



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Fiona Hunter
Principal Development Manager Planner
Breckland Council
Elizabeth House
Walpole Loke
Dereham
NR19 1EE

Wednesday 21st August 2019

Dear Fiona,

Ref: 3PL/2018/0021/D – Application for development of 42 dwellings at Elm Close, Yaxham

I am writing to formally place on record my concerns regarding the above application for 42 dwellings at Elm Close in Yaxham.

Although I understand that outline permission has been granted for this site and that, therefore, the principle of development has already been established, it is clear that there is considerable local concern about the proposed size of the application in its current form. Given that Yaxham is a village of just 204 dwellings, 42 additional properties would represent a substantial level of growth in excess of 20%. Such growth would be significant for almost any settlement, but the effects in Yaxham would be even more profound.

As you will be aware, the village is not designated as a Local Service Centre in Breckland's Emerging Local Plan – lacking key services like a pub or a shop. The nearest school (Yaxham Church of England Primary School) is situated over a kilometre away from the site, and is in fact in Clint Green, with no plans or room to expand. One must seriously question the logic of a development of this size in Yaxham when there are not the services there to support it.

Indeed, in the absence of such services, those joining the community will have to commute in search of them – adding large amounts of traffic to the roads in this very rural area. Whilst some may travel to nearby villages for their basic needs, realistically, the vast majority of journeys will have to be into Dereham – where, as we all know, there are already severe problems with traffic congestion. The Tavern Lane/Yaxham Road junction is a horrendous bottleneck, with long tailbacks in all directions becoming increasingly common, and this new traffic will only serve to exacerbate the problem.

(So serious is the congestion affecting the Tavern Lane/Yaxham Road, along with the town as a whole, that I am liaising with local Town, District and County Councillors about the prospect of a

summit to bring all of the relevant parties together to discuss potential measures that can be taken to alleviate the issues being faced).

You will also be aware that Yaxham has its own Neighbourhood Plan – adopted after a referendum voted overwhelmingly in support (with 92%). It clearly indicated the village's desire to retain its small and rural identity, but made provision for some small scale developments that do not exceed a maximum density level of 20 dpha. These proposals for 42 homes would be at level of 25 dpha – some 25% above the level set out in the Plan. Elm Close, however, currently only has a density of 17 dpha and, therefore, the proposals being put forward are even more out of keeping with the heritage and identity of the village. This application flies in the face of all of the tireless hard work carried out by the Neighbourhood Plan team, and ignores the views of an entire local community.

There are concerns that insufficient flooding mitigation measures are being included in the plans as they stand too. In 2015 and in 2016, a number of residents in the vicinity of the site in question were seriously affected by surface water flooding and, with such incidents of heavy rainfall becoming more frequent, the village is justifiably worried that such a high volume of new housing in this area would serve to worsen the issue. Many residents are already struggling to secure insurance to protect them in the event of flooding.

Given the history of flooding in Yaxham, it does seem strange to me that the proposals lack a proper surface water drainage scheme – especially as I understand that the inclusion of such a scheme is, again, a requirement in the village's adopted Neighbourhood Plan for all proposed developments of more than five houses. I believe it is vital that this aspect of the application must also be looked at again.

As I have so often expressed, I have deep concerns about the high volume of applications coming to 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.

I have also consistently emphasised the need to ensure that public trust in the planning system is maintained. Decisions taken by the Council – on the advice of Planning Officers – absolutely 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 area.

Having spoken to local councillors and residents alike, it is very apparent that this is not a case of Nimbyism. There is a willingness to work with all parties, and particularly the applicant, to ensure that if development is to take place at this site, it is done in a way that minimises the impact on the existing community and does not destroy the spirit of the village. As it stands however, it seems that a number of their legitimate concerns have been overlooked.

Should the proposals be allowed to go forward in their current form, I am certain that it will deal a massive blow to public support in our planning system in Yaxham and the surrounding area. It will undermine the foundations of Localism as well, dissuading others from developing their own Neighbourhood Plans. Having long supported the principle of giving local communities much more of



a say in how they grow and develop over decades to come, I believe this would be a major step backwards.

I would therefore like to formally request that no approval is granted for this application – at least until the concerns being raised by myself and the community are properly addressed.

I genuinely believe that, were the applicant to take on board the feedback being given and adjust their proposals accordingly, a much more sustainable development could be achieved – one that could command support from a majority of the local community. (Indeed, were the issues around flooding tackled and the application be much closer in size to that proposed in the outline planning permission granted back in 2015, I suspect that much of the current opposition would fade away).

I would greatly appreciate if this letter could be provided to the members of the Planning Committee in advance of the hearing, and if it could be read out also.

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