

The Rt. Hon. Robert Jenrick MP
Secretary of State
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

(By email)

6 October 2020

Dear Robert,

Lutterworth East planning application Reference: 19/00250/OUT

I am writing further to the email from Mr Carpenter of the National Planning Case Unit to Harborough District Council of 28 September which stated that you had received a request from Alberto Costa MP asking you call-in the above planning application, which Harborough District Council resolved to approve on 28th July 2020. Harborough DC officers copied Mr Carpenter's e-mail to the County Council.

Leicestershire County Council is both the landowner and the applicant for this application. As you might expect, the County Council is concerned about the request. The Council's planning agents – Marrons Planning - will be writing to Mr Carpenter with representations why it is this Council's strong view that this application does not meet the prescribed criteria for call-in. I understand that Harborough DC does not support the call-in request.

As Leader of the County Council, I am writing to you separately to say that I believe that the County Council's planning application does not meet the criteria for a call-in and consideration by a public inquiry and report to you and, as such, it would not be appropriate for your office to intervene in a matter which is devolved to local government and already been considered twice already. Firstly (and I accept more generally) during the consideration of the Harborough Local Plan inquiry during 2018; and secondly (and in much more detail) through Harborough's consideration of the application culminating in a lengthy planning committee meeting on 28th July 2020.

Leicestershire County Council is keen to see the permission granted so that the scheme can move into the delivery stage providing much needed new quality housing for Harborough district and to ensure that the district council is able to meet house building targets set out in its Local Plan. Any delay to this process would conflict with government aspirations to build quality and affordable homes quickly, as reinforced in the *Planning for the Future White Paper (Aug 2020)*.

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The Harborough Local Plan was recently adopted in April 2019. This application is fully in accordance with relevant Local Plan policies, including a policy compliant amount of affordable housing. I should add that I recall that the submission of the planning application was delayed until after the Local Plan examination hearings and publication of Proposed Modifications to ensure that the application was fully compliant in all respects before it was submitted.

The County Council has already invested £30m in this scheme, taking it initially out of private sector hands to ensure early delivery of an exemplar, sustainable development that we can be proud of. It is our intention to procure a development partner following grant of planning permission and market signals suggest that there is a lot of interest at this time, despite the current economic downturn.

Mr Costa, as the local MP, has provided support to the scheme in the past. Mr Costa also spoke in support of the scheme at the planning committee meeting in July 2020 and this was welcomed. He has been involved in several meetings with officers over the years and we have engaged collaboratively to ensure that the application is of the highest calibre, respecting and understanding those aspects where residents in his constituency have concerns. We have welcomed Mr Costa's interest and input into the application and we remain committed to engaging fully with him as the scheme is developed.

The meetings with Mr Costa helpfully narrowed down concerns and, I understand, that in the survey Mr Costa is currently undertaking with his constituents, he mentions just three matters: namely (i) road alignment (ii) the proposed housing near electricity pylons and (iii) the distribution units.

To address these concerns the following detail from the hybrid planning application is pertinent:

- 1) The size, sale and alignment of the development 'Spine Road' and associated highways infrastructure was as agreed with county highways officers and Highways England (this was a detailed planning application);
- 2) Any housing near the pylons that cross the site would be safely distant from the power lines and the pylons themselves, in accordance with all health and safety and building regulations (this element was in outline only); and
- 3) The warehousing element of the application on a site adjacent to the M1 junction would be developed in accordance with the relevant policy in the Local Plan. The proposed size, scale and layout on the illustrative masterplan (as submitted with the planning application and seen by the planning committee members before they resolved to grant permission) was the same that the Inspector saw and approved at the Local Plan inquiry. Final details would in any event I am advised require a further planning approval as it was in outline only.

I should add all three of the above matters were discussed at the Local Plan stage and debated during the Local Plan examination. The Inspector did not find fault with the policies in relation to any of these matters.

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The County Council and Harborough District Council have worked together with the local community on the plans throughout the Local Plan and pre-planning application stages, as well as normal statutory planning consultation and the Council will continue to liaise with the community, parish and town councils to ensure this project is delivery quickly and with a high level of quality. I am pleased that the local residents have had ample opportunity to comment, raise concerns and help shape the scheme over the last 7 years.

I recognise that some local residents remained concerned. I would expect that with an application of this scale. Whilst i can understand both their and Mr Costa's concerns, a Call-in shouldn't be an opportunity to have "another bite of the cherry".

To be clear, residents' concerns have already been scrutinised at an examination in public through the Local Plan process. The output of that process and the Inspector's conclusions formed part of the planning application that Harborough District Council planning committee resolved to approve in July, subject to Conditions and a S106 agreement. This will ensure that planning obligations are provided relating to affordable housing, education (including new primary schools), off site highways improvements, sustainable travel benefits, health provision and the like. I am informed that good progress is being made with getting the S106 agreement completed, which will pave the way for early delivery. I hope you will recognise the effort that has gone into making this progress, particular as other schemes of this scale elsewhere across the country often take many years to conclude. I hope you will agree that a Call-in process is unlikely to lead to a different outcome to that made by Harborough's Planning Committee in July.

If I may, I would like to stress the impact of a Call-in and associated public inquiry would have. Firstly, it would delay the delivery of much needed housing, employment and infrastructure improvements. It also adds substantial costs at, what you know, is a most difficult time, when despite our track record and prudence, even our budgets are being stretched. I fear it would also make public bodies such as ours less willing to commit to projects of this type going forward.

I appreciate the Council's financial interest arising from this application is not a matter you will directly have to consider, but I think as part of the context, it merits being understood. The scheme is already benefitting from the Local Authority Accelerated Construction fund and we are in discussions with Homes England about the proposed Single Housing Infrastructure Fund to help fast track the delivery of this vital scheme. We are looking for ways to speed up the delivery of building these houses and a call-in will substantially delay matters and make the scheme less attractive to our delivery partners. Protracted delay raises the risk of losing potential investment partners.

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The *Planning for the Future* White Paper (Aug 2020) sets out helpful proposals to reform the planning system, front-loading public engagement and speeding up decision making. The County Council's planning application, as approved by Harborough DC, is exactly the type of balanced and Local Plan compliant development the White Paper espouses, and I am proud that the County Council, with the assistance of Harborough District Council, is on be verge of bringing it to fruition.

Echoing the Prime Minister's forward to the White Paper, we want to deliver a "sustainable, beautiful, safe and useful development" and "build the homes we all need and the future we all want to see".

I understand why Mr Costa has requested this application to be called-in, but I hope my comments, and those from the County Council's planning agents, will suffice in convincing you that a call-in of this application is neither appropriate, nor helpful to any parties. Most importantly, the outcome will be almost certainly be just a delay to delivering much needed homes.

I am copying this to Alberto Costa MP and Phil King the Leader of Harborough DC.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'NR' with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Nicholas Rushton CC
Leader of the Council

CC The Rt. Hon. Alberto Costa MP
 Cllr Phil king, Leader, Harborough District Council