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Tuesday, 16 August 2022

Dear Councillor Stedman and Mr Robins,

**Redrow Homes - Hesmond's Stud Detailed Planning Application WD/2022/0341/MAJ**

## **Village Concerns Objection 13 - PCS Public Representations**

1. We are writing to you as the Co-Chairs of Village Concerns, a local Action Group from East Hoathly with Halland Parish. We represent the views of over 200 supporters against the overdevelopment of our Parish.
2. Village Concerns has long been aware of the sensitivity of the timings of Public Representations at Planning Committees. It is made quite clear in all the briefing material that there are time limits to which one must adhere. Speakers are reminded of this in strict tones prior to speaking and the Chair is ruthless in sticking to the time limits.
3. Whilst we fully accept that it is the prerogative of the Chair to enforce these rules as they see fit we would ask that the rigour of their application might be re-considered. There are two fundamental reasons for this:
  - a. Public Representations are a very small but important part of the planning process. They give the public a voice direct to the elected officials who will make the decision. In a world where Councillors have limited contact with the electorate, this is even more important. This two or three minutes of contact should be embraced and taken on board. It is highly intimidating and stressful for most members of the public to come forward and make such a representation. They should be made to feel welcome and relaxed rather than being stressed by the domination of the stopwatch.
  - b. The Chairs of these meetings often seem to be so focussed on the timings that we are concerned that they may not be able to concentrate on

the public representations that are being made. We feel that they should be able to concentrate all their attention on the content, and not the timing. The matter of timing could be passed to one of the council staff who administer the meeting.

4. The Planning Committee South Meeting on 11 August had, for the three major planning applications, six public representations against the applications and three in favour. The timings were as follows:

a. **Hesmond's Stud**

**Against**

Victoria Aldridge 2.24

Jan Burdon 2.41

Jonathan Walker 2.52

**For**

Katie Lamb 3.38 - after having been given extra time because of a 6 second interruption because she was speaking too quietly.

b. **Upper Horsebridge Road**

**Against**

Hilda Nixon 3.20 - This speaker was visibly and audibly distressed during her testimony but was interrupted and forced to conclude.

Steve Keo 3.09

Councillor Fox 2.21

**For**

Mark Best 2.32

c. **Two Oaks, Horam**

**For**

Mark Best

0.54

5. Village Concerns makes the following observations on these timings:
  - a. Up to three speakers are allowed to speak for, and up to three against each planning application. For major planning applications these are each of three minutes. Thus for each major application 18 minutes would be allocated for the Public Representations. On the 11 August PCS Meeting there were three major applications and therefore 54 minutes could have been spent by PCS listening to Public Representations. The total time used by the speakers for the three major applications on 11 August was 23 minutes 51 seconds. This was less than half the time allocated for public representations and it is therefore quite clear that the length of time taken on each speech should not have been an issue.
  - b. The biggest transgression of the timing was by the Redrow's Planning Director who no doubt makes many such representations. She overran by 38 seconds and was eventually stopped by the Chair but this was in stark contrast to the abrupt intervention of Hilda Nixon who was visibly and audibly distressed and could easily have been given a little leeway, or Steve Keo who was interrupted before his three minutes had even elapsed and then made to finish very quickly. The evidence of this meeting would suggest that speakers for an application get more favourable consideration than those against.
6. Village Concerns fully understands the challenges that these meetings raise but we feel that, at present, there is a bias in favour of the applicants and their agents. The public, whose opinions should be the most valued and pertinent to Councillors, are made to feel unwelcome and under considerable pressure not to transgress some seemingly arbitrarily applied rules. We feel that you should make more effort to accommodate and assist the public contributions at such meetings and stop the domination of the stopwatch. If any bias is exhibited, it should be in favour of the public rather than the developers making money from these planning applications.

Katherine Gutkind and Kathryn Richardson  
Co-Chairs  
Village Concerns

cc

Nusrat Ghani MP

Councillor Draper  
Parish Council

Councillor Newton  
Councillor Snell  
Councillor Blake-Coggins  
Councillor Bowdler  
Councillor Cleaver  
Councillor Grocock  
Councillor Guyton-Day  
Councillor Howell  
Councillor Stephen Shing  
Councillor Watts  
Councillor White  
Councillor Baker  
Councillor Cade  
Councillor Clark  
Councillor Coltman  
Councillor Doodes  
Councillor Douglas  
Councillor Hallett  
Councillor Johnson  
Councillor Lunn  
Councillor Moss  
Councillor Owen-Williams  
Councillor Redman  
Councillor Daniel Shing  
Councillor Sparks