

Public planning inquiry finishes into Quinn Estates' Highsted Park development for Sittingbourne

10:04, 08 November 2025

updated: 08:49, 09 November 2025

[Alex Langridge](#)

What is understood to be the longest public inquiry for a housing-led scheme ever to be considered by the government has finished.

Quinn Estates' garden village plans, known as the Highsted Park development, in [Sittingbourne](#), were called in by then housing secretary Angela Rayner on November 7, 2024.



The development would cover land south and east of Sittingbourne. Picture: Swale planning portal

This meant the decision for the 8,400-home scheme was taken away from Swale council, which was going to refuse the proposals, and instead would be made by the Planning Inspectorate.

The three-month inquiry [started in March](#), but was extended by 12 days due to a debate over [how much the vital road upgrades](#) included in the project would cost.

However, the additional sessions could not take place for four months, meaning the hearing was due to end at the end of October.

It is understood to be the longest inquiry for a housing-led scheme ever considered by the Planning Inspectorate.

It has now concluded, almost a year since the council's planning committee was set to determine the application. Planning inspector Christina Downes will now prepare her report.

This will include her formal recommendation to the Secretary of State on whether the development should be approved or refused.



How the development may look if given the go-ahead. Picture: Swale planning portal

There is no timeframe for the decision, but it is typically issued several months after the inquiry closes.

Development director for Quinn Estates, Ben Geering, said: “We believe that Highsted Park will deliver homes, jobs and infrastructure where they are most needed.

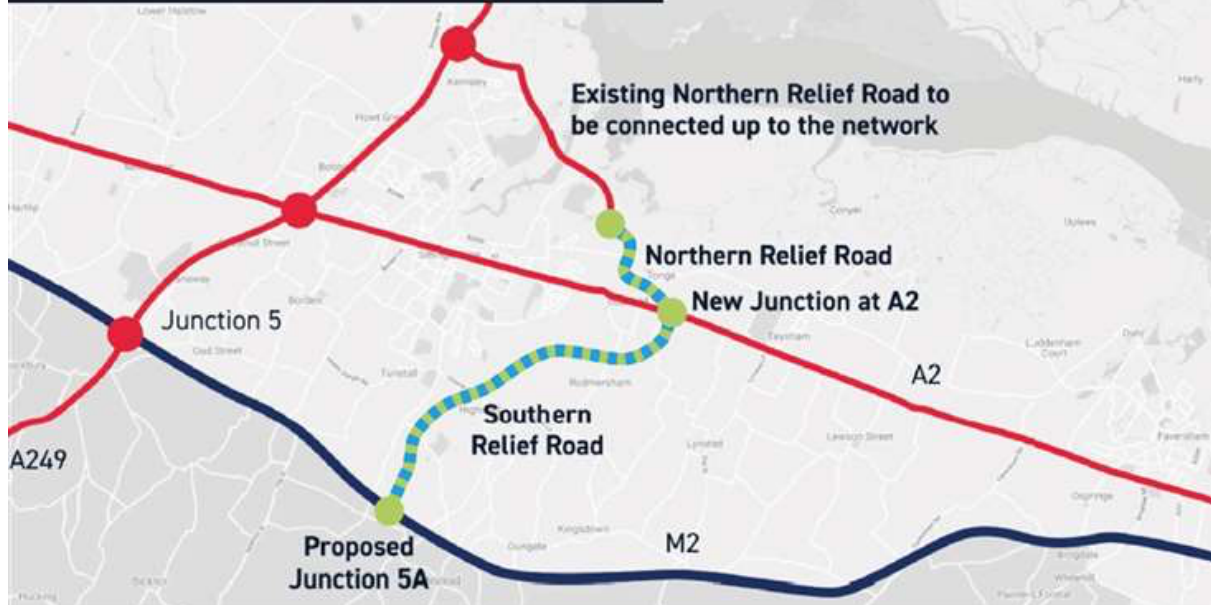
“It will expand Sittingbourne, the largest town in Swale, but will also be a catalyst for jobs and opportunities within the Thames Gateway, one of the largest regeneration areas in Europe.

“It does this at no cost to the public purse at a time when the country is facing economic challenges and an acute housing crisis.

“Throughout the inquiry process, we have sought to find common ground with Swale council, Kent County Council and statutory consultees on the benefits this development will bring.

“The provision of 8,400 homes, including over 20% affordable homes, and the thousands of jobs provided by the expansion of Kent Science Park will deliver substantial long-term benefits for the people of Swale and the wider county.

Route of the Northern Relief Road and the Proposed Southern Relief Road Connection and J5a of the M2



The plans for the highway upgrades. Picture: Quinn Estates

“Swale, Kent County Council and National Highways have all set out their support for the delivery of the Southern Relief Road and the completion of the Northern Relief Road.

“They acknowledge that without this development, this key infrastructure cannot be funded.

“The S106 legal agreements would secure hundreds of millions of pounds of privately funded public infrastructure, including a new J5a for the M2, the Southern Relief Road and Northern Relief Road, a new secondary school, four new primary schools and major on-site health provision.

“Over 50% of the total site area would be retained as open space, to the benefit of nature, future residents and people living in this part of Swale.

“The inquiry process has shown that the benefits of this scheme, together with the mitigation proposed, will outweigh the negatives.

“Our aim, as with all our developments, is to leave a positive legacy, and that has been the basis of our evidence throughout this inquiry.



An aerial image of where it could be

“We would like to thank all of those who have engaged in the inquiry process and await the decision from the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.”

Swale council has maintained its opposition to the plans for land south and east of Sittingbourne, which stretch to Bapchild and Teynham.

It believes that the scheme would significantly impact the landscape, harm heritage assets, result in the loss of high-quality agricultural land and ancient woodland, and conflict with the adopted local plan.

Leader of the council, Cllr Tim Gibson, said: “I want to thank all the residents, community groups, councillors, parish councils and officers who dedicated an enormous amount of time and energy to participate in this long and complex inquiry.

“We believe the case against this unsustainable development is overwhelming. From the beginning, we have been firm that this proposal is the wrong development in the wrong place.

“We presented a robust case to the inspector, and we now await the final decision, hopeful for an outcome that respects the wishes of our local communities and protects our borough’s character.”



Cllr Tim Gibson said he believes the case against the development is “overwhelming”

Speaking on behalf of The Teynham and Highsted Action Group, Cllr Julien Speed also said residents have made it “overwhelmingly clear” that the development is not wanted nor needed.

He added: “The Highsted Park scheme would place immense pressure on local roads, schools and the natural environment, and yet still fails to deliver anything close to the affordable homes our communities require.”

The ward councillor for Teynham and Lynsted also said he was “alarmed” to hear that a decision had been made to increase the amount of affordable housing delivery while decreasing healthcare funding.

It is understood that the proposed acute healthcare contribution for the northern site has been reduced from around £4.5 million to £1.5 million, while the level of affordable housing has gone from 4% to 10%.

He said: “The decision to balance affordable housing delivery against essential healthcare funding raises significant concern.

“While the increase in affordable housing was presented as an improvement, the resulting offer still falls far short of local need and policy expectations, which are 40% in rural locations.



Cllr Julien Speed has raised concerns

“At the same time, scaling back contributions towards hospital services by £3 million risks adding further pressure to already-stretched NHS resources serving our community.

“A development of this scale should be capable of supporting the infrastructure required to meet the needs it creates. Communities should not be forced into a trade-off between affordable homes and basic healthcare capacity.”

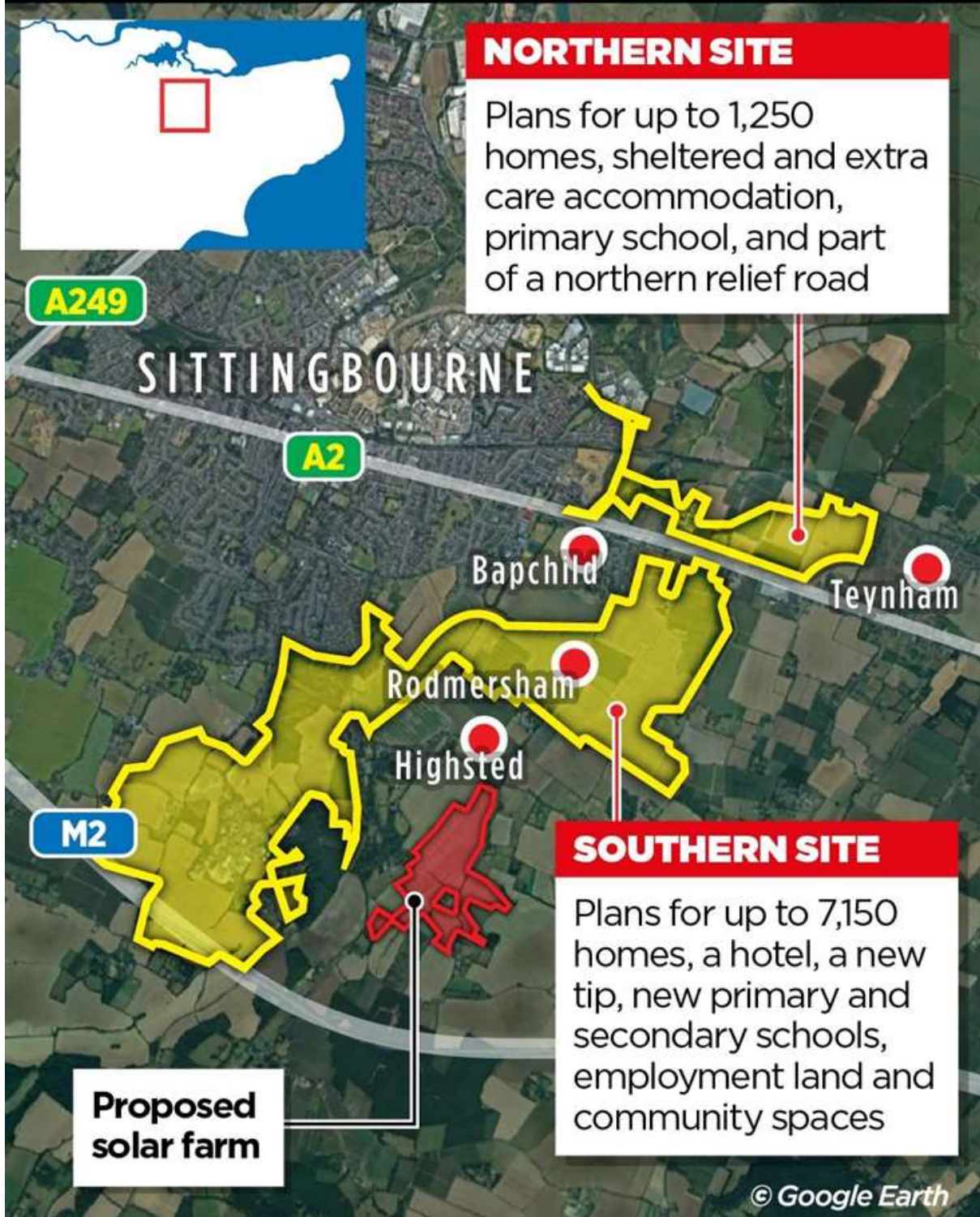
It is understood that Swale council will have spent £800,000 of taxpayers' [money on legal costs](#) fighting Quinn Estates' plans.

Sittingbourne and Sheppey MP Kevin McKenna (Lab) has received a backlash from councillors, who blamed him for the costs the authority faced after it emerged he wrote to the then Deputy Prime Minister asking her to intervene.

He was keen to point out “dozens of residents, businesses and community groups asked for the application to be called in” as well.

The Highsted Park development, which has been in the works for more than a decade, is split across two separate applications.

Highsted Park developments



A map of the proposed Highsted Park development

Up to 7,150 homes, a community space, a hotel, a recycling centre, and primary and secondary schools are earmarked for the larger site surrounding Sittingbourne, with two halves named Highsted Village and Oakwood Village.

It also includes provision for a new M2 motorway junction and the completion of the southern relief road.

The smaller site, known as Teynham West, is planned to host up to 1,250 homes, along with sheltered and extra care accommodation, a primary school, and the Bapchild section of a northern relief road, which is already in the local plan.

Critics have said that if allowed, the project would engulf the rural communities outside Sittingbourne and place a massive strain on roads and services.

Find out about planning applications and other public notices in your area by visiting PublicNoticePortal.uk.

While supporters claimed it would bring much-needed housing, the six-kilometre relief road would help ease existing and future traffic worries.