

## **Land at Brook Farm, Daws Heath Rd Appeal - Tim Copsey, CPBC Ward Councillor and Resident of Daws Heath**

I would like to thank you inspector for the opportunity to speak at this appeal.

I am a ward councillor for St Michael's, which is where this large area of beautiful green belt land at Brook Farm is located. The threat of this unwanted development has been hanging over the lives of the residents of our community for years so there was much relief when this application came before the council and was so firmly and soundly refused planning permission. I will endeavour to convey a sense of the many fully justified reasons why 695 residents raised objections.

The residents like myself that live in this area understand the value and importance of our precious green spaces and this land in question is very much part of that context. I think it is worth highlighting that Castle Point is a small borough that is very densely populated and perhaps that adds to why local people feel so passionate about protecting the local green landscape. This land forms a part of green belt ring that surrounds the settlement of Daws Heath separating it from other nearby settlements. As well this is land performing a very clear planning function it has a positive impact on the community in so many other ways hence the concern of this beautiful open green space being lost to inappropriate development.

This land falls within the area of the Daws Heath Living Landscape, a network of green spaces defined by an initiative from the Essex Wildlife Trust. There is a serious problem in our country of species decline and government is encouraging areas to value habitat that support nature sustainability and recovery. We are currently blessed to have some places remaining such as this land between urban settlements that are rich in bio diversity and support wildlife. The meadows, hedges and trees of this beautiful land are home to foxes, bats, a large amount of Badgers, birds, hazel dormice, notable butterflies such as the rare Heath Fritillary, reptiles, harvest mouse, common toad, pole cat and hedgehog. No amount of mitigation could compensate for the devastation caused to this wildlife habitat should this appeal be allowed.

In addition to being a home for wildlife it is also a home for horses. The stables and fields are currently home to around 40 horses. This is a significant valued community facility. Not only does this provide a place for horses but for their riders the layout of defined tracks on the land provides a safe environment for riders of all ages to enjoy the countryside and their healthy equine interest. Many such places are being lost to speculative development.

Another great concern in respect to the possibility of residential development on this land is the negative visual impact that would be caused. Not only would the damage to openness be felt within the land but it would negatively impact how the land is currently viewed from beyond it's boundaries. On one side of this land we have the SSSI Dodds Grove a publicly accessible woodland that the public enjoy walking through which gives lovely views of this currently beautiful landscape. Also travellers on foot or by vehicle can benefit from the views of this land from the rural parts of Bramble Road. In addition to this there is justifiably great concern about the Residential Visual Amenity Impact on properties on one side of the entire long stretch of Fairmead Avenue and for part of Haresland Close.

Traffic is an enormous problem in congested Castle Point. Now this may not have been highlighted in reports that have been presented but residents such as myself can testify that this is a very real and detrimental situation. This proposed development would be located a short drive from one of the main entrances to the borough, the Rayleigh Weir roundabout and one of the busiest junctions, The Woodman's mini roundabouts on the A129. This part of the road network is notorious for traffic problems. Daily rush hours and Saturday mornings are particularly bad. To be clear there is no expectation that a development has any responsibility to improve existing highway problems but local people are loathe to see planning granted for a large development of 173 dwellings which would result in a large increase in road traffic making existing problems far worse.

Local people have great concerns about flooding due to the widespread flooding that occurred across the borough in 2021. We are seeing an increase in extreme weather events and there is a lack of confidence that this has been adequately considered in the case of this proposed development and the particular characteristics of the land.

In our area we have ongoing problems with basic utilities such as water supply and sewage processing. It would appear the local sewage plants do not have the processing capacity to handle the current quantity of sewage which is evidenced by the regular pumping of sewage into our rivers. Similarly we have regular burst pipes from the water network. It is hard to see the justification for a major development to proceed while these problems remain.

We have a serious lack of health provision in Castle Point and in particular in this area of Daws Heath. The nearest surgery is under severe stress. Massively oversubscribed with patients and lacking in medical staff. I might add the building is great and a good size but that does not make up for a lack of drs inside. A new development of this scale will make a difficult situation far worse for existing residents and any potential new ones.

In our community there is widespread support for the upholding of the green belt laws of our country. This piece of land is Green Belt and to me demonstrates all the purposes of green belt extremely well. I see it as a classic example of green belt preventing urban sprawl, stopping communities merging, it safeguards the Daws Heath countryside from encroachment and it preserves the unique character of the Daws Heath area. This green belt contributes very substantially to the openness and sense of space in the area. It gives relief between the built areas beyond it.

I believe the Local Plan process is the correct place for strategic allocation of appropriate land where development should take place. Speculative planning applications and "planning by Appeal" is not an approach I support. A plan led approach is for me the best way to fully evaluate matters and decide if it is appropriate or not to allocate sites. Recent years have seen the beginning of a transformation of the council here and I am pleased that such good positive progress has been made on the new community led Castle Point Plan. That should be the mechanism for planning the type and location of housing in the borough.

The final point I would like to make relates to housing need. It is absolutely true that there is a need for some additional housing in Castle Point. We certainly must have some more housing built in our borough. However, housing need alone does not merit disregarding the very real planning constraints that are applicable to this land in question.

I appreciate the importance of your deliberations and on behalf of my community my sincere plea to you is to ask that you would reject this appeal and uphold the protection of this beautiful green belt land.

Thankyou