RT HON SIR JOHN WHITTINGDALE OBE MP
Member of Parliament for Maldon

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Planning Inspectorate

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Dear Inspectors,

Chelmsford Local Plan Examination – Hammonds Farm

I am writing in my capacity as Member of Parliament for Maldon to raise concerns about the proposed allocation of Hammonds Farm as a major new settlement to the east of Chelmsford and, in particular, the potential consequences for my constituents in Maldon and the surrounding areas.

I appreciate that the Examination must determine the soundness of the Chelmsford Local Plan against the relevant statutory and national planning policy tests, and I do not seek to duplicate the detailed technical representations already being made by local authorities, Parish Councils and other participants.

However, Hammonds Farm is a development of exceptional scale for this part of Essex. It has always been recognised that the A12 is the boundary for Chelmsford expansion and this sets a precedent for rural expansion. The proposal is for 3,000 homes within the Plan period, with capacity for a further 1,500 homes beyond that, together with substantial employment development and supporting infrastructure.

This has already attracted an exceptional level of public concern. More than 20,000 objections have been submitted across the successive Local Plan consultation stages. I fully recognise that planning decisions cannot be determined simply by counting objections. Nevertheless, the scale and persistence of that response demonstrates the very substantial concern among communities potentially affected by the proposal.

Those concerns extend well beyond the Chelmsford administrative boundary.

The A414 is a critical route for residents of Maldon and the surrounding villages travelling towards Chelmsford, the A12, employment, education, healthcare and other services. There are limited realistic alternative routes, and disruption or additional congestion on this corridor has direct consequences for communities throughout the area.

There is also a wider economic dimension. Maldon District is heavily dependent upon its road connections towards Chelmsford and the A12 for access to employment, business markets, supply chains and the wider strategic road network. Many residents travel westwards for work, while businesses in Maldon and the surrounding area depend upon reliable access for employees, customers, deliveries and commercial movements. The visitor economy is also important to the district.

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A significant deterioration in the reliability of the A414 corridor for Maldon, and a material increase in congestion in travel between Heybridge and Hatfield Peverel, would together therefore have consequences beyond additional journey time. It risks making it harder for residents to access employment, increasing costs and uncertainty for local businesses, and reducing the attractiveness of Maldon, Heybridge and the surrounding area for investment and visitors. The congestion that is to be expected on the A12 east of Boreham Interchange and Junction 19 of the A12 will of course be further exacerbated by traffic generated by the proposed 5000 houses at Kelvedon.

The transport implications of Hammonds Farm also need to be considered cumulatively with the substantial employment and warehousing development proposed and permitted around the A12 Junction 18 between the A414 and the A12, which is already operating in peak hours at or near capacity. These developments have the potential to generate significant additional employee, commercial, HGV and delivery traffic alongside the journeys generated by a new community of this scale. My concern is therefore not simply the traffic generated by Hammonds Farm in isolation, but the combined effect upon the A414, A12 Junctions 18 and 19 and the wider road network used daily by residents and businesses in Maldon and the surrounding areas.

I understand that important elements of the transport strategy for Hammonds Farm remain dependent upon substantial new infrastructure, assumptions about significant levels of active and sustainable travel, and further assessment and mitigation.

For my constituents, the consequences if those assumptions prove overly optimistic would be very real: increased congestion, longer and less reliable journey times, additional costs for businesses and greater pressure on one of the principal transport links between Maldon and Chelmsford.

I would therefore ask the Inspectors, when considering whether the Hammonds Farm allocation is justified, effective and deliverable, to be satisfied that the cumulative transport effects have been properly assessed and that the infrastructure and mitigation relied upon are realistic, funded and capable of being delivered when required.

I would also ask that proper weight is given to the effects upon communities outside Chelmsford's administrative boundary, for example including the proposed 5000 additional houses at Kelvedon, whose residents and businesses nevertheless depend heavily upon the same strategic road network and will experience the consequences of development decisions taken immediately to their west.

The exceptional level of public concern should not, of course, substitute for the planning evidence. It does, however, reinforce the importance of ensuring that an allocation of this scale and consequence is subjected to the most rigorous examination before it is found sound.

I hope these constituency concerns will be taken fully into account as part of the Examination.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely

John Whittingdale