



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Kit Malthouse MP
Minister of State for Housing
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Friday 21st September 2018

Garden Communities Prospectus

Dear Kit,

Thank you for your letter to me, dated 28th August 2018, in which you provided further information about the Garden Communities Prospectus that had just been published.

As you may be aware, a Norfolk based development company, Lanpro, recently unveiled their desire to build a garden town of approximately 10,000 homes in my constituency, between Dereham and Fakenham. This news has, unsurprisingly, caused considerable concern for many of my constituents living in the communities in and around Lanpro's proposed site.

Lanpro notified me back in 2017 that they were beginning to look into the feasibility of building a well-designed garden village at the site in question as part of an exciting partnership with the Mid Norfolk Railway and local communities that would use the profits to improve the Mid Norfolk Railway's line so that a scheduled commuter service could be reopened between North Elmham and Wymondham, Norwich and Cambridge. While delivering much needed housing for the region, this improved infrastructure would provide much quicker commuter links between a considerable section of Norfolk's heartland and the East's two big economic growth areas.

It was on this basis that I was interested in the principle of a garden village in this very rural part of my constituency, and open to seeing their plans. However, I then heard nothing from them until their proposals became public a few weeks ago – and I am aware that they carried out very little, if any, consultation with councillors and local communities too.

Having now looked at Lanpro's Prospectus in great depth, and discussed their proposals extensively with the Leader of Breckland Council, local councillors and residents, I have come to the decision that I cannot support the vision being put forward. It does not achieve what was initially discussed and lacks any serious plan to manage the major traffic implications and general disruption that a settlement of this size would create in such a rural area. I know also that, having carefully assessed Lanpro's Prospectus themselves, officers at Breckland Council have advised councillors not to support the outlined vision being proposed.

Point 28 of the Garden Communities Prospectus (on page 9) states:

"Proposals are invited from local authorities and private sector partners (such as master developers or land owners). Proposals submitted by private sector partners must be expressly supported by the local authority."

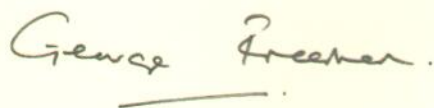
I now understand that, in light of the recommendation that has been made to Breckland councillors, Lanpro have decided to lobby the Ministry directly instead, in the hope of bringing about an amendment to the Garden Communities Prospectus that would allow their proposals to move forward without the consent of the local authority. I urge you to ensure that this attempt to circumvent the planning system is NOT allowed to happen.

Trust in the planning system – and the Government's commitment to localism – is at an all-time low. Instead of allowing ourselves to be pushed around by the big developers, we should be insisting they work with elected local leaders like the MP and local council leaders to frame a sensible scheme with clear community benefits. There will be understandable outrage if people saw developers and landowners able to lobby Ministers to circumvent due process so that they can make hundreds of millions of pounds from dumping a massive housing estate without any transport infrastructure on to a rural part of Norfolk.

Lanpro's decision to lobby the Ministry in this manner, in my opinion and that of many others in Mid Norfolk, shows a seriously ill judged contempt for the communities that would be affected, as well as both Local Government and the planning system.

I would, therefore, appreciate your reassurance and commitment that Lanpro's approach of circumventing the planning process and community consultation will not be allowed. Instead, the developers should be required to sit down properly with local leaders and see if a sensible scheme can be worked out.

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



cc. The Rt Hon James Brokenshire – Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government