

Good morning, and thank you for providing the opportunity to speak.

My name is Richard Adam and I'm a long-standing member of Marden Parish Council.

I also have a 43-year career as a fully qualified professional in the field of highway engineering, and now hold a senior position where I am the technical authority for all highway design matters within my organisation.

The parish council recognises that the site between Albion Road and Copper Lane in Marden is allocated for housing in Maidstone Borough Council's adopted Local Plan Review document for 2021 to 2038.

As such, we do not object to the proposed development in principle, much as some of our village residents might wish us to, as we need to take a pragmatic view and work towards the best outcome for the parish as a whole.

This appeal relates to an outline application for up to 117 houses and associated infrastructure, with all matters reserved apart from access, but safe and convenient access between the site and the village centre has always been the parish council's main concern.

You will have seen our grounds of objection to the planning application, and some of these were expanded upon in our September 2024 representation for the appeal.

In October 2024, the appellant provided a new scheme to alter the highway layout along the length of Albion Road north of the site towards the village centre in an attempt to address some of Maidstone Borough Council's grounds for refusing the application.

The parish council made a second representation last month, specifically about this appeal scheme, and then a third in November when the appellant's proofs of evidence were made available.

You may be relieved to hear that I do not intend to repeat the many detailed points we have previously made today, but it is important that all three representations are read together as one.

However, there is a further aspect that we would like to draw to your attention to, namely the standards and guidance published by Active Travel

England in respect of infrastructure design for the three active travel modes: walking, wheeling and cycling.

As I'm sure you know, Active Travel England is the government's executive agency responsible for making walking, wheeling and cycling the preferred choice for everyone to get around in England.

Active Travel England has developed a suite of tools to support the development of designs and the assessment of design quality for active travel interventions and schemes.

The design tool most relevant to the appeal scheme is the Route Check, which assesses a wide range of metrics using the common Red / Amber / Green rating approach.

Additionally, for the Safety Check tab in the Route Check spreadsheet, there is a Black rating for so-called 'critical issues' that need to be designed out.

In terms of footway width, this is a critical issue for the appeal scheme.

When taken together with all the other safety-related deficiencies highlighted in our three representations, it is clear that Kent County Council should not have withdrawn its objection following presentation of the appeal scheme.

If I may speak personally for a minute, I don't like to come here to criticise the work of fellow professionals in public, but road user safety is a serious matter, and in this case, that needs to be done.

In my career, I have never seen a scheme involving so many comprises that would variously affect the safety (and convenience) of all road users: pedestrians, cyclists and motorists.

Were such a scheme be referred up to me at work, there is no way that I could consider recommending that for approval. The designers would be invited to go back to the drawing board and try again.

Anyway, on behalf of Marden Parish Council, I ask the inspector to use his independence and not rely on the Kent County Council letter dated 8 October 2024, because that fails to address many of the relevant road safety issues.

If one imagines a good road layout design at one end of the spectrum, the appeal scheme would fall off the other end because it not only 'scrapes the bottom of the barrel' in term of technical standards and guidance but also goes below that.

The design attempts to do the impossible within the available road-space along Albion Road, and of course fails.

In summary, the parish council is not saying that there isn't some way to achieve safe and convenient access for pedestrians and cyclists between the proposed housing development and the village centre without also introducing avoidable hazards and delays to motor traffic using Albion Road.

However, we are saying that the appeal scheme clearly isn't the answer.

We therefore request the inspector to reject the appeal on the numerous grounds of road user safety (and also convenience) identified in our three representations and the additional 'critical issue' raised today.

Thank you, and if it would help the inspector, I would be happy to hand over these notes for the written record.