Sir Ashley Fox MP
Member of Parliament for Bridgwater

National Planning Casework Unit
Department for Housing, Communities and Local Government
(sent via email)

24th September 2026

Re: Planning Application 09/23/00003 - Land East of Bower Lane, Bridgwater (750 Dwellings)

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing in support of the planning call in by CPRE Somerset to the Secretary of State in relation to the planning application 09/23/00003 for up to 750 dwellings on land between Bower Lane and the M5 at Bridgwater.

I have previously written to Somerset Council, expressing serious concerns about this proposal. My objections centred on the scheme's failure to provide adequate affordable housing, healthcare infrastructure, education provision and transport mitigation. Having reviewed subsequent developments, I remain firmly of the view that these concerns have not been satisfactorily addressed and that the application raises issues of more than local significance which merit intervention by the Secretary of State.

I wish to make clear that I support appropriate housing development. Bridgwater is a growing town and additional homes are needed. However, development must be sustainable and supported by the infrastructure required for both existing residents and new communities. This proposal fails that test.

Of particular concern is the apparent failure to secure adequate healthcare provision. CPRE Somerset has highlighted representations from all nine GP practices serving the Bridgwater area, including the practices closest to the development site. Their collective position was that the scheme fails to adequately address its impact on local healthcare services and that, without fully funded and deliverable additional primary care capacity, the healthcare impacts remain unacceptable.

These concerns mirror points I raised previously. At that time, NHS Somerset had sought a contribution of £418,000 to mitigate pressures on GP services. I argued that this contribution should be secured in full. The absence of adequate healthcare provision would place considerable strain on already stretched local services and undermine the quality of care available to both existing and future residents.

The provision of affordable housing is another significant issue. The scheme has long been unable to meet the policy requirement for 30% affordable housing. I previously described this as unacceptable, noting that developers who overpay for

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA
Tel: 01278 811 007 | E-mail: ashley.fox.mp@parliament.uk | Website: www.ashleyfox.org.uk

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land should not be permitted to avoid the obligations necessary to support sustainable communities. According to the information submitted to the Planning Casework Unit, the development would provide only around 6% affordable housing despite the acute need for such housing in the area.

Education infrastructure also remains a major concern. I previously noted that Somerset Council had identified approximately £7.8 million of education contributions as necessary to support the development and argued that these contributions should be treated as non-negotiable. Schools, healthcare facilities and other community services are fundamental infrastructure requirements, not optional extras. Despite coming to this figure Somerset Council then subsequently decided that no further money was required. I am not satisfied with their reasoning for this sudden change and believe that this will leave taxpayers forced to foot the bill.

Traffic and transport impacts have likewise not been adequately resolved. East Bridgwater already experiences significant congestion, particularly along Bath Road and Westonzoyland Road. The cumulative impact of this development, together with other approved schemes in the area, risks placing an intolerable burden on the local road network. I previously requested clear assurances that cumulative traffic impacts would be fully assessed and mitigated before any approval was granted. I remain unconvinced that sufficient weight has been given to these concerns.

Taken together, the shortcomings in affordable housing delivery, healthcare provision, education funding and transport mitigation raise serious questions about whether this proposal complies with the objectives of national planning policy and whether it can properly be regarded as sustainable development. The issues at stake extend beyond a local planning judgment and concern the application of national policy relating to infrastructure delivery and community benefits.

I therefore welcome the decision to issue a holding direction and for the Secretary of State to review this application. Given the scale of the development and its implications for local services and infrastructure, I believe independent examination is warranted before any final planning permission is granted.

I would be grateful if this letter could be taken into account as part of the Government's consideration of this matter.

Yours faithfully,

Ashley Fox

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