



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

Friday 14th January 2022

Dear Sam,

Ref: 3PL/2021/1547/F – Application for 8 poultry houses with associated admin blocks, feed bins and ancillary development on land to the south side of Swangey Lane, Rocklands All Saints

I am writing to highlight the widespread concerns and objections being made in relation to the above application on land to the south side of Swangey Lane, Rocklands All Saints.

As you will be aware, several hundred objections have already been lodged with Breckland ahead of the determination of this application – with a number of constituents having been in touch directly with myself too to express their concerns. I have also been in contact with local councillors and am aware that they have been inundated with local objections from a number of the parishes surrounding the site in question as well.

As the Member of Parliament for a largely rural constituency, I know the vital importance of our local farming sector. However, having looked at the correspondence raised with me by constituents and local parish councils, and sat down and looked over the proposals being put forward, I share many of the concerns being expressed and would like to draw particular attention to some of them here.

Location

The site in question is situated in one of the most rural corners of Mid Norfolk and there is no doubt that an application of this scale would most certainly be out of keeping with the very rural nature of this location. Compounding this issue is the fact that the site is on elevated ground and would therefore result in this significant development being visible for some distance in all directions. If this application is given permission, the subsequent development would fundamentally alter the landscape and visually impact a considerable area.

It should be remembered too that the site is in close proximity to an SSSI (Swangey Fen), along with the Norfolk Valley Fens Special Area of Conservation, and that many rare and protected species call this area home. There is widespread concern that construction, and then operation, on the scale that is proposed will have an adverse effect on these precious local wildlife populations which, as you will have heard me say on numerous occasions, are a valuable asset that must be safeguarded. They are key part of what makes our corner of the world such a wonderful place to live, work and visit and to lose them would, again, forever change the rural nature of this area.

Constituency Office
8 Damgate Street, Wymondham, NR18 0BQ



Highways

The very rural character of the proposed site is further illustrated by the local highways. Indeed, Swangey Lane is a single lane that lacks sufficient passing places and, I believe, is wholly inappropriate for the sheer size and quantity of vehicles that I understand would be required to sustain the proposed development. Many of the surrounding highways are also single lane roads – some of which are well known for flooding regularly. (You will be aware that I set up the Mid Norfolk Flood Partnership at the start of 2021 in response to the awful flooding that hit large parts of Mid Norfolk over the Winter of 2020/2021. Rocklands is one of the communities that have actively engaged with that group, with many of the issues they face are based in this part of the village).

Furthermore, with Swangey Lane and several of the adjoining routes very popular with walkers, dog walkers, cyclists and horse riders, I strongly suspect that there is a real danger upon safety too were this application to be given a “green light” and the area to see an increase in HGV traffic and the like.

Environmental Impacts and Pollution

I would draw special attention to questions around potential environmental impacts, as well as pollution. Fears that the elevated nature of the proposed site could result in surface water run-off flowing down into ditches that neighbour Swangey Fishery (a thriving local business) and also into the River Thet valley have been brought to my attention by a number of local constituents. The increased presence of pollutants such as nitrates and phosphates in nearby watercourses would undoubtedly have a detrimental impact on fish and wildlife were inadequate consideration given to this issue and I would urge that no permissions are granted until the Planning Committee, the Environment Agency and all other relevant parties are satisfied this risk has been properly addressed. Given the unique topography of this area and the activities that would be taking place however, I suspect that it will be extremely difficult to sufficiently mitigate this issue.

Although situated in a very rural spot, the location in question is in the middle of a number of larger settlements, including Rocklands’ main village, Great Ellingham and Shropham. A great many residents and businesses are worried about the increased odour and light pollution that will emanate from this site – issues that will only be heightened by the site’s elevation. While some odours are to be expected when residing in the countryside, there can be no question that an expansion of the poultry farm at this scale will result in a substantial and dramatic increase in such odours. In addition, the light pollution that will inevitably accompany the proposed development could have adverse effects upon the nearby Observatory at Great Ellingham. We must not allow a highly valued local asset like the Observatory to be affected and I would ask that this issue is thoroughly investigated prior to any permissions being granted.

Those living in the vicinity of the site have expressed grave concerns about the significant increase in noise that a development of this size and operation would bring too – both on location, but also in terms of the increase in traffic required to service the development. They are deeply worried about the impact that this, along with increased odours and light pollution, will have upon their quality of life and, no less important, house prices. The impact upon those already living in the area must not be forgotten.

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Biosecurity

As you will be aware, a recent bird flu outbreak occurred in the vicinity of the site in question and I am told that one of the contributing factors cited was the quantity of other large poultry farms in the area. Of course, the cumulative effect of these numerous poultry companies must be considered (not just in terms of biosecurity, but also in relation to environmental impacts and pollution).

In addition, I know of significant local concerns that the proposed site's close proximity to Swangey Fen poses an increased risk to biosecurity that other nearby poultry farms do not quite have. They fear that the presence of open water and denser wild bird populations could present a much greater risk of bird flu and the likes getting into the poultry farm and sparking an outbreak that effects businesses over a considerably larger area.

Given the importance of the poultry farming sector to my constituency (and especially this part of Mid Norfolk), I would ask that the Environment Agency and others investigate all such concerns around biosecurity thoroughly.

As I conclude, I would like to stress that this is not a case where several NIMBY local communities unite to oppose any form of additional development in their local area. These communities have a history of being home to numerous such farms and their associated infrastructure and are in fact proud of the role they play in supporting the local economy. However, they do have genuine, serious concerns in terms of this poultry farm expansion and are rightly fearful of the impacts this proposed application will have on their rural way of life and the character of the surrounding area, as well as upon those farms already operating in the vicinity.

It is my understanding too that, despite a significant number of submissions expressing concerns when the initial Scoping Application was undertaken in April 2020, none of the local parish councils have been contacted by the applicant and no attempt has been made to proactively engage with the local community directly. Sadly, this is the case far too often and I suspect that had the applicant proactively engaged locally, they may have been able to find a compromise solution that could have avoided much of the opposition they are now seeing.

Based on the points I have made in this letter, I am firmly of the belief that this application is unsustainable, inappropriate and out of keeping with the area and I would therefore like to place on record my belief that it should be refused.

Please may I ask that my letter is added to the Breckland Planning Portal and shared with the Planning Committee. In the event that this is determined at a public hearing, I would appreciate if my letter could be read out too.

Yours,

George Freeman MP

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