

Outline application for the erection of up to 250no.dwellings, including affordable housing, public openspace, landscaping, sustainable urban drainage system(SuDS) and vehicular access point (All mattes reserved except for access). Land at Ham Road, Faversham

Application Reference: 23/502113/OUT

Reasons for Objection:

The application should be refused on the grounds that:

- The emerging Neighbourhood Plan positively plans for the level of growth required by Swale Borough Council with the site allocations for residential and mixed-use development.
- The proposed development would encroach into the open countryside, resulting in the loss of Grade 2 agricultural land that is 'best and most versatile'.
- The site has been discounted through Swale Borough Council's SHLAA assessment and the AECOM site options and assessment report, October 2021 prepared for the emerging Faversham neighbourhood plan, which also concluded that the site was ranked as amber owing to constraints including the high sensitivity of the landscape character.
- The site is within an unsustainable location on previously undeveloped land.
- There are no planning merits or gains to justify departure from national, local and emerging neighbourhood plan policy.

Housing Need

Housing need for Faversham is currently delivered through strategic site allocations in the adopted Local Plan and Faversham Creek Neighbourhood Plan. The application site is not a site allocation in either of these Plans.

The application site is within the Faversham Neighbourhood Area. Swale Borough Council have allocated 219 homes to be delivered within the Neighbourhood Area over the plan period. The emerging neighbourhood plan currently at post Regulation-14 stage caters for and above the level of growth required. Therefore, there is no material reason to support speculative development at this scale that results in the loss of previously undeveloped land as a greenfield site and Grade 2 agricultural land.

This is also supported in the AECOM site options and assessment report October 2021 prepared for the emerging Faversham neighbourhood plan, which also concludes that using the RAG rating the site was amber owing to the constraints including having a strong relationship with an Area of High Landscape Value, and as having a high sensitivity to development. It is Grade2 agricultural land, and

development would therefore lead to the loss of the best and most valuable agricultural land.

#### SHLAA 2020

The application site refers to the SHLAA site reference SLA18/077. Whilst the assessment notes that there are limited site constraints and that it is available it does conclude that:

*“In terms of access to services and facilities, the site is in a relatively unsustainable location although this is likely to improve as a result of the nearby development that is underway on the other side of Ham Road.”*

This is of particular concern, supported by the evidence of the LCWIP which makes clear that new development should be supported by infrastructure that reduces the need for private journeys by car. As the site is considered unsustainable there are no planning merits to support departure from national or local plan policy.

#### Natural Environment and Landscape

The proposal will result in the loss of previously undeveloped land. The agricultural land is classified as Grade 2. The development proposal is contrary to national planning policy and the emerging Faversham Neighbourhood Plan policy which seeks to protect ‘best and most versatile’ agricultural land.

The DEFRA Magic mapping data shows the south-eastern part of the site is in close proximity to The Swale a RAMSAR designated site. The site is also entirely within the impact zone for The Swale SSSI. Any development proposal would need careful consideration in terms of impact on the SSSI and RAMSAR site The Swale.

The site is also identified as an area for the following priority species:

- Corn Bunting;
- Lapwing; and
- Redshank.

The Swale Landscape Sensitivity Assessment 2019, identifies the application site within area FM6, noting that the site is arable farmland. It concludes that:

*“This flat, visually exposed area on the edge of the marshes forms part of the wider setting to Faversham and Oare, and has a strong relationship with the adjoining Locally designated landscape. These attributes indicate a high overall sensitivity to future change from residential and employment development.”*

It did also note that the area that includes the application site is considered slightly less sensitive but still an overall rating of High.

The development proposal would have a negative impact on the natural landscape, by virtue of the loss of Grade 2 agricultural land in a highly sensitive location. The

development proposal does not include any proposals to support departure from national and local plan policy to develop this sensitive landscape area.

## Kent Design Guide

Kent Design Guide suggests a range of Road widths from 6.00m to 10.5m. Access to the site is via either Oare Road Barnfield Road or Davington Hill. Oare Road is 5.8m wide but in the area of Gist and John Hall Close, there is typically a line of cars parked at the side of the road and reducing the effective width down to 3.9 m. Davington Hill has a carriageway width of just 5.05 m and, adjacent to the line of Davington Cottages there are marked parking bays which reduce the carriageway width down to just 2.9m of effective width.

Both Oare Road and Davington Hill have pavement widths of circa 0.9m as compared to the recommended minimum of 1.8m. Barnfield Road which also gives access to this western side of Faversham has a carriageway width of just 3.36m with no pavement. Priory Row has a carriageway width of 6.25m but also has parking on one side down its length and reducing the effective width to 4.5m. It will be self-evident that as the widths of the only roads that give access to this part of Faversham, are well below the recommended design widths of roads to serve new development, the proposed development site, the subject of this application, is not adequately and therefore not safely served by a highways network. It will also be apparent that in the event of vehicle breakdown or accident, that any of these roads would be blocked and thereby prevent access by emergency vehicles.

It will also be apparent that pedestrian access to the site is less than half the minimum safe recommended width and thereby pedestrian safety would be severely compromised. This even though the only school within reasonable proximity to the site, has already exceeded its maximum roll level. Therefore, in the event this development went ahead children's lives would be at risk as they would be forced to use those substandard hazardous footpaths.

There is no reference to these issues in the highways report submitted as a part of the application.

## Environmental

There is a statement that there is no contamination. However, these were once brickfields which have been back filled and a casual stroll over the site will demonstrate evidence of this, as will environmental records of the site. Therefore, this application should not be allowed in the absence of a full site investigation demonstrating the presence or lack thereof, of contaminant material. Such investigations being normal and good planning practice where contamination is reasonably suspected.

It is normal to submit a full ecology appraisal with a planning application of this type and such appraisal is particularly important when a site is adjacent to a RAMSAR site, an SPD and a SSSI. In this case the report submitted was too early to be able to adequately assess presence of reptiles, and other creatures. It is self-evident that

the presence or absence of protected species be assessed in a proper and detailed manner, especially where a site is adjacent to a site of designated international importance for its wildlife.

### Economic Growth

In the absence of sufficient industry or commerce to meet the employment needs of Faversham, it is obvious that tourism must be promoted to encourage and enhance the economic well-being of Faversham. The proximity of the Town Centre to the important open areas that adjoin Faversham Creek to the West are part of the USP of Faversham and an important part of its heritage and its future. The erosion of that proximity by the concreting over of a huge swathe of open area to the west of Faversham would not be in the interests of Faversham's economic well-being, the viability of the Town Centre and the growth of the tourism industry on which many jobs rely.