



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Steve Reed OBE MP
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Reference No. HW63173

3 July 2026

Dear Steve

Highsted Park Planning applications in Faversham & Mid Kent (Planning references: 21/503906/EIOUT and 21/503914/EIOUT)

I am calling on you to refuse the above two planning applications which have just been presented to you by the Planning Inspector.

Totalling 8,400 houses the two applications located in my constituency were called in by your predecessor as Secretary of State, Angela Rayner, at the request of my neighbouring MP, Kevin McKenna. If approved this massive development will have a seriously detrimental impact on my constituents.

It was recently reported by BBC South East that you said:

New homes "will not be built" if the infrastructure to provide them with water is not in place.

The recent water outages and current hosepipe ban show we do not have enough water for our current houses, let alone for an extra 8,400. South East Water is growing increasingly more concerned about large-scale housebuilding in Kent. They recently made clear there is not enough water to supply all the houses in the neighbouring borough of Tonbridge and Malling's Local Plan.

The new Kent reservoir won't be operational until the mid-2030s, and water is already being transported in large tankers along our country lanes in parts of my constituency which is simply unacceptable.

By your own criteria this should be enough evidence to refuse this application outright and halt all other large-scale developments in Kent until our water supply can be guaranteed.

I understand the Highsted Park developer has chosen Southern Water to supply their water despite the development being in a South East Water area. Why? Will this work?

The applicant and KCC have drawn up plans for a waste recycling centre close to Cromers Water reserve which could pose a contamination risk to the freshwater supply. This is a Special Protection Zone (SPZ1). Southern Water strongly objects to this location and say this should be sited as far from the abstraction point as possible.

People have told me that Southern Water are concerned about an area south of Golden Wood - specifically the impact on the water catchment area, the disturbance to the bedrock and the impact on the public drinking water supply. Within this area the Applicant has identified in excess of 80 boreholes and within the entire application site there are over 300.

This area to the South of Kent Science Park was previously home to a Shell Research farm, where experimental and novel pesticides were tested on crops. There are concerns that residual chemicals in the ground could be mobilised and contaminate the water supply if the ground is disturbed.

There is no train station nearby, so new residents will inevitably travel mainly by car. Therefore, this development will lead to a substantial increase in traffic on local roads.

The developer is promising a new motorway junction as the answer to these problems. It won't be. The M2 already struggles with the volume of traffic on it and accidents bring it to a standstill – along with many nearby A-roads. There is no likelihood of it being expanded to a 3-lane motorway any time soon to address this.

So, putting more traffic onto it is not an answer. Nor will all car journeys be made on the M2. The country lanes will get busier and more dangerous, the traffic jams in local towns will get worse.

Healthcare provision in this area is under severe pressure. The applicant for Highsted Park does not believe the NHS Acute Healthcare contribution meets the Regulation 122 CIL tests, whereas the Council's position is that it does. The applicant contests its liability to provide the required funding, and it is down to you to determine whether the tests are met. If you conclude that elements of that contribution (or all of it) do not meet Regulation 122, what mechanisms will be in place to ensure the healthcare needs of these new residents are properly funded?

On top of the lack of infrastructure, the land for Highsted North is 85% excellent, very good and good quality agricultural land, while Highsted South is made up of 87.6% of good quality or better farmland. I am sure you will agree that destroying hundreds of acres of good quality farmland will have a detrimental impact on the country's food security, and areas of poorer quality land should be built on instead.

I am not against sensible-scale developments in or adjacent to cities and towns, but this is something else altogether. It is clearly huge in scale, will be built on high quality farmland, in an area where the infrastructure is unfit to support the current population let alone thousands more.

Furthermore, there are already many thousands of new houses in the pipeline for this rural area, also being built on agricultural land and relying on much of the same infrastructure. Recently nearly 7,000 local people signed a petition, which I took to Downing Street, urging the Government to reduce Kent's housing numbers.

In addition to many smaller scale developments of between twenty and two hundred-plus houses, and many thousands already built in the last ten years, there are four other large developments in the pipeline in my constituency:

- Heathlands Garden Village: 5,000 houses in the Maidstone Local Plan
- Lidsing Garden Village: 2,000 houses in the Maidstone Local Plan close to another large development likely being put forward by Medway Council
- Winterbourne Fields: 1,815 houses – a planning application being decided by Swale Borough Council
- Duchy of Cornwall development: 2,500 houses – approved by Swale Borough Council

Can I urge you to consider the cumulative impact of development when taking your decision.

As a historically agricultural area, we do not have the infrastructure to support this level of growth. Development here means building on green fields and farmland which impacts our food security. The bulk of new housing should be in towns and cities where there are the jobs, public transport and infrastructure to support it.

There should also be a bigger emphasis on delivering sites that already have planning permission. Although not in my constituency, the Queenborough and Rushenden site in Swale has over 1,000 houses stuck with Homes England for 15 years and has still not been built. Instead of building thousands of houses on agricultural land, like Highsted, the Government should be supporting Homes England to deliver this project and returning it to the 5 year land supply for Swale.

If all the planned developments go ahead, the number of residents in my constituency will increase by approximately twice the population of its largest town, Faversham, and by far more than any other constituency in Kent.

I strongly believe that in order for you to make an informed decision, and instil confidence in the planning system, you should visit the site. I would be very happy to show you around and introduce you to local parish councillors and residents and hear their concerns directly.

In short, I call on you to take these concerns into account together with the testimonies from local people at the inquiry and refuse both applications.

Yours sincerely



Helen Whately MP
Member of Parliament for Faversham and Mid Kent