

Cllr Martin Potter – Statement to Appeal for Pump Lane

The Rainham area is no stranger to housing developments with the town growing substantially since the second war from a village to become a commuter town, with around 10,000 homes built over those decades. In recent years around 500 homes have been built or are part of a live development, and there is over 300 in the pipeline having gained permission. So, what makes this development different to what came before to lead to such an overwhelming reaction against it? What is so significant about the harm? Why did the community petition we led on back in 2018, when it was only a concept, amass over a 1000 signatures in a matter of weeks? Why did over 3500 residents make personal written objections (the most for any single housing development in the history of Medway)?

Well firstly, the development is proposed in a special area of orchards and farmland, this countryside, 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 through to 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).

The relationship between the Lower Rainham orchards and farmland and Riverside Country Park, which together forms an Area of Local Landscape Importance (Gillingham Riverside Area), cannot be separated, they run parallel east to west between the railway and the river. The proposed development would cut the heart out of this rural landscape and would severely impact its rural character of this vital wellbeing escape from urban and suburban Medway. The development would also extinguish the orchards and would introduce development into an area which is predominantly 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 an isolated 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 live development and permissions. Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind there are only two connecting highway through routes (geography dictates an east/west flow) 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 detrimental air quality.

A key aspect of the transport and access issues is that the development would have limited pedestrian connectivity to local centres and would lack 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 bridle PROW routes which can be safely traversed; however we are not convinced these homes would be occupied

by 3000-4000 people who want to go rambling just to go to the shops or work. 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. This combined with the issues relating to transport and access means car use would be substantially higher than average, which is in stark contrast to the appellants traffic assessments. The transport and access issues from this development would result in significant harm and rule this development totally unsustainable.

Although Rainham is now a town consisting of a small centre surrounded by urban/suburban sprawl, it has retained this treasured area of countryside and rural character which also act as strategic green buffers preventing coalescence with nearby towns and settlements. It's abundantly clear that the benefits of providing new homes would not outweigh the significant harm this unsustainable development would have on the rural landscape and character of the area, on highways and the environment, and with the loss of the 'Best and Most Versatile' orchards and farmland, with impacts from such a development having a detrimental impact on Rainham and the east of Medway. Furthermore, the area does not need to be allocated for development in order for Medway to meet its local assessed housing need as per Medway Council's emerging Local Plan. The appeal, and therefore the proposed development, should be firmly dismissed.