



THE RT HON NICK HERBERT CBE MP

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR ARUNDEL & SOUTH DOWNS

HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Esther McVey MP
Minister of State
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

31 July 2019

Dear Esther

I am writing to request that you 'call in' for your determination a planning decision made by Mid Sussex District Council Planning Committee on Thursday 25 July 2019 – DM/19/1897 – to build 130 houses at Friars Oak Fields in Hassocks, West Sussex. Any housing development on this site runs contrary to the wishes of the local community and its designation as local green space in the draft Hassocks Neighbourhood Plan.

I wrote to Mid Sussex District Council prior to the Planning Committee meeting, which should be noted was an additional meeting for the Committee diary and only notified to Councillors three weeks ago, asking that the decision be postponed, or permission refused. The Planning Committee meeting was scheduled just one day after the deadline for public representations, and just a few weeks ahead of an Appeal inquiry for an application from the same developer for the same site which was refused by the same council in June 2018.

I share the concern of Hassocks Parish Council and many constituents who have written to me about the way in which the developer is gaming the system with multiple applications. The first application – DM/15/0626 – was called-in and refused for development in March 2018 by the previous Secretary of State. A second application – DM/18/2342 – was refused by the Council, and the developer has Appealed the decision. An inquiry hearing will take place on 10 September. The third application – DM/19/1897 – was granted permission last week.

Hassocks has already taken considerable housing, above that which meets local need. The District Council set a strategic allocation of 500 houses on the village through its Local Plan. Further speculative developments have also been granted permission as well as housing on sites allocated in the original draft Neighbourhood Plan, some of which are already under construction.



The original Hassocks Neighbourhood Plan was suspended at its Regulation 16 stage to allow the Mid Sussex District Plan through, in June 2016. This meant that Hassocks had to redraft its Neighbourhood Plan, taking into account the amount of housing already approved. The revised Draft Plan has once again reached its Regulation 16 stage and is now waiting for approval, so policies within the Plan should carry greater weight. Friars Oak Fields has been allocated as local green space within it.

The Neighbourhood Plan process has already been delayed and the Plan should now reach its local referendum stage as quickly as possible to allow the document and its policies to be of material consideration in planning matters. The application for development at Friars Oak Fields falls outside the area identified in both the Local and Neighbourhood Plans and constitutes part of the strategic gap between Hassocks and Burgess Hill. There is no community support for development on this greenfield site, while honouring the Neighbourhood Plan process will promote development policies which the residents of Hassocks will accept and will go some way to restoring very damaged faith in the village in the democratic planning system.

This application pre-determines the Mid Sussex District Council's own Site Allocations DPD process, due by 2020. I fully understand the Council's need to protect and strengthen its 5-year land supply but this has been assessed as being robust. The Council should be given the confidence to refuse speculative planning applications and not fear legal challenges on its land supply position.

The Local Plan policies – DP4 and DP6 – sets out allocations for six Tier 2 settlements, including Hassocks, to deliver any expected shortfall in delivery. Hassocks is shown to be delivering significantly more housing than any other Tier 2 settlement, and through existing completions and commitments there is no additional requirement for Hassocks to deliver any more housing. The village will take between 1,116 and 1,161 more houses in the period to 2031.

In addition, the site borders the London to Brighton railway line. One of the reasons the previous application was refused was concerns over the risk of pedestrian crossings over the unguarded track where the schools and high street are located on the opposite side of the line. While the developers have proposed a both a footbridge in one application and a pedestrian foot tunnel in another, the designs and costs were not submitted with the application and therefore could not be commented on. Network Rail only responded to the Council on 4 July to say they had entered into a Basic Services Agreement with Rydon Homes to assess options. Designs will not be ready for consideration until August.



I have considerable concerns about how Mid Sussex District Council has been handling planning matters in Hassocks and I do not believe that the Council should be permitted to give permission for this development in the circumstances. The Government's important policy of neighbourhood planning is systematically being undermined in the village and this cannot be allowed to continue.

In summary, I believe that this application should be called-in for your determination on the basis that the application was incomplete for residents to comment on, that it pre-determines the Local Plan Site Allocations DPD, that it gives no weight to the policies contained within the draft Hassocks Neighbourhood Plan, that it does not have the support of the local community who wish to protect the fields as local green space, and that it is housing which is not needed in a village which is already taking more than its fair share.

This request is urgent because permission has already been given by Mid Sussex District Council's Planning Committee, despite the Secretary of State's holding direction. I would therefore be grateful for your immediate attention to this matter.

With kind regards.

Yours sincerely

Nick Herbert

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