



RE: 22/00588/FUL

Members of the Planning Panel

I wish to place on record my objections to application: 22/00588/FUL – the proposed development of 214 new dwellings (33 within the existing Mill structure and the remainder on adjacent land).

Having considered the proposals I am not convinced that they are appropriate for the site. They do not address an extant housing need in the area to the level where they would justify the loss of amenity in the area.

Whilst I note that the Council lists the building of “large higher value family homes” as a “strategic priority”, this is not based on a need for 4 and 5 bedroom homes (a total of 78 of the proposed properties) in the area, but rather the Council’s desire to boost its Council Tax base. This is a poor justification for the loss of important green belt and green field land.

Given the ample supply of brownfield sites in the area, with better links to employment and transport coupled with a genuine shortage of good quality, affordable housing in the Borough, the proposed development seems somewhat cynical.

The site has a number of features which make it unsuitable for further development. Whilst I note that the developer has suggested that some of these issues will be addressed as part of the development, the proposals as presented are somewhat vague and optimistically presented.

There is a reference to a terrace providing a flood escape, although there is no substantive detail as to how this will work, there is also no assessment of how existing properties in the area will be impacted. Flooding is already an issue in the area, the loss of drainage provided by the undeveloped area around the Mill can only serve to exacerbate this problem. There appears to be no consideration given to the possible difficulty new homeowners would have in insuring their property given the history of flooding in the area.

Site access is also a serious concern. Even with the proposed upgrades to the existing access points, this does not mitigate the existing difficulties on Crimble Lane and Woodland Road which suffer from traffic complications already – the addition of circa 400 vehicles (assuming approximately 2 cars per dwelling) would have significant impact in terms of congestion, noise and air pollution for both new and existing residents. I also note that the Environment Agency has a standing objection and is reviewing a response from the developer – at the very least this process of review should be allowed to conclude before a decision is made.

I also have concerns about the commercial viability of the project and the potential impact on s106 contributions. Whilst I note that some provision has been made for education and off-site infrastructure, this is predicated on the site being completed without unforeseen cost over-runs which seem almost inevitable given the nature of the site. I have heard concerns

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from local residents that the redevelopment of the Mill will be subject to the development of the new houses and may not go ahead if the developer decides the new developments are not as lucrative as initially stated. Members of the Panel will be well aware of developers using commercial viability as a reason to renege on their s106 commitments on even seemingly straight-forward sites. The addition of 214 new households and the hundreds of people therein will place significant pressure on existing infrastructure and there appears to be no plan to address the lack of essential facilities in the area, even assuming that the full hypothecated amount is obtained from the developer.

Finally, I was very concerned to learn from constituents that the one of the Directors of the proposed developer is a close family relation of a Member of the Panel. As a matter of due diligence, this should have been publicly declared to avoid even the appearance of impropriety, whether the Member intends to vote or not and should be a material consideration. There should be no suggestion that a decision is being made by the authority which could even indirectly enrich someone who is in a position of influence.

I hope the panel will give serious consideration to the points I have set out as they represent the concerns of a large number of local residents who have been in touch with me to express their apprehensions about the proposed development.

Whilst I see merit in restoring the Mill and protecting an important piece of local heritage, I would politely suggest that this part of the project is considered separately from any new development and that any further development in the area be contingent on the successful restoration and completion of the Mill.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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