



Rehman Chishti MP  
*Member of Parliament for Gillingham and Rainham*

House of Commons  
London SW1A 0AA

Tel: 020 7219 7075  
Email: [rehman.chishti.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:rehman.chishti.mp@parliament.uk)

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP  
Secretary of State  
Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities  
2 Marsham Street  
London, SW1P 4DF

8<sup>th</sup> October 2021

Dear Secretary of State,

**Re: Urgent meeting request to discuss unsuitable and unacceptable planning applications affecting the residents of Gillingham and Rainham**

I trust you're keeping well and may I congratulate you on your appointment as Secretary of State for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities.

I am writing to you to request a meeting with you on an urgent basis to discuss a range of planning issues which are causing grave concern to my constituents, within and adjacent to my constituency of Gillingham and Rainham, including the Pump Lane planning appeal which you are due to make a decision on by next month, along with a recent proposal by Maidstone Borough Council to designate land for up to 2,000 homes at Lidsing, which is on the border of Hempstead in Gillingham and Rainham. Below I will give more details of the areas of concern.

**1. Opposition to the land off Pump Lane planning application (Application Ref: MC/19/1566, Appeal Ref: 3259868)**

I understand from the letter attached, dated 5<sup>th</sup> October 2021, from your Department that you are due to make a decision on the Pump Lane planning appeal (Application Ref: MC/19/1566, Appeal Ref: 3259868) for up to 1,250 homes in my constituency by 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2021.

This site was refused planning permission by Medway Council as it was not a site that was due to be included in their emerging Local Plan, and there are serious issues with the development.

Gillingham and Rainham is already the most densely populated constituency in Kent, and I would like to reiterate my complete and strong opposition to this unacceptable and unsuitable development, which is opposed by the overwhelming majority of my constituents. The large-scale proposal would have huge detrimental effects on my constituents, including damaging our cherished very limited rural green spaces and placing further pressure on local services.



The decision of the Local Planning Authority was challenged and in February 2021, I gave evidence before the Planning Inspectorate inquiry into this application outlining my opposition and I have attached my full representations on Pump Lane sent to the Planning Inspectorate on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2020, which details my opposition in full. Taking into account the views of the overwhelming majority of local residents and the negative impacts the development would have; I hope that you will see fit to reject this application.

## **2. Further unacceptable large-scale developments impacting Gillingham and Rainham**

The proposed Pump Lane development is just one of several unsuitable and unsustainable large-scale planning applications that are currently being proposed in or on the border of Gillingham and Rainham, all of which would have serious detrimental effects on my constituents:

- **Lidsing Garden Community:** A neighbouring local authority, Maidstone Borough Council, as part of their Draft Local Plan Review has included a proposal for 2,000 homes at Lidsing, which borders Hempstead in my constituency. The proposal is poorly related to any services within Maidstone and the pressure for services will fall on my Local Authority, Medway Council. This proposal would cause irreversible damage to our cherished green spaces, especially in the Capstone Valley (Area of Local Landscape Importance) and the North Downs (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) and would put huge pressure on our schools, health services, and roads.

I also note that in Maidstone Borough Council's Draft Local Plan Review document, the plan explicitly states in paragraph 6.72 that the Lidsing "site will operate as an urban extension to the Medway urban area" and in paragraph 6.80 that "The creation of this new Garden Community will change the character of this area, creating a new place within Medway with its own unique identity". I note that paragraph 6.80 above states the new Garden Community would be a "new place within Medway". I find this to be factually inaccurate as Lidsing is not within the Medway Unitary Authority but falls within Maidstone Borough Council and this needs to be clarified. No doubt, if it was within Medway Council boundaries, Medway Council would have responsibility for this area, not Maidstone Borough Council. I find it completely unacceptable that a neighbouring local authority is trying to satisfy its housing need on the borders of my constituency with a development that will draw largely on the resources and infrastructure of my constituency and of the Medway area.

- **Gibraltar Farm (MC/14/2395), (MC/18/0556), (MC/19/0336), (MC/21/1296 – Resubmission of MC/19/0336):** I have consistently and strongly opposed this unacceptable proposal, which would lead to the construction of up to an additional 450 homes in an area of outstanding natural beauty and located on a completely



unsuitable site for such a large-scale development, which could not be appropriately supported by local infrastructure.

This proposal has been submitted or resubmitted on four separate occasions since 2014 – all of which have been put forward by the same developer, on the same plot of land for the same number of 450 homes. On 5<sup>th</sup> August 2021 I wrote to the Medway Planning Authority to express my strong objections to the most recent application MC/21/1296 which was lodged with Medway Council this summer. On that very same day I also wrote to the Planning Inspectorate to oppose MC/19/0336 which the developers are seeking to appeal simultaneously to launching a fresh application and will be the subject of a Planning Inquiry this autumn.

Please find attached my representations to both Medway Council and the Planning Inspectorate regarding the distinct applications for the same site on 5<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

- **East Hill (MC/19/0765), (MC/21/1520):** I have also vigorously opposed the nearby proposal at East Hill, which as in the case of Gibraltar Farm is a proposal to construct hundreds of homes on farmland in the Capstone Valley. Sadly, as is also the case regarding Gibraltar Farm, multiple applications are ongoing simultaneously. MC/19/0765 seeks to construct 800 homes on the site and I opposed this development in 2019. I wrote again to the Local Authority on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2021 to oppose the scheme when it was going before the Planning Committee and I have been advised in recent days that the developer has sought to appeal this decision and therefore I will be writing to the Planning Inspectorate shortly.

However, the developer has brought forward a new case to Medway Council this summer – MC/21/1520 – on the same site for 650 homes and I expressed my strong objections to the Local Authority on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

The above cases provide important context for the threat being continuously posed to the local community in the Capstone Valley, and the services and infrastructure they rely upon, including schools, health services and roads, by several substantial large-scale developments. This is causing a great deal of anxiety to local residents who should have the ability to enjoy their homes and community without such a threat looming over them.

The landowner at Gibraltar Farm and East Hill is also the owner of most of the land at Lidsing where Maidstone Borough Council are proposing the construction of the Lidsing Garden Community.



### **3. Concerns regarding communities being overwhelmed by separate large-scale developments**

Further to the above, I have serious concerns regarding local communities, such as Hempstead in Gillingham and Rainham, which repeatedly face several large-scale planning applications to which they are opposed, but which are dealt with in isolation by the relevant authorities, rather than in the context of other proposals in the pipeline that may impact the area as a whole.

For example, Hempstead in my constituency is severely affected by both the Gibraltar Farm and East Hill applications. The concern is that each appeal is dealt with as a one-off, so no inspector will see the impact of up to 1,250 additional homes on Hempstead, only one development of 450 and one of 800/650 which they may individually regard as acceptable.

The same situation presents itself with the Lidsing proposal. If these proposals are approved one-by-one, Hempstead will be overwhelmed by developments totalling over 3,000 homes, the largest two of which will mean that the entire area between Hempstead, Lordswood and the M2 will be built on.

This approach means that although residents may be strongly opposed to these developments, inspectors may be inclined to approve them as they don't see the cumulative impact of all the developments on an area. To help resolve this, the Government could require inspectors to call in all other applications in the surrounding area and look at them in their entirety.

Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you on an urgent basis on the issues above and regarding a meeting to discuss the issues outlined above.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rehman Chishti".

**Rehman Chishti MP**

P.S. For your reference, I have attached the following documents:

- Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities letter regarding your decision on the Pump Lane development (dated 5<sup>th</sup> October 2021)
- Rehman Chishti MP letter to the Planning Inspectorate regarding Gibraltar Farm (dated 5<sup>th</sup> August 2021)
- Rehman Chishti MP email to the Head of Planning at Medway Council regarding Gibraltar Farm (5<sup>th</sup> August 2021)



- Rehman Chishti MP email to the Head of Planning at Medway Council regarding East Hill (dated 14<sup>th</sup> July 2021)
- Rehman Chishti MP email to the Head of Planning at Medway Council regarding East Hill (dated 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2021)
- Rehman Chishti MP letter to Maidstone Borough Council regarding Lidsing (dated 15<sup>th</sup> December 2020)
- Rehman Chishti MP letter to the Planning Inspectorate regarding Pump Lane (dated 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2020)