



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

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

Thursday 20th June 2019

Dear Robert,

Ref: 3PL/2010/1361/F – Application for the erection of 255 dwellings with associated open space on land east of Yaxham Road and south of Dumpling Green, Dereham

I am writing to formally place on record my concerns regarding the above application for the erection of 255 dwellings on land east of Yaxham Road and south of Dumpling Green in Dereham.

It is no secret that I have deep concerns about the high number of applications in our part of Norfolk – many of which are, often, highly inappropriate and on a scale that is unsustainable and out of keeping with the heritage and identity of our largely rural area, clearly breaching the sustainable development criteria set out in the National Planning Policy Framework and 2011 Localism Act.

(Indeed, it is for this reason that, as part of my ongoing campaign to secure reforms to the planning system, I have been liaising with the Council's leadership as I look to arrange a visit by the Housing Minister to see the challenges being faced here in Mid Norfolk first-hand)

I have also repeatedly emphasised 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.

It is with this in mind that I was very shocked to hear that this application is being heard at Monday 24th June's Planning Committee hearing – despite the fact that the public consultation does not in fact finish until Friday 28th June (four days later).

While I appreciate that the site in question has been the subject of several consultations in recent years, I am sure that you, and the Planning Committee, will appreciate how bad this looks to the public. Such a timeline will only serve to unnecessarily heighten distrust of the planning system (especially as, I understand, this site is not one of the Emerging Local Plan's designated 'Preferred Options', but instead only an 'Alternative Option') and encourage a perception that local views are not given the consideration and respect they deserve. This will in turn, I suspect, discourage individuals from taking part in the remaining part of this consultation period – and in the consultation periods of future applications in the area.

Such disengagement is of particular concern to me because, as you well know, there is widespread upset about the level of development that has taken place, and is continuing to take place, in Dereham.

The fact that several parts of the town regularly come to a standstill at peak times of the day (and, increasingly, at non-peak times) because of congestion is well known and a source of great frustration for many – with one of the most problem locations, the Tavern Lane/Yaxham Road junction (and surrounding roads), being situated just down the road from this site.

I understand that the Dereham Transport Study, commissioned by Breckland Council to help inform the Emerging Local Plan, stated that in order to cope with the growth coming to Dereham, a signalised roundabout would be required at this troublesome junction. Norfolk County Council's Highways Department has since explained that such a roundabout at this junction is in fact undeliverable – and so the town is continuing to receive the development, but without a key piece of infrastructure. I must therefore reiterate my belief that, in the absence of a proper, strategic traffic plan, such large-scale developments as the one in question here will only exacerbate these traffic problems in the town and fuel local disillusionment further.

Cycle routes are something that I have argued merit serious consideration within a wider traffic plan for Dereham and, although this application has made provision in this regard, I have been made aware of serious anxieties about the effectiveness of the plans in their current form.

Indeed, I understand that the developer has proposed to improve cycle links up to the level crossing on Yaxham Road – where cyclists would then be required to join the highway. Given the high volume of traffic that passes through this stretch of road (as indicated by the congestion issues at the Tavern Lane/Yaxham Road junction, detailed above), this location is particularly hostile to cyclists, and poses all sorts of safety issues.

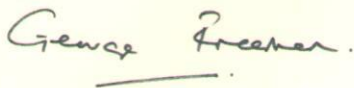
There are concerns about the route of the cycle path that will run through the site of the application itself too. Many doubt that it will be sufficiently used as it will exit on to Dumpling Green, an unsurfaced and narrow private road that is actually designated as a footpath (with no legal rights to cycle). To then depart Dumpling Green and cycle into the town, cyclists will be required to turn right, across traffic, without it would appear the aid of an appropriate crossing. As a result, I myself must question how many people will be willing to risk their safety using this route.

There also remain fears that large-scale development such as this, to the south-east of the town, add to an 'urban sprawl' that may eventually see nearby communities, like Yaxham, swallowed up. Having spoken to thousands of constituents about this matter over the past nine years, I have encountered no one that believes this would be a desirable, let alone sustainable, outcome of development in this part of Mid Norfolk.

Given the strength of feeling about development, as well as the already high levels of distrust in our planning system, in Dereham, I would therefore like to formally request that no approval is given for this application until after the consultation period has concluded. It is absolutely imperative that proper due process is not only carried out in a logical and transparent way, but that it is seen to be carried out in such a manner too.

I would also request that the points that I have raised about the application are taken into account and given full and thorough consideration by the Planning Committee when the time comes.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "George Freeman". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a short horizontal line.

George Freeman MP