

Our ref – 13/NKS/HI01691

Your ref -

Date 22 May 2026

FTAO Case Officer Mrs Lisa Fisher

Gravesham Borough Council

Civic Centre

Windmill Street

Gravesend

Kent

DA12 1AU

By email only planning.admin@gravesham.gov.uk

Dear Sir/Madam

20260223 - Application for Outline application with all/some matters reserved for the development of up to 50 residential dwellings (including affordable housing), vehicular access road from School Lane, internal roads, car parking, landscaping, public open space, and other associated works and infrastructure. All matters to be reserved with the exception of the main site access. - Land North Of High View School Lane Higham Rochester Kent ME3 7HP

Preface

We are instructed by Higham Parish Council [‘HPC’] which objects to this proposal for the reasons set out below, broadly in respect of inadequate Infrastructure (reduced trains, closing GP surgery, lack of public transport, poor utilities with water and electricity outages, insufficient school places) highway safety risk and by no means least, Green Belt.

Within the parish there are two settlements, Higham Upshire and Lower Higham (‘HU’ and ‘LH’ respectively, otherwise Higham where the context allows). The proposal will contribute to urban sprawl and start to merge the two Higham settlements. There is considerable open land of which the application site forms part, it is not well contained.

The above demonstrate that, contrary to assertions otherwise¹, the application site forms a crucial ingredient strongly contributing to openness to prevent the two Higham settlements from merging. Being on higher ground than that to the South or North it will exacerbate the loss of openness and consequently the development would dominate.

¹ Claims sourced to the submitted Nicholsons green belt assessment of “rounding off” are unjustified

HPC object on the grounds that the landscape and character will be significantly harmed by this proposal.

HPC also object on grounds of traffic impact, parking and highway safety. These are explained below.

Discussion

Air quality

HPC note the air quality report supplied uses figures from 2024. HPC object on the grounds that this is not up to date enough information. There are more vehicles using it especially due to the latest Nuralite development. HPC understands that a buildings emission strategy has not been produced yet and should the proposal be approved, it requests that this is a condition on any approval.

Loss of quality agricultural land

The site has been used for arable farming for generations successfully, its loss is unjustified

Highways

Public footpaths create a barrier between the Trees housing estate and Vicarage Row. This development will have a detrimental bearing on Highview, School Lane & Vicarage Road in terms of overshadowing of existing properties. Footpath NS153, as stated in the KCC report, is not shown correctly on the submission. HPC objects to re-routing this as it is a well-used footpath by pedestrians, dog walkers, cyclists and horse riders.

School Lane is the main route to reach both the railway station and Higham Primary School. HPC state a lot of residents walk to these facilities and already it is dangerous due to vehicles parking on the pavement at Vicarage Row – pedestrians end up having to walk in the road. There is not enough provision for vehicles to park as there is in adequate infrastructure. Being submitted in outline, parking will be subject to a Reserved Matters Application ('RMA'). KCC has recently adopted Parking Standards (2025) whereby one-bedroom houses will be provided with one allocated space; two / three-bedroom dwellings will be provided with two allocated spaces; four/five-bedroom dwellings will be provided with three allocated spaces; and visitor parking will be provided at a ratio of 0.2 spaces per dwelling. Where are excess cars going to park as the roads are narrow even for two lanes, cars parking on School Lane due to the primary school will block the sight line of the single lane track into and from the site. Vehicles park on the pavement in School Lane preventing dog walkers, pedestrians and school children walking safely. In addition, the entrance/exit is located on the top of a hill which means on School Lane you will not see what is driving

towards you. It will risk highway safety, especially for School Lane drivers, pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders due to the school.

The Statement provided only mentions St Johns Church and Fir trees, it does not mention other listed buildings in the village e.g. in Taylors Lane and the Monument in The Larches.

In addition, HPC would like to make objection comments on what would be RMA matters as they have a bearing on the outline planning application.

Flooding/drainage

Whilst this site is within Flood Zone 1 it has surface water for most of the winter months, which drains onto the road due to the height difference of the field compared to School Lane. The surface water area on the site is more than the applicant reports.

Quoted from Southern Water response dated 24/3/26 "The drainage strategy proposes to discharge surface water via deep borehole soakaways founded in the Seaford Chalk Formation. Discharging directly to the Seaford Chalk bypasses the natural attenuation and protection provided by the overlying Thanet Sand Formation and creates a preferential pathway into the Southern Water abstraction horizon. The increased risk to the public water supply has not been assessed. The drainage strategy must also be corrected to reflect that the trial pit infiltration tests were undertaken in the Thanet Sand Formation, not in the shallow Seaford Chalk."

HPC object to the potential to discharge the surface water into deep boreholes where there is no research as to whether there would be an increased risk to the public water system. Higham has had water outages many times over the last year, resulting in the school being closed, so proposing this system could have a detrimental bearing on the water system for the whole village. Southern Water also note that the infiltration recordings are incorrect, HPC request that these tests are carried out again to ensure that the infiltration tests are recorded correctly and in the correct ground layer..

Infrastructure sustainability and amenities

The NHS Kent and Medway Report states that healthcare will increase with a development but it should be noted that Higham will soon no longer have a GP practice in the village as that is closing imminently. This will generate more vehicle movements as the nearest GP practice is a 15 minutes car journey, one cannot reach Cliffe Woods medical practice via public transport.

The Primary School is already at capacity and many children in the village are unable to get into the school due to being outside the catchment area. Please see **attached letter** from [REDACTED]

HPC wishes to object to the proposed development as the village does not have a reliable supply of potable water, there are regular outages, the school has to close, UH cannot cope with this number of new houses.

Character and appearance

As to character and appearance the current undeveloped nature of the site, with its pastoral field surrounded by broken hedges typically represents the characteristics of the landscape character area that it forms a part of. The presence of UH to the south does not urbanise the existing character of this site. The site is on significantly higher ground, the sloping character with hedges means on the site the fact that there is a densely populated urban area metres to the south is not apparent. Even after 15 years reduced impact by maturing vegetation would still have an impact so that the change would reduce from moderate adverse to minor adverse. Once constructed, the developed parts of the site would remain as major adverse despite the maturing of vegetation in gardens.

The boundary vegetation is such that there are clear views from all of the rights of way surrounding the site into the site itself. On completion of the development the housing estate will be clearly seen through this mature vegetation and the impact would be major adverse. With RMA screen planting the impact could, in time, reduce to minor adverse if the mitigation is effectively implemented. The visual impact within the site itself would however still remain as major adverse.

HPC overall consider that there would be moderate harm to the local landscape as a result of the implementation of the proposal and that this should count as other harm to be weighed against the proposal.

As to accessibility to services and facilities the applicant asserts that this is a sustainable location in the context of access to services and facilities by non-car modes, apart from agreeing that there is no objection to the sustainability of the scheme in "transport" terms, it appears to have been otherwise silent on the accessibility aspects of the proposal.

Manual for Streets⁴ in discussing walking neighbourhoods considers that there should be a range of facilities within 800m. Only the bus services are the 417, which runs through the actual village but only 3 times per day and 190, which is only accessible on the Gravesend Road (roughly a 15-minute walk from the School Lane/Highview site). Most facilities are located at a considerably greater distance, the facilities within the Medway or Gravesend town centres being well over a 4.8km walk away. Nevertheless, the nearest secondary school is Thames View 5.8km away. However, whilst Guidelines for Providing Journeys on Foot⁵ advises that for school trips an acceptable journey is 1km, it also points out that the desirable distance is 500m.

The 417 bus service passing the site would connect it with Cliffe Woods & Gravesend and other places, however, the service frequency is only approximately 3 buses per day. There is no objective assessment as to the likely numbers of commuters who would use this service.

HPC consider the overall service to be too infrequent to encourage a substantial modal shift. The majority of persons residing on this site would be likely to use the private car to access schools, shops, community and leisure facilities etc. In addition, as the Council points out, the bus subsidy is only for a temporary period.

Green Belt

Section 9 of the Framework promotes sustainable transport. It requires the promotion of opportunities to use walking, cycling and public transport through the planning system and for it to actively manage patterns of growth in support of this objective. The nature of the access linkages proposed from this site, in the context of sustainable movement modes, are not particularly helpful in promoting these modes of travel. The accesses for pedestrians and cyclists from the site, to the facilities in Medway or Gravesend, are comparatively lengthy and contain a far from encouraging environment. In consequence, a development as proposed, at the site would not easily promote sustainable travel patterns to its residents, other than for some commuters.

The Framework, at paragraph 103 also says that significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes. This proposal does not, in HPCs view, offer a realistically genuine choice and does not therefore meet the sustainable travel objective.

The development is significant and in the light of the above, HPC do not consider that it would achieve an accessible neighbourhood or one that was sustainable in this context. The proposal is in conflict with the Framework objective of promoting sustainable transport. Furthermore, because of the locational considerations, the residents of the proposal would not easily interact with the rest of Medway or Gravesend, a requirement of paragraph 91 of the Framework.

NPPF 155c requires developments to be in sustainable locations with particular reference to paragraphs 110 and 115 of the Framework. HPC consider with the closure of the GP surgery, no available places in the primary school and poor public transport links, these render this is an unsustainable location for this large number of new dwellings. All of the above considerations would combine to dissuade many residents of this site from walking, cycling or using public transport when travelling to facilities in Medway or Gravesend. Instead they are very likely to make these journeys by car.

Despite the applicant's arguments, it is not a locationally sustainable site per NPPF 110 or 115, so it fails NPPF 155c and is not grey belt.

In addition to the harm by virtue of inappropriateness, significant weight should be given to the harm caused to the openness of the Green Belt and HPC consider having particular regard to the views of the site from the adjacent roads and public footpaths, the proposal would be at variance with saved LP policies as well as the Framework's GB policy.

The circumstances discussed above taken together are not, in HPCs view, the very special circumstances [VSC] required to counter the harm to the GB that it has identified. HPC find that the other considerations in this case do not clearly outweigh the harm that it has identified. Consequently, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development do not exist.

The Council does not have a five-year supply of housing land and the shortfall is significant. In such circumstances footnote 7 to paragraph 11d) of the Framework says that relevant policies for the supply of housing should not be considered up to date. It also says that in such circumstances, planning permission should be granted unless the application of policies in the Framework that protect areas of particular importance provide a clear reason for refusing the development proposed. NPPF footnotes say that GB land is such an area. The tilted balance is consequently not engaged.

Conclusions

Planning law requires consistency in decision taking². This site is ***locationally unsustainable***, it thus fails NPPF 155c. It will be incongruous sprawl of an otherwise well contained defensible boundary of this settlement, undermining the purposes of the wider green belt and failing to safeguard from encroachment.

The Framework has not altered the starting point for determining this application, which is the adopted development plan. Decisions must be taken in accordance with development plan less there are material considerations otherwise. The applicant does not dispute that the proposal would be contrary to the adopted development plan, so the question is whether there are material considerations of sufficient weight to justify permission. In HPCs view there is no credible case presented that there are VSC so the key part of the applicant's case depends upon the councils view on grey belt. The tilted balance is not engaged because the site is not grey belt nor are there VSC. To deny significant harm to green belt purposes by allowing unsustainable development in terms of paragraph 155c would be brave and irrational, susceptible to challenge by judicial review.

What this case really amounts to is an attempt by the applicant to bypass the council's emerging spatial strategy to find appropriate sites for release in a new local plan. To leapfrog due process. Put another way, if the council were to grant permission, it would have no plausible way to defend release of huge swathes of similar land around the two Higham settlements having created a precedent. It would truly open the proverbial 'floodgates' and its release negate the local plan review process.

² DLA and Baroness Cumberlege [2018] EWCA 1305

Yours faithfully,

[Redacted Signature]

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