

PINS REFERENCES: APP/V2255/V/24/3355313 AND APP/V2255/V/24/3355314

43.5.2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY - JULIEN SPEED – COMMUNITY ISSUES

ON BEHALF OF TEYNHAM & HIGHSTED COMMUNITY ACTION GROUP

A RULE 6 PARTY

28 May 2025

Introduction

My name is Julien Speed. I am the Chairman of Lynsted with Kingsdown Parish Council and a Swale Borough Councillor for Teynham & Lynsted ward. I am appearing as a witness on behalf of the Teynham & Highsted Community Action Group in connection with the Highsted Park planning inquiry. This Summary Proof of Evidence outlines the main conclusions and findings contained in my full Proof of Evidence on the community impact of the proposed development.

Volume and Breadth of Community Opposition

There is overwhelming community opposition to the Highsted Park proposals. The total number of objection arguments raised across all the main identified topics for the Northern site alone was 2,087. Added to the 2,014 objection points for the Southern site, that's a total of 4,101 points arguing against the combined site – an exceptional number for a planning application and representing an overall objection rate of 92%. A broad range of issues were raised, including traffic, healthcare, education, landscape harm, ecology, sustainable transport, and water infrastructure. In contrast, only 362 supporting arguments were recorded - of which 64% were based on pre-written templates. By comparison, 82% of objections were personalised. This disparity reflects the depth and authenticity of local concern.

Traffic and Congestion

Objectors cite significant existing congestion on the A2 London Road and fear that the new link road will add pressure to surrounding roads, rat-runs, and junctions – particularly if the northern site alone is approved. Numerous residents describe daily delays, safety risks for pedestrians and cyclists, and doubts about the deliverability or effectiveness of mitigation measures.

Healthcare Provision

Residents expressed grave concern about access to primary care, citing long waits and difficulty travelling from Teynham to the relocated GP surgery in Sittingbourne. Swale

already has one of the lowest GP-to-patient ratios in England, and population growth is likely to exacerbate pressure on overstretched hospitals such as Medway Maritime.

Education Provision

Residents report difficulty obtaining local school places, with some children allocated schools miles from home. There is widespread scepticism that proposed schools will be delivered on time and concern about the impact on SEND provision, which is already stretched.

Landscape and Visual Harm

There is deep concern about the loss of rural separation between historical hamlets, intrusion into valued countryside views, and harm to local biodiversity. Wildlife corridors and habitats for protected species would be permanently fragmented.

Sustainable Transport

The site is poorly served by public transport. Rail services are inadequate and local buses infrequent. The claim that walking and cycling will be viable alternatives is strongly disputed by residents.

Sewerage and Water Supply

Southern Water has admitted that existing infrastructure cannot accommodate additional demand without significant upgrades. Residents report existing issues with low water pressure and sewer overflow. Key aquifers serving the area are also vulnerable.

Air Quality and Health Impacts

Residents are alarmed by likely increases in air pollution, especially PM2.5 particles. The site lies adjacent to Air Quality Management Areas in Teynham and East Street, Sittingbourne, and current pollution levels already exceed new legal targets for 2028 and 2040.

Loss of Agricultural Land and Food Supply

Residents strongly object to the loss of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land. The Highsted Park proposals would see the permanent removal of hundreds of hectares of productive farmland, undermining national food security and contradicting government policy to protect soil quality. Concerns are raised about the irreversible impact on a rural landscape historically tied to fruit-growing and food production.

Ecology and Biodiversity

The development would fragment wildlife corridors, destroy priority habitats, and threaten protected species such as dormice, slow worms, and rare birds. Residents and experts argue that proposed mitigation is insufficient, and that cumulative damage to biodiversity is incompatible with national commitments to nature recovery and the Environment Act 2021.

Heritage and Conservation Areas

Objections highlight the proximity of the proposed development to listed buildings, conservation areas and ancient routes. The loss of rural context and setting would harm the character and significance of these heritage assets, contrary to national planning policies requiring their protection and enhancement.

Conclusion

For all these reasons – the scale and sincerity of local opposition, the weight of evidenced community harm and the failure of the application to meet national planning objectives – I respectfully urge the Inspector to refuse permission for the proposed Highsted Park development.