



**CPRE Kent 3
Local Concerns**

Appeal by Gladman

PINS Reference: APP/V2255/W/15/3067553, 3067567 & 3148140

Swale Borough Council reference: 15/500671/OUT & 15/510595/OUT

Land Off London Road, Newington, Kent.

Proof of Evidence of Cllr Mike Baldock, KCC Councillor for Swale West,
on behalf of the Kent Branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England

The Kent Branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England exists to promote the beauty, tranquility and diversity of rural England by encouraging the sustainable use of land and other natural resources in town and country.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 My name is Mike Baldock and I am the Kent County Councillor for Swale West which covers Newington. Kent County Council has the responsibility for Roads and Transport issues within Kent. I am also a Swale Borough Councillor for the Borden and Grove Ward.

2. Traffic impact on the A2

- 2.1 This section of the A2 between Hartlip and Newington is already at very high traffic levels, and there are regular delays and severe congestion due to the very narrow passage through the actual village of Newington – the pinch-point between the Bull Pub and the Co-op store is one of the narrowest parts of the entire A2. (For example, two HGVs cannot pass each other here, and there are considerable amounts of HGV movements through the village due to the cold-storage at Spade Lane in Hartlip, less than a mile away. Traffic collisions at this point are frequent, and have necessitated the replacement of the pedestrian-safety railings outside the Co-op in Newington on three occasions in the past year.
- 2.2 Given the lack of local job opportunities in the village, most new residents will be travelling to work. This will mean a significant increase in traffic joining the A2. The majority of new residents are likely to need to turn right to access either Sittingbourne or the A249 for London.
- 2.3 As there is a proposal for a third lane to enter the new site this will exacerbate problems in leaving the site to turn right which will increase frustration levels and as in similar cases where these third lanes exist, see an increase in reckless chance-taking to exit the site.
- 2.4 This section of road is also the first clearly visible stretch of road after getting through the bottle-neck in the village, and provides emergency vehicles with the chance to get past the traffic. This will be severely hampered by yet another exit from a major site, especially given the third lane entrance which could potentially be blocking the space an emergency vehicle needs.
- 2.5 Further consideration also has to be given to the fact that this stretch of the A2 receives a huge increase of traffic whenever there is an incident on the M2 – something which is happening with increased frequency over recent years. This is likely to be made worse by proposals for a Lower Thames Crossing which will deliver more traffic through the A2/M2 corridor through Kent as opposed to the M20/A20 corridor. As there are no proposals for improving the links between the two corridors, this will increase traffic, especially freight traffic, along the M2/A2 which will then be diverted onto the A2 through this section in the event of an incident.
- 2.6 There is also the likelihood of work to improve Junction 5 of the M2 which will involve considerable disruption which will increase traffic levels along the A2. This will increase traffic levels and congestion increasing already unacceptable levels of pollution.

3. Traffic impact beyond the A2

- 3.1 It is recognised by both the applicant and Swale Borough Council this development will have an impact on traffic levels on the surrounding strategic road network, most essentially upon the Key Street roundabout, and also the A249 and the Stockbury Roundabout/Junction 5 of the M2.
- 3.2 Given the cumulative impact of other housing developments in this part of Swale, with the potential for even more sites to be granted permission through the emerging local plan, serious questions have to be asked as to what extent these pressures can be addressed, and whether the existing proposals for improving the Key Street roundabout can accommodate extra journeys from this site.
- 3.3 It is difficult to see what can be done to significantly improve the Key St roundabout, and the monies so far mentioned do not seem adequate to the existing task, let alone to cater for increased levels of traffic. Simply throwing more money at the problem will not address the issue unless there is a realistic proposal to deliver a smoother traffic flow.
- 3.4 At the moment no such proposal is known, and indeed it is hard to see what exactly could deliver such an outcome.
- 3.5 Recommended sites in the emerging local plan include another site in Newington Village of over 100 houses to the East of the village. Existing permissions already exist for considerable development in nearby Rainham (within the Medway Unitary area).
- 3.6 This would add further unplanned-for increases on this strategic junction at Key Street, and which would risk making the existing permissions harder to deliver as people would witness the delays and factor that in when deciding whether or not to move into this area.
- 3.7 These developments will also increase the number of cars that try to use rural lanes to bypass the A2 – such as Church Lane and Bull Lane. These roads are, as the "Lane" designation implies, rural lanes that are narrow, winding, and not designed for the sort of driving that seems to be encouraged by the need to 'rat-run' to avoid strategic roads. Increasing traffic on the strategic road network beyond what it can facilitate and forcing traffic to seek alternative routes is contrary to transport strategic planning, and what is supposed to be achieved by having a serviceable strategic network.

4. Air Pollution caused by traffic

- 4.1 Newington is already an area with a recognised air quality problem. In addition to the existing problem, there are several housing schemes that already have planning permission close to the village centre, and others potentially being allocated within the emerging Local Plan.

- 4.2 One of the sites is that of the old Working Men's club – at present this is an open derelict site right at the heart of the village next to the A2, which provides for some dispersal of the local pollution. When this site is developed for housing, that dispersal will be significantly reduced.
- 4.3 These sites will have an immediate impact on the levels of local pollution, simply through the usual behaviour of residents – house heating, etc. The increase in pollution from the extra traffic that will come from the proposed development at Pond Farm therefore has to be combined with that of locally permitted development, and also that of significant sites that have been granted permission elsewhere along the A2, such as in nearby Otterham Quay Lane. Consequently, it is hard to see what remedial action could be taken by the developers of Pond Farm to prevent the traffic generated by this development contributing to what is an already concerning level of pollution which is set to increase from already permitted development, and the consequential damaging impact on public health.
- 4.4 It is also worth noting that this development is on the south side of the A2, whilst many of the amenities – such as the school, church, and the Co-op store are all on the north side. Consequently, there is inevitably going to be an increased amount of pedestrian traffic coming from the site to use these facilities. This will result in the pedestrian crossing being used even more often, therefore causing further traffic delays and more stationary vehicles at the heart of the village where the pollution levels are at their highest, and have most impact on local people. The proposal for a pedestrian crossing near to the development site does not provide a satisfactory mitigation of this as one cannot prevent people walking to the village and crossing there, and it is natural for many people to avoid crossing a road until they are near their destination.

5. Summary

- 5.1 For all these reasons, and many others, I am, like many of my constituents, completely opposed to this development being given permission. It will forever change the character of the village of Newington, and will have a damaging impact on the rural landscape of both Newington and the neighbouring parish of Hartlip. It will also have a significant detrimental impact on the safety of the A2 and the local road network, and add hugely to the congestion and the air pollution within Newington. This will also have a serious impact on the mental well-being of the villagers who will suffer even higher levels of stress and frustration. This site is not in Swale's emerging Local Plan for very good reasons, and there are better sites available within the Borough.