



Simon Wood
Director of Planning and Building Control
Breckland Council
Elizabeth House
Walpole Loke
Dereham
NR19 1EE

Friday 22nd January 2021

Dear Simon,

Ref: 3PL/2020/0462/F – Erection of 50 Residential Dwellings with associated infrastructure on land south of Dereham Road, Mattishall

I am writing to formally put on record my concerns about the above application for 50 new dwellings on land south of Dereham Road in Mattishall.

As I have frequently made clear to Breckland Planning Committee, and more widely, I have strong concerns about the high volume of applications coming to our part of Norfolk – many of which are, often, highly inappropriate, unsustainable and on a scale that is out of keeping with the rural heritage and identity of our local communities, 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 its planning officers – must be based on proper due process and rigorous and balanced assessment of all the relevant criteria, with special attention given to the questions of sustainability and the likely impact of an application on the community. The views of residents, locally elected councillors and the MP should carry particular weight on issues in their area.

With all of this in mind, I must say that I am therefore very surprised to learn that Breckland planning officers are recommending this application be approved.

My understanding is that this application by Hopkins and Moore is a new application, and not connected to the previous Gladman proposals back in 2018. As a result, it must be judged on its own merits and in the context of Breckland's Local Plan, and Mattishall's Neighbourhood Plan. Nevertheless, the circumstances of that Gladman application remain pertinent here and must not be forgotten.

As you will recall, the Gladman application was very similar to this new application here – located on the same site and roughly the same size – and was turned down by Breckland Planning Committee, but then approved by the Planning Inspector. Both Breckland Planning Committee and the Planning Inspector recognised that the Gladman application contravened policies in the Local and Neighbourhood Plans.

Yet, when the Gladman application was heard back in 2018, Breckland was still without a recently adopted Local Plan and a Five Year Housing Land Supply. Despite recognising the contraventions, the Planning Inspector was therefore obliged to put more weight on the national planning need and rule in favour of the development as a result.

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Given that Breckland now has an adopted Local Plan and a Five Year Housing Land Supply, as well as the fact that this new application is incredibly similar to the previous Gladman proposals and contravenes two of the three criteria recognised for being breached back in 2018, I think it is evident why I am confused to see this latest application being recommended for approval. On these grounds alone, I would argue this application should be halted.

However, I must draw attention to this question of sustainability too.

As you will be aware (as will all of Breckland's councillors, including those on the Planning Committee), the area has been hit hard by flooding in recent times. Indeed, just this last week, Mattishall, Yaxham and the surrounding area were badly affected, with flood waters overwhelmingly local drainage systems and pumping stations, rendering many resident's toilets, showers and sinks unusable and causing sewage and foul water to rise up and flow out of them, along with local drains.

I have been working closely with local councillors to highlight this case (along with those others around Mid Norfolk) with Norfolk County Council's Flood Management team, the Environment Agency and Anglian Water – who have been forced to deploy tankers in order to pump and take away these flood waters and sewage round the clock.

Furthermore, the site of this application itself was flooded – along with the junction of Old Hall Road and Dereham. A grave omen indeed.

Sadly, this incident was not a one off. It is happening more and more often. The 23rd-24th December saw Anglian Water tankers responding to exactly the same set of circumstances in the Yaxham-Mattishall area – and heavy rainfall caused problems back in the summer, and on numerous occasions over recent years. It is unacceptable to deem these isolated incidents and 'freak' weather events.

(So bad has the situation become over recent weeks, with local sentiment reaching fever pitch, that I am in the process of convening a Mid Norfolk Flood Partnership – to create a forum in which local councillors and community action groups can come together with officials from Norfolk County Council, Anglian Water and the Environment Agency to hold them to account and share local knowledge of our local drainage networks. We hope this Partnership will serve as a platform to secure a better, more coordinated approach to responding to, and mitigating, future flooding events. This is because the current system is failing)

In light of this horrendous flooding (including of the application site) and the associated overwhelming of the local drainage system, I challenge anyone to argue that this application can be deemed sustainable. The addition of 50 new properties on a site prone to severe flooding, and to be connected to a drainage system that already cannot cope with heavy rainfall (an increasingly common occurrence), would not just be bonkers, it would be negligent.

As you know, I am not against the idea of development in Mid Norfolk. I actually encourage it.

That's why I have advocated for a more local approach to planning – one that embraces the spirit of the 2011 Localism Act, giving greater say to local authorities like Breckland and communities like Mattishall, and helps drive a 'Rural Renaissance' in our part of the world. If we are to truly 'Build Back Better', we will need such a 'Renaissance'.

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As stated again at the beginning of this letter, I have consistently made clear that any new development must respect the local heritage of our local communities, and be accompanied by the necessary infrastructure to support.

This application here ticks neither box – contravening policies in the adopted Local and Neighbourhood Plans and promising only to add to an already significant flooding and drainage problem. The proposals were not suitable back in 2018 and time has shown that these proposals now are even more unacceptable. If this application is approved, local opinion will rightly be universally angry with, and distrustful of, our planning system.

I must therefore request that this application be refused approval – at least until such time that the policies can be satisfied and the flooding and drainage issues affecting the area are resolved.

I would appreciate if you could ensure my letter is raised with the members of Breckland's Planning Committee.

Yours,

George



George Freeman MP
MP for Mid Norfolk

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