

Statement by The Rt Hon Theresa Villiers

Planning inquiry on application to build a caravan park in Mays Lane

Planning application reference: 23/3816/FUL - Appeal reference: APP/N5090/W/24/3346789

For the past twenty years I have lived [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. I represented the area as MP for 19 years until the general election and I am here as a local resident.

I strongly oppose this appeal and would ask that the council's rejection of the planning application be allowed to stand.

Green belt open land

As set out in the documents, the site has been used as an open field to graze horses for many years.

It is green belt land ...and its setting is green belt land.

Its surroundings include much valued public open space, livery stables, and farms.

This area provides a vital buffer between the suburban areas on the edge of the London conurbation and the open rural character of the neighbourhood beyond.

This is *exactly* the kind of location which green belt rules are designed to protect.

It cannot conceivably be described as 'grey belt', it is not previously developed, and it is making a really substantial contribution to the core purposes of the green belt.

The December changes to the NPPF therefore do **not** remove protection from the land, and do **not** provide a justification for overturning Barnet Council's decision.

Allowing this appeal would involve a radical departure from an approach which has prevailed for decades in Barnet under successive administrations.

It is a longstanding element of planning law, both national and local, that development on the green belt should not be permitted apart from in very limited circumstances.

Very significant benefits have to be shown to justify dispensing with the normal principle that green belt land should be protected in perpetuity.

Such benefits have not been established in this case.

The purchase of the site to provide a location for the caravans of the applicant cannot justify disregarding longstanding and fundamental principles set out in both Barnet and London planning policies.

If the assertion that residential use on a site is convenient for the purchaser were enough to justify building on the green belt ...there would soon be very little of it left.

Such a move would massively undermine the whole green belt principle and the protection it provides against urban sprawl and the indefinite expansion of London out into the countryside.

That general principle that was recently *confirmed* in the NPPF published in December.

Flooding and highways

Turning to concerns about flooding and drainage, I can attest to the fact that the road next to the site is frequently flooded.

Just a few weeks ago, the heavy rain led to a large deep pool of water forming over the road yet again.

It seems irresponsible to park caravans in such an obviously flood-prone location.

And why permit residential development on a site which both parties acknowledge has a poor public transport rating, with a very long walk to the nearest station?

I appreciate that highways matters are not being contested by the council or the residents' group, but I want to highlight my personal concerns about these issues.

I speak as someone who has been regularly driving, cycling, walking and running up and down Mays Lane and Barnet Gate Lane for many years.

There is no proper footway where the road passes the site, just a narrow muddy strip of turf.

This is also a problem further along towards Barnet Gate Lane.

That means drivers should keep their speed down to ensure they can stop in good time if they suddenly encounter a pedestrian as they follow this twisting road around.

But very often they don't do this, meaning it can be an intimidating and uncertain environment for pedestrians.

Allowing residential development here goes against the sustainable and active travel goals set out in Barnet, London, and national policy.

Brethren centre expansion

The area is already being asked to absorb change because of the grant of permission to expand the building which used to be the Plymouth Brethren centre.

From previously being a lightly used place of worship, the new Centre for Islamic Enlightening will host regular gatherings of 250 people.

The numbers climb to 350 a day during Ramadam and to 800 for Muharram.

This will inevitably lead to traffic problems and environmental impact.

Granting this appeal, allowing further densification in the area ...would compound those problems and put further strain local infrastructure.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it would set a deeply damaging precedent if this appeal were to be allowed.

The buildings proposed are out of character with the rural nature of the area, they would be a far more dense use of the land than is currently the case, and they would be visible from nearby footpaths.

This would have a substantial negative impact on the openness of the green belt.

Even worse, allowing these buildings to be constructed would open the way for a claim that the land has been “previously developed”.

That could mean loss almost all protection and lead to construction of flats there the future.

Both during my time as MP, and since, many residents have told me of their strong opposition to this development.

I would urge you to hear their concerns and reject this appeal.