



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP
Lord Chancellor, Secretary of State for Justice
Ministry of Justice
102 Petty France
London SW1H 9AJ

5th November 2014

Dear Chris,

Former HMP Blundeston, Lowestoft, Suffolk

Following the closure of HMP Blundeston last December, your appointed agents Jones Lang LaSalle have been preparing the property for marketing. This work has included liaising with the local planning authority, Waveney District Council, with the objective of issuing a Planning Information Document that will guide prospective purchasers on the type and nature of redevelopment that will be acceptable.

Waveney District Council have just received the draft document from Jones Lang LaSalle. This is an extremely disappointing brief, which in its current form will not help achieve an early sale of the property for uses that will be acceptable to the local community. The document currently promotes a form of development which is unacceptable to the local planning authority and which is highly unlikely to obtain planning approval. Instead it should be encouraging interest from both those parties who could be looking to occupy parts of the site themselves and those developers prepared to work with the local community to secure an acceptable form of redevelopment. Moreover, it does not help you in achieving your objective of securing best value from the sale of the site.

I make the following comments:-

1. It is disappointing that having been appointed some months ago and having been in discussions with the planners for some time, Jones Lang LaSalle have only now approximately four weeks before marketing is due to commence provided a draft document for Waveney District Council's consideration.



2. The draft document does not take account of the sites location, its surrounds and its features that should influence how it should be redeveloped. Whilst a large part of the property is in effect a brownfield site, account needs to be taken of its rural location and its immediate surrounds. This includes woodland which is designated a County Wildlife Site and a lake. There is an adjoining residential area, Lakeside Rise, and any redevelopment should blend in with and seek to enhance the setting of the dwellings there.
3. Jones Lang LaSalle describe the site as being a sustainable location and thus suitable for a large scale residential development of 150-180 dwellings. This is not the case due to both the sites rural location and the fact that it is not immediately adjacent to the village. Whilst Blundeston is designated in the Local Plan as a 'Larger Village', the plan states that it can only support small scale development as there is a limited range of local services. The redevelopment proposed by Jones Lang LaSalle does not fit within this context and is completely inappropriate.
4. In only considering a residential development, the brief is uninspiring and too narrow in focus. No proper assessment has been made of the need for mitigating measures so as to ensure that the redevelopment blends in properly with the village. The brief needs to be rewritten so as to ensure redevelopment is of an appropriate form and scale that is acceptable to both the local community and the local planning authority.
5. Proper consideration has not been given to either alternative uses or a mixed use development. The all-weather sports pitch should be retained and made available for community use. Full consideration should be given to keeping the workshops that are situated to the east of the site and whether these can be accessed separately. It is particularly disappointing that retaining these units has not been properly considered, as I understand that during the site visit that took place in May, which Jones Lang LaSalle attended, a number of councillors made clear that they favoured the retention of these units.

A local business had expressed interest to me in this part of the property earlier in the year and I had put them in touch with the estates team in your department, though they have now bought another property. Their interest suggests that the layout of this accommodation and the existing availability of services (ie power and water) means that they could be suitable for process/manufacturing businesses. This needs to be looked into fully prior to marketing commencing.



6. The main constraint to securing an early sale of the property that will produce the best outcome for both the local community and the Government is the significant costs that will be incurred in demolishing those buildings which cannot be re-used. The fact that it would appear that no attempt has been made to overcome this obstacle is disappointing. You should consider putting funds aside to clear the site. Funding is available through a variety of Department for Communities and Local Government schemes to facilitate the redevelopment of brownfield sites. Work should be done to establish whether such funding can be provided here.

I would be grateful if you could instruct Jones Lang LaSalle as a matter of urgency to work with Waveney District Council to redraft the document so that it addresses the problems that I have outlined. If it would be helpful the planning officers at Waveney District Council would be more than willing to speak with your officials to set out their concerns so as to help find the best way forward.

I would also welcome the opportunity to meet up with you so that I can explain my worries in more detail and to seek to agree a way forward which is acceptable to the local community.

As you are aware from the numerous discussions that you and I have had over the past fourteen months, the closure of HMP Blundeston was a major blow to both those who worked there and to the local community. The sale of its property and its future presents an opportunity to leave a positive legacy for Blundeston and the area to the north of Lowestoft. If marketing proceeds with the Planning Information Document in its current form, there is a danger that this opportunity will be lost.

I look forward to working with you to address these concerns.

Peter Aldous
Member of Parliament for Waveney