

REBECCA HARRIS MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Mr Ian Butt
Director of Place and Communities
Castle Point Borough Council
Kiln Road
Benfleet, Essex
SS7 1TF

28th November 2025

Dear Ian

I am writing to register my objection to the outline planning application 25 0779 OUT for up to 165 dwellings on land west of Glebelands. I am writing in my capacity as the local MP, but also as someone who stood with local residents and fought in the successful campaign to preserve this important area of Green Belt.

I have listened to residents across Thundersley and the surrounding communities who have for many years defended this parcel of Green Belt land. Their concerns are not founded in a desire to prevent change but in a determination to protect the openness, character and separation between settlements that this land provides. The application as submitted would cause permanent and unacceptable harm to the Green Belt and should be refused.

This application is described as an outline proposal for "up to 165 dwellings" with public open space, landscaping and a Sustainable Urban Drainage System and with "all matters reserved except access." Those phrases are central to the assessment of harm. The National Planning Policy Framework makes clear that inappropriate development in the Green Belt is, by definition, harmful and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. The Framework sets out the purposes of the Green Belt and the need to protect openness and prevent urban sprawl and the merging of neighbouring towns and villages. The presumption in favour of sustainable development does not remove the specific protections afforded to Green Belt land. The applicant has not demonstrated any very special circumstances that would clearly and convincingly outweigh the substantial and permanent harm to openness and to the five purposes of the Green Belt.

Local people have fought for many years to protect Glebelands. We secured a landmark decision from the Secretary of State to preserve this Green Belt from an almost identical development proposal for 165 homes twelve years ago. That history matters. That precedent matters. It is not merely a record of local feeling. It is a record of planning outcomes and of sustained community engagement that has repeatedly recognised the role this land plays in preventing coalescence and in maintaining the character of our area. To permit development here would be to overturn those hard-won decisions and to set a precedent that would put

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other Green Belt parcels across Castle Point at risk. The Council must give significant weight to that history when considering the soundness of any proposal to release this land from Green Belt protection.

I am also deeply concerned by the emerging Local Plan process and the suggestion that this land might be treated as a Grey Belt. Reclassifying land in this way without robust evidence would be a mistake. The Regulation 19 stage must be underpinned by a clear and transparent evidence base that demonstrates that any parcel no longer fulfils the purposes of the Green Belt. Generic categorisation or convenience led re-labelling is not sufficient. The Council must show landscape, visual and functional analysis that supports any change of status. By labelling it as Grey Belt, I am concerned that the Council may have inadvertently signalled to developers who may not have faith in the Council's plan being found 'sound', that applications such as this are timely and likely to be successful, if not in committee then at appeal.

The transport evidence submitted with this application is inadequate. Rushbottom Lane already experiences significant peak period congestion and local residents report regular queuing and rat running. The Tarpots junction is a critical node for traffic flows in and out of Benfleet and Thundersley and Sadlers Farm is a strategic interchange whose performance affects the wider network. The Transport Assessment must be tested against realistic cumulative growth scenarios including committed developments in the area. At present the application does not demonstrate that the local highway network can absorb the additional trips from up to 165 dwellings without unacceptable delay, increased collision risk and harm to pedestrian and cyclist safety. The Council must apply the tests in national policy regarding severe residual cumulative impacts and refuse development where impacts are severe and unmitigated.

Flood risk and wastewater capacity are further concerns that I believe add weight to grounds for refusal. The outline submission proposes a 'Sustainable Urban Drainage System' but lacks the detailed drainage design and downstream capacity evidence required to demonstrate that surface water can be managed without increasing flood risk elsewhere. The area has experienced recent local reports of sewage main bursts and surcharging incidents. Those events demonstrate the fragility of the existing wastewater network and the need for a clear statement from Anglian Water confirming that foul flows from up to 165 dwellings can be accommodated without exacerbating sewer flooding or causing environmental harm. Before any determination the Council should require a formal capacity statement from the water company and a programme of network capacity upgrades where necessary.

The outline nature of the application with all matters reserved except access means that the full extent of landscape and visual harm cannot be properly assessed at this stage. The site contributes to local landscape character and provides a green buffer visible from public vantage points. The loss of this open land would harm local amenity and the setting of nearby residential areas. The Council should therefore treat the application with caution and require a full assessment of landscape and visual impacts at reserved matters stage or refuse in the absence of adequate information.



In the planning balance the harm to the Green Belt and to local infrastructure clearly outweighs the benefits claimed by the applicant. The NPPF is explicit that inappropriate development in the Green Belt is harmful by definition and that very special circumstances must be demonstrated to justify release. The applicant has not met that test. The transport and drainage evidence is incomplete and the risk to local residents from increased congestion and from sewer and surface water failure is real.

Local people have defended Glebelands for good reasons. Their defence was not about preventing necessary development but about ensuring that development is sustainable, that it does not undermine the character of our communities and that it does not proceed at the expense of public safety and environmental protection. For these reasons I ask the Council to refuse application 25 0779 OUT.

Yours sincerely
Rebecca

Dame Rebecca Harris DBE MP
Member of Parliament for Castle Point