

Statement to Planning Appeal APP/N2345/A/12/2182325/NWF
Eileen Murray
Chairman Grimsargh Parish Council

My name is Eileen Murray, Chairman of Grimsargh Parish Council and I have come here to speak on behalf of the residents of Grimsargh who are united in our opposition to this particular development to the south of our Village.

We fully understand that there is a national need for houses. We also understand that there will always be an issue with people not wanting large developments on their doorsteps. That is why there is a planning process in place to determine from a strategic perspective the appropriate location and nature for development.

Grimsargh Parish Council has engaged wholeheartedly with the planning process, taking part in the consultations on the Central Lancashire Core Strategy and the Site Allocations process. We have greatly welcomed the resultant and now adopted Lancashire Core Strategy. Most particularly Policy 19 which we see clearly aims to preserve the rural identity of our village and seeks: "to ensure that those places at greatest risk of merging will be protected." Of all the villages in the area, Grimsargh is unarguably the one for which that phrase most applies.

The one remaining area of open countryside between lying directly between Grimsargh and Preston is small and as such is cherished by the residents of Grimsargh and we are passionate about keeping it intact. This proposed development is centred precisely on that narrow stretch of precious open countryside.

Hallam use the phrase both in their original planning application and appeal submissions describing the proposal as being "a sustainable extension to the city of Preston". There is little argument that could reasonably be made that the sustainability of the city of Preston would be harmed by the proposed development. It is our view, however, that the rural identity and very nature of the village of Grimsargh would be rendered entirely unsustainable by this proposal.

We are not against all development as a matter of course. The Parish Council review all proposals on merit. There have been applications for a number of small scale housing developments over the past couple of years within the village that have received no objections from us. Just last summer there was an application to build a number of houses on the land to the rear of the vicarage that came to the Parish Council for consideration. We weighed up the pros and cons of the scheme, listened to the applicants and formed the view that, on balance, it should proceed. In our engagement with the Sites for Preston consultation, leading to the Preferred Options Paper we held our own public meeting attended by 200 villagers and we engaged proactively with the residents to get fully updated with their latest views on local needs. We heard a significant level of opinion that it would be beneficial to have a small level of extra-care housing within the village. One of the identified sites, WB 2.1 includes such provision and therefore has received no objection from Grimsargh Parish Council.

It is this Hallam development on this site that we are wholly opposed to because of our palpable fears over the possibility of our Village merging with and becoming a suburb of Preston.

The land in question also has a considerable heritage value which I will leave to my colleague David Hindle to provide details on.

Now I know Hallam also raise the issue of the housing supply. The City Planning Officers have responded thoroughly on that one and I do not pretend to be fully up to date with the latest numbers.

I do know some simple facts, though. Firstly, to put a little context: around 20 years ago the land that Grimsargh comprises had around six hundred dwellings on it. The number now stands at just over one thousand. The maths is simple; that is a 67% increase. Some might say that we have done our bit! Secondly - just over the fields on the former Whittingham hospital site there is planning permission for a major development of 650 houses. The developer has just confirmed that building will start on that this year. That, together with the other on-going and pending developments in Longridge will certainly give a plentiful supply of housing in the immediate vicinity for the foreseeable future.

Those pending developments will certainly also exacerbate the already severe traffic congestion experienced on the main road (B6243) through Grimsargh. This road is recognised in "The Highways and Transportation Masterplan Framework for Central Lancashire" consultation document, only just this week published by Lancashire County Council, as being one of the "red" areas forecast to be highly congested both morning and evenings. There are no proposals in this consultation document to increase the highways capacity in this area. There is some mention of the route through the village becoming a "public transport priority corridor" which is laudable, but there is already a good bus service, so it is difficult to see how this will have any significant impact. We may want everyone to take the bus, but the reality of what is likely to transpire is somewhat different. The Highways Master Plan does contain options for significant highways development north of the city, where the Central Core Strategy is targeting the residential developments on the northern suburbs of the city.

The Core Strategy and the Highways Master Plan are coming together to strategically target the residential development for this region in those areas north of the city, not to the east of Preston where Grimsargh lies.

Now just to touch on Schools – it is well known locally that the two junior schools are full. This has just been confirmed in the recently published Lancashire County Council Document "Strategy for the Provision of School Places and School's Capital Investment", which shows both schools at capacity for the current year's intake. Indeed parents living in the village with children already at the schools have been told their toddlers may not be able to go to the same school as their siblings. Imagine the additional car journeys that will bring about on the school run!

In Summary:

The infrastructure will not support any further significant development in the area of our village – the traffic congestion is already severe and is definitely going to worsen with no prospect of relief from road improvements. The schools are full.

Most importantly - the protection of the rural nature of the village is of vital importance – as recognised in the planning policies and as embedded in the hearts of the residents of this village.

This development on this land would render insignificant the remaining separation of Grimsargh from Preston, heralding the loss of the village identity – forever.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to put forward our views.

Eileen Murray
Chairman Grimsargh Parish Council
8th January 2013