a reflection of this too.

Despite the call for potential sites closing in October 2018 (the same time that this application was being prepared), no proposal for this site was put forward in this site allocation process by either the applicant or the agent. As a result, there is now a widespread belief locally that a deliberate attempt has been made to try and circumvent the efforts being pursued by the local community. For many, the size of the proposed application, which greatly exceeds the proposed maximum allocation in Breckland's own Emerging Local Plan, and inappropriate location are seen as the reasons for this perceived attempt to circumvent the ongoing Neighbourhood Plan process.

As you know, I have consistently made clear my belief that the views of residents, Parish Councils, locally elected councillors and the MP should carry significant weight when consideration is being given to developments being proposed in their areas. I firmly stand by those sentiments now, as it is vitally important that public trust in our planning system is maintained, and fear that an approval of this application would seriously undermine that crucial public trust. (The fact that, I understand, there are numerous technical errors and omissions in the documents presented with the application will only serve to compound this further).



It is worth noting also that those opposing this application are not simply confined to Saham Toney. Watton Town Council, Norfolk County Council, CPRE Norfolk and the Environment Agency are just a few of the other local councils and agencies that have voiced objections to the proposals put forward.

For all of the reasons discussed in this letter therefore, I would therefore like to formally state my belief that the Planning Committee should refuse permission for this application. It is clear to me that this development would be both inappropriate and unsustainable – clearly breaching the sustainable development criteria set out in the National Planning Policy Framework and Localism Act.

Please ensure that this letter is brought to the attention of the Planning Committee and read out at the eventual hearing so that full consideration can be given to the points that I have raised on behalf of my constituents in this beautiful corner of Mid Norfolk.

Yours,

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

George Freeman MP