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The Planning Inspectorate
Temple Quay House
2, The Square
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5 August 2021

Dear Inspector

Re: APP/A2280/W/21/3276864 – Representations against an outline application that was rejected by Medway Council in January 2021 to construct up to 450 homes, a nursery, retail space up to 85sqm, and associate main route of access and further highway works on farmland at Gibraltar Farm in Hempstead, Gillingham, Kent.

I am writing to you as the Member of Parliament for Gillingham and Rainham in order to make clear my firm opposition to the above appeal, which seeks to dismiss the decision by Medway Council in January 2021 to reject the unacceptable application MC/19/0336 to build up to 450 homes at Gibraltar Farm in the Capstone Valley, an area of outstanding natural beauty in Hempstead, Gillingham, Kent – a site completely unsuitable and inadequate for such a substantial large-scale development which local infrastructure cannot support.

Whilst this development has a Hempstead, Gillingham postcode it falls just outside of the boundaries of my constituency and lies within the footprint of the Chatham & Aylesford constituency. However, the development can only be accessed from the road network through the ward of Hempstead & Wigmore in my constituency in Gillingham and Rainham.

The immense scale of the development would have significant negative impacts on communities far away from the site. It would not be just my constituents who live in the Capstone Valley who would be adversely affected but also many who live, work or go to school wider afield and therefore I write to you in opposing this appeal on behalf of all my constituents across the Gillingham and Rainham constituency.

The Gibraltar Farm site has been the subject of continued interest in the applicants making repeated applications for much of the last decade and therefore this development is widely known across the community and has been raised with me by



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constituents for many years. The clear consensus amongst local residents I have spoken with is that this is the wrong location to build such a large development. Local infrastructure in the area would be unable to support additional residents, and due to the nature of the site additional infrastructure cannot be provided that would mitigate the adverse impacts this development would burden existing residents and services with.

When MC/19/0336 was put forward for consideration in 2019 I canvassed hundreds of my constituents in Hempstead and Wigmore to raise individual awareness of this development and the need to support wider community efforts to oppose not just this development but a second unacceptable development for 800 further homes in the Capstone Valley at East Hill that was before the planning authority at the same time. It is important to note that both of these developments put forward to Medway Council have been submitted by the same applicants. I wrote to the Head of Planning at Medway Council on 8th May 2019 setting out my reasons for opposing both of these developments and why I believe they should have been rejected.

That second development – MC/19/0765 – was seeking to construct 800 homes at East Hill in the Capstone Valley and was rejected by Medway Council in March 2021. The applicants put forward a further application to Medway Council seeking to construct up to 650 homes on the same site. I wrote to the Head of Planning at Medway Council on 14th July 2021 to vigorously oppose this further application.

Whilst that particular application for 650 homes is wholly independent of this case, it provides important context for the threat being continuously posed to the local community in the Capstone Valley, and the services and infrastructure they rely upon, by several substantial large-scale developments two of which are from the same applicant. 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 above them.

A third, even more significant proposal was put forward late last year by Maidstone Borough Council. In December 2020 as part of their Local Plan Review, Maidstone Borough Council put forward a development option to construct approximately 2,000 homes on farmland at the hamlet of Lidsing in the mouth of the Capstone Valley, less than a mile from the Gibraltar Farm site in consideration here.

I submitted extensive representations to Maidstone Borough Council and submitted a petition to the House of Commons expressing the opposition of myself and local councillors in Gillingham and Rainham to the proposals.



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Simultaneous to launching this appeal following Medway Council's rejection of MC/19/0336 the applicants have submitted a new application – MC/21/1296 – to Medway Council seeking to construct up to 450 homes at Gibraltar Farm. I have therefore written to the Head of Planning at Medway Council this week to oppose this third application regarding the site since 2014.

On learning that the developers are seeking to appeal Medway Council's decision I am making representations to yourself, and I have advised my constituents that they may wish to also make representations to you in this appeal, and to Medway Council regarding the new application.

I have outlined below my concerns and the concerns that have been raised with me by constituents regarding this unacceptable large-scale development:

1. **Infrastructure/roads**

The adverse impact of this unacceptable proposal on the Capstone Valley will place a significant burden on the local road network which cannot be mitigated, leading to longer journeys and more air pollution being emitted in this area.

2. **Schools/healthcare**

Local Primary and Secondary school would be particularly hard hit by this proposal as would local GP services. As you are of course aware there is already a shortage of education provision in the local area and which the Local Authority is working hard to address in finding ways to increase capacity.

This highlights the existing pressures that will be further exacerbated which in my view could not be mitigated in any way should this development go ahead. As I noted to the Local Authority in representations on the Local Plan, Gillingham and Rainham is already very densely populated.

3. **Green spaces**

The Capstone Valley is a cherished green lung for all of the residents of Medway, one of the largest urban areas in the South East which should be protected from development. This large-scale development is proposed to be built on farmland which would therefore be lost.

4. **Appropriate development**

Medway Council is presently drafting the new Local Plan for the Medway Unitary Authority that is due to be published later in the year and which will



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provide for a housebuilding plan and on which the local community will be able to provide their views.

Until Medway Council publishes the Local Plan later this year we must look at small-scale housing proposals on a case-by-case basis to address our housing needs in a sustainable way taking into account the views of the community where there is suitable infrastructure in place or where it can be provided. I have written to the Head of Planning at Medway Council in support or conditional support of 5 small-scale housing developments in Gillingham and Rainham this year, including a care home and student accommodation, and I will continue to look at sustainable small-scale developments until Medway Council provides a new Local Plan.

However this large-scale development is completely unacceptable. This development does not have the support of the community, it is in a location where existing infrastructure cannot sustainably support additional services and where additional services cannot be provided or increased to mitigate the disruption the development would cause.

I wrote to the Head of Planning again regarding this development on 21st December 2020 prior to the Planning Committee considering the proposal in January and subsequently rejecting it, further reiterating the concerns I had raised in 2019:

'In line with my previous correspondence to you I am completely opposed to this unacceptable development.

I do not believe that this site in the Capstone Valley on the borders of my constituency is suitable for such a development. It is a cherished greenspace that is loved by many and should be protected from such developments which I have made clear in my representations to Medway Council on 31st March 2017 and 25th June 2018 in the development of the Local Plan, and which I also made clear in a petition I submitted on behalf of my constituents in the House of Commons on 9th July 2015 calling for our local green spaces – including those in the Capstone Valley – to be protected.

This proposal would also have a significant and detrimental impact on local roads leading to increased congestion and more air pollution being created. It would place further pressure on existing GP services and it would exacerbate



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the existing pressures on primary and secondary school places where there are already challenges.

The Local Authority is working hard to increase school places but I do not believe in consideration of the scale of this development that this can be mitigated.'

Conclusion

Considering the very significant harm this unacceptable large-scale development would cause I find it extraordinary that the applicants are simultaneously seeking to appeal the decision of the third application they have made on this site since 2014, whilst also submitting a fresh fourth application despite the clear objections of more than one thousand local residents when this application was before Medway Council.

The overwhelming majority of constituents I speak to and whose representations I hear are staunchly opposed to this completely unacceptable development and I urge the Planning Inspectorate to take into full account the deep concerns of my constituents across Gillingham and Rainham and myself as their Member of Parliament in opposing this development at every level.

Yours sincerely

Rehman Chishti MP