



Our ref: MP-PL1
Date: 16 November 2020

Planning Inspectorate for England and Wales

Councillor Martin Potter
23 Ellison Way
Rainham
Kent
ME8 7PL
01634 566475
mpotter.rainham@gmail.com

Dear Inspector,

Re: Land off Pump Lane (1250 Homes) - Appeal (APP/A2280/W/20/3259868)

We are the ward councillors for Rainham North where the orchards and farmlands subject to this appeal for the proposed development of 1250 homes by AC Goatham is located. The Rainham area is no stranger to housing developments with the town growing substantially since the war from a village to become a commuter town, with around 10,000 homes built over those decades. Rainham consists of a small centre surrounded by urban sprawl, yet it still retains some areas of countryside and rural character which also act as green buffers preventing coalescence with nearby towns and settlements.

In recent years there has been further development in Rainham with live permissions granted for around 1000 homes, but despite this and the extensive expansion of Rainham over decades we've managed to maintain the strategic green buffer of the rural area of the Lower Rainham orchards and farmland. Furthermore, **this area does not need to be built on for Medway to meet its local assessed housing need**, as per Medway Council's emerging Local Plan. This special area, which is to the north of the railway line, extending down to the river Medway and west from Berengrave Lane along to Yokosuka Way, is a vital green lung preventing the total urbanisation of Rainham with neighbouring Twydall and Gillingham.

This treasured area of countryside includes historic working orchards and associated heritage properties, farmland, woodland areas and Riverside Country Park (including the Ramsar marshes along the river). It is also recognised as an area of local landscape importance (Gillingham Riverside Area of local landscape importance), and the proposed development would be a damaging concrete incursion right in the middle of this Lower Rainham countryside, whilst also extinguishing the historic working orchards. It would cut the heart out of this valued area of rural landscape which predominantly consists of agricultural land of 'Best and Most Versatile' quality. Furthermore, it would significantly erode this important green buffer which prevents urban coalescence, whilst no doubt setting a precedent that would lead to the obliteration of the entire Lower Rainham green lung.

As a car dependent development it would overwhelm the highway network, which has already been stretched to capacity by the aforementioned housing developments built over decades and further exacerbated by live development and permissions. Furthermore, it is critical to bear in mind there are only two through routes in the Rainham area which are the already congested A2 and Lower Rainham Road. Therefore, the development would lead to the most severe highway congestion and would contribute significantly to air quality concerns. A key aspect of the prognosis here is that the development would have limited pedestrian connectivity to local centres and lacks acceptable safe walking and cycling routes due to the nature of the country lanes and narrow highways in Lower Rainham. During daylight hours there are rural PROW routes which can be safely traversed, however we are not convinced the homes will be occupied by 3000-4000 ramblers.

The public transport in the immediate area is very limited by its rural nature, and the nearest train station (Rainham) is around 40 minutes walk by the safest route. It should also be noted that the nearest centres (Rainham and Twydall), are small and have limited employment opportunities, therefore they are not going to provide employment for the vast majority of people. These issues when combined with the sustainability concerns above, will result in car use that would be substantially higher than average, which is in stark contrast to the appellants contrived and inadequate traffic assessments.

The proposed development would also lead to significant soft infrastructure challenges relating to schools and health services, and the plans put forward in relation to local services by the appellants are ambiguous and lack detail in terms of how the concerns will be adequately addressed. The internationally designated Ramsar site of the Medway estuary in nearby Riverside Country Park must be protected along with the local wildlife, these issues are also yet to be adequately addressed.

Further to the concerns we have outlined above, we fully endorse the Medway Council's refusal of the application received on the 28th June 2019 for the following reasons:

1. Insufficient information has been provided in relation to mitigation measures, and no agreement has been reached to secure such measures, which are necessary to ensure that there will be no adverse impact on the integrity of the Medway Estuary & Marshes SSSI, SPA and Ramsar site as a result of the additional recreational pressures caused by the proposal. In the absence of imperative reasons of overriding public interest, Regulations 63 and 70 of the Habitats Regulations require permission to be refused. In addition, the lack of information and mechanism to secure the mitigation also results in non-compliance with policies S6 and BNE35 of the Local Plan and NPPF paragraphs 175 & 176.
2. The proposed development would have a harmful impact on the local historic landscape, as well as the setting and significance of a number of designated heritage assets, including: listed buildings (York Farmhouse (Grade II); Pump Farmhouse (Grade II); Chapel House (Grade II); 497-501 Lower Rainham Road (Grade II); The Old House (Grade II); Bloors Place (Grade II*); a range of outbuildings including cart lodge and granary west of Bloors Place (Grade II); and, the garden walls to south and east of Bloors Place (Grade II)); and, two Conservation Areas (Lower Twydall; and, Lower Rainham). Applying the great weight which has to be given to the conservation of the designated heritage assets (by virtue of NPPF paragraph 193 and Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990), the proposal is

contrary to Local Plan policies BNE 12 and BNE18. In addition, as the public benefits of the scheme would not outweigh the harm to the designated heritage assets, the proposed development is also contrary to the NPPF paragraph 196.

3. The proposed development would lead to significant long-term adverse landscape and visual effects to the local valued Gillingham Riverside Area of Local Landscape Importance (ALLI), which would not be outweighed by the economic and social benefits of the scheme, in conflict with Local Plan policy BNE34 and NPPF paragraph 170.
4. The applicant has failed to satisfy Highways England that the development will not materially affect the safety, reliability and / or operation of the Strategic Road Network (SRN). This is contrary the tests set out in department for Transport Circular 2/13 paragraphs 9 & 10 and the NPPF at paragraph 109.
5. The cumulative impact from the increased additional traffic cannot be accommodated on the highway in terms of overall network capacity without a severe impact. This is contrary to Local Plan policy T1 and the NPPF at paragraph 109.
6. The cumulative impact from the increased additional traffic from the development is unlikely to be able to create a safe highway environment. This is contrary to Local Plan policy T1 and the NPPF at paragraph 109.
7. No assessment nor technical details have been provided regarding the two new access points along Pump Lane to serve the proposed development, therefore it has not been possible to appropriately assess the adequacy of these access points. This is contrary to Policy T1 of the Medway Local Plan 2003 and paragraph 109 of the NPPF.
8. The proposed development would result in the irreversible loss of 'best and most versatile' (BMV) agricultural land, contrary to Local Plan policy BNE48 and the NPPF at paragraph 170 and footnote 53.
9. In the absence of a completed S106 legal agreement, the proposal fails to secure infrastructure necessary to meet the needs of the development. This is contrary to Local Plan policy S6 and the NPPF at paragraph 54.

The public response to the application for this development was unprecedented in Medway with over 3000 objections lodged. This was a campaign that started in November 2018 when we launched a community petition in response to the appellants applying for a scoping opinion. The petition quickly amassed over 1000 signatures and would lead to a community movement to protect the area, spurred on by a united community and an amazing grass roots steering group of local residents. We worked with the group with regard to multiple public events to raise awareness of the application, and it should be noted we had to host our own exhibition for Rainham North residents after AC Goatham only held a single consultation event (at short notice) in Twydall.

To conclude, it is abundantly clear that the benefits of providing new homes would not outweigh the damaging impact this unsustainable development would have on the community, rural landscape and environment in Rainham with impacts also felt further afield, particularly with regard to the strategic road network. Due to the scale of the proposals, level of controversy and the unprecedented public interest we request the Secretary of State makes the final appeal decision. However, regardless of who makes the final decision we hope you

are in no doubt that **the appeal, and therefore the proposed development, should be firmly dismissed.**

Yours faithfully

Councillor Martin Potter and Councillor Kirstine Carr

Councillor Martin Potter and Councillor Kirstine Carr

Cc: Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP – Secretary of State for Housing Communities and Local Government

Cc: Dave Harris - Head of Medway Council Planning