

NORTHFLEET HABOURLSIDE ENQUIRY STATEMENT

OAKWOOD INDUSTRIAL ESTATE

I am Jane Young representing our company Oakwood Industrial Estate. During this enquiry we have already heard several reasons why this development should not go ahead and I will be duplicating many of them but I want to make a personal statement today to show how this proposal has a detrimental effect on ordinary business owners, landlords and their employees now and in the future and the human side of the effect of this development.

We have owned Oakwood Industrial Estate since the early 80s. After many years of hard work, long days and nights away from home my husband and his partner finally had enough money to secure a piece of land. It was bought initially for our own haulage and storage business and was chosen because of its proximity to wharves on the river where we loaded such things as paper and timber for onward delivery or storage. For many years we ran a successful business until 2000 when my husband's partner was killed in an accident. After a couple of years going it alone my husband decided to let the property which consisted of warehouses and open yard. Over the years we have successfully let all the space with very little tenant turnover.

Today our 4 tenants run thriving businesses from our premises. They employ in excess of 60 employees nearly all of which have families. Let me tell you about these companies.

JCB Medway are the Kia dealership for the area offering car sales and repairs and operate an MOT station. The next nearest dealership for KIA is in Rainham Kent. They currently have 20 employees on site and 70% of them live locally. I would say it would be virtually impossible for them to find a similar site in the local area. This would mean that they might be able to absorb some staff within their organisation but there would inevitably be job losses.

The KIA car showroom and MOT station is well used by local people.

Fawkham Valley Scaffolding. The scaffolding company are hired to work on sites all around the Kent and Home Counties. They employ 20 people who mainly live in the local area. Once again re-location would be an issue for them & if they left the local area some current employees would look for jobs that were still in the Gravesham area.

Metro Traffic Management. A company who provides & operates all the equipment for temporary road works or utility repairs. They chose our unit to rent because of the proximity to excellent road links as they can be called out day or night to deal with an emergency. They have invested a considerable amount of money fitting their unit with all the necessary equipment required to run their business. They have 12 employees that all live within 10 miles of their site.

CRS Cables Ltd. This is a company that provides skilled and specialist high voltage cable repair service. They are used by UK Power network, National Grid and National Rail amongst many others. They have 16 staff and all live within a 15 minute drive. This is essential for them to meet emergency deadlines. Relocating to new premises, if they could be found, would cause a lot of disruption and impact on their ability to provide emergency & essential maintenance. Moving to a new location could result in people leaving as a new site out of the Gravesham area would add additional travel time making already long days even longer.

I am advised by a local land agent that similar facilities available on our estate are almost impossible to find in the local area and even looking further afield there is very little to offer our tenants. This has been confirmed by previous speakers.

Without doubt there will be job losses if these plans go ahead and the loss of some vital services in the immediate area and beyond. How is that justifiable for the sake of a new football stadium?

Let's consider the new stadium. The carrot that the developer is dangling in front of the local residents.

The football stadium – I believe many local people are in favour of the scheme because of the promise of a new football stadium. Ebbsfleet Football Club is currently at the bottom of the Vanarama league. Last year's attendance figures show the largest attendance in the whole season was when 1664 fans attended. This is 34% of the capacity of 4769. The lowest was 501 even though it was for a semi-final with a Kent team. These figures really do not support the need for a larger stadium. An 8000 capacity stadium is excessive especially when the stadium will lead to the loss of a huge quantity of productive industrial floor space which is home to many large & small businesses.

If the stadium needs to be rebuilt it should be located in a far less impactful location eg on some of the derelict areas in Northfleet and scaled down to a size that reflects the likely attendance figures. I know that the argument will be put forward that it is the state

of the stadium that put fans off attending but really it is more around the team's performance than anything else and their current performance does nothing to encourage fans to attend and that is something that the applicant cannot predict will change.

Retail provision and jobs

The development site is located less than 5 miles away from one of the largest shopping sites in the UK. Westfield Stratford is a 10 minute train journey. Pay in retail is usually no more than minimum wage generally part time and zero hour contracts are common. Not a viable alternative to someone losing their job in one of the local industries that will be lost.

300 bed hotel will offer employment

Again the jobs available are not well paid and often mean someone has to work shifts and unsocial hours .Again not an attractive prospect for anyone losing their current job. I'm not really sure who would want to stay there. Eurostar no longer stops at Ebbsfleet so unlikely European tourists would need to use and why would they get off there anyway? Possibly business people visiting local industry but surely there won't be any businesses left to visit!! The surrounding area is already well served with hotels and B&Bs.

Office space. From speaking to a letting agent and the Kent Chamber of Commerce I am informed that there is abundance of office space currently available in Kent. With the advent of home working businesses are trying to get rid of office space, not looking for it.

Housing. Of course this is of significant interest to Gravesham Borough Council who recognise this development would go a long way to helping them meet their target for building new homes but only 360 of these dwellings, the minimum required, have been earmarked as affordable. I have no doubt that these affordable dwellings will be the ones nearest any remaining industries in the area. I am sure the developers will want to maximise their investment by selling those dwellings in prime spots along the river which certainly won't be affordable for most of the residents in Gravesham. But most of this housing is close to 2 industrial areas, Britannia Lead & Robin's Wharf. I can see this is a recipe for disaster. Home owners and tenants will soon start complaining about the noise from the industries, the HGV movements, the fumes & dust. This could lead to

restrictions being placed on these 2 sites, businesses that have been here for decades, which will impact on the day to day running of their operations.

Finally I would like to ask the developer and Gravesham Council if they ever for a moment consider the impact the plans have on landlords, business owners and their employees. Real people not just numbers on a page.

These plans have put a blight on every business in the area. Speaking personally if the plans go ahead we will be forced to sell our site which we have never wanted to do. We expected that our children and grandchildren would carry on benefitting from the business making life easier for them which is surely something all parents and grandparent wish to do. Potentially if the plans go ahead and all our tenants move out we will be without our main income. I know that we could eventually agree a settlement with the developer but this could take years and will never be at price that the land is worth. When we first bought our site a Compulsory Purchase Order was put in place as KCC needed a strip of land to build a road now known as Thames Way. It took 7 years before we received the pay out from KCC. We are both in our 70s. We may not have 7 years left!! and we don't need the stress and worry this is causing. This is the same for many other businesses in the area. People have spoken to my husband deeply concerned about how these plans will disrupt their lives, how they fear what will happen in the future and how they can see that businesses they built up over years of hard work ruined. People who rent premises, who will not get any compensation will face the prospect of trying to find new premises or close their business, leading to unemployment for many.

Gravesham Council Head of Planning said in his first statement that they have no plans to relocate any of the businesses effected and that the loss of jobs was 'regrettable.' Regrettable! I think it is shameful. Shameful that the council should even be considering plans that displace or close businesses, create unemployment and allow a traditional industrial area, that provide services both locally and nationally, to be thrown aside. How can anyone believe that is good for the local economy.

We strongly object to the development plans and very much hope they are refused.