



Sam Chapman-Allen
Leader of Breckland District Council
Elizabeth House
Walpole Loke
Dereham
Norfolk
NR19 1EE

Monday 13th December 2021

Dear Sam,

Ref: 3PL/2010/0010/F – Application for the erection of 54 dwellings and associated roads, parking, hard and soft landscaping and open space on land adjacent to Swaffham Road, Saham Toney

Having already made a submission in relation to the above application back in February 2019, I am writing once again following the invitation to raise further points in light of the amendments and additional information submitted by the applicant.

As before, I wish to formally state my belief that the Planning Committee should refuse permission for this application. While I will not recap everything that I have raised already, I do wish to make some further specific, key points here that I believe also merit strong consideration.

Saham Toney Neighbourhood Plan and the settlement boundary

You will be aware that, since my initial submission, Saham Toney has recently had its own Neighbourhood Plan adopted – with over 86% of ballots cast approving the Plan. This application would contravene that plan, falling outside of the settlement boundary and consequently encroaching upon the gap that separates Saham Toney proper and the outskirts of Watton.

As you know, Saham Toney and its surroundings are rural in nature, very different to the character of Watton, and so any coalescence of Saham Toney with Watton would be highly undesirable – irrevocably altering the very nature of life, as well as the aesthetic, of this community. This would be highly unacceptable and a significant blow to the community and its existing residents. We must not sacrifice the rural way of life, and heritage, of this parish.

Furthermore, my understanding is that, since the application was first submitted, the applicant has now argued that, for a variety of reasons, the application should in fact be considered as a ‘Watton application’ rather than a ‘Saham Toney one’. I am sure you will agree that this is ridiculous and a clear attempt to circumvent the processes in place and the obstacles they face, having already been met by significant and justifiable opposition from local residents, councilors and myself as the elected Member of Parliament.

As is well documented, I have long been vocal in my support of the spirit of ‘Localism’ – to give local districts, and the communities within them, a much greater say in how they wish to grow and develop in the years to come. Were this application to receive permission against the wishes of the local community, and in



contravention of their very recently adopted Neighbourhood Plan, I fear public trust in the planning system will be greatly undermined.

As highlighted by myself previously, Saham Toney is clearly not a parish of NIMBYs wholeheartedly opposed to growth and development. It is a community that has put hours of tireless effort into producing a Plan that will positively shape its future. I would urge the Planning Committee to avoid granting a permission that would seriously damage that vital relationship with the public.

Flooding

I touched upon the serious flooding issues that affect this particular site in depth in my first submission nearly three years ago. As is well known, flooding in Norfolk has only worsened and increase in the time since. What were once considered rare occurrences of heavy rainfall are more and more frequent and this last twelve months have been some of the worst on record – with major flood events occurring across the county on the night of 23rd-24th December 2020 and for much of the first few months of this year.

Indeed, in response to the growing crisis, I established a Mid Norfolk Flood Partnership with local councillors, parish councils and community groups to generate a stronger voice for this affected. Both Saham Toney and Watton are represented and doing all they can to ensure their communities get the support they require.

More widely, Lord Dannatt became chair of the newly formed Norfolk Strategic Flood Alliance and, with groups like our own, he is battling hard for Norfolk's communities to help us ensure that we respond much better to, and have improved mitigation for, future such flood events. This is not a quick fix however and we are many years away from having this issue firmly under control.

It for these reasons that I am baffled to hear the applicant wishes to continue pursuing this application. An enormous amount of submissions have been made pointing out that this site is particularly prone to flooding and, to my understanding, no major work has been undertaken to reduce flooding on the site since it was originally announced that the application was being brought forward. Having seen flooding worsen in the area over the past three years, I firmly believe the risks presented have increased. If this application is permitted, it is highly likely that we will see the homeowners underwater before long, with the existing community also having to cope with the effects such flooding will bring.

For the reasons previously outlined, as well those contained in this letter, it is clear to me that this development would be both inappropriate and unsustainable. I would therefore ask that you pass both pieces of correspondence on to the Planning Committee for full consideration, and ask that it is read out at the hearing.

Yours,

George Freeman MP

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