



Written Statement to the South Norfolk Village Clusters Housing Allocations Plan (VCHAP) Examination

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Introduction

As the Member of Parliament for Mid Norfolk, I have long championed the importance of preserving the unique rural character of our villages, including Wicklewood, Barford, and Barnham Broom. I am grateful for the opportunity to submit this statement to the VCHAP Examination, and I wish to reiterate the concerns I have raised publicly, both in correspondence and on social media, regarding the current housing proposals.

Having lived in and represented this area for many years, I am acutely aware of the value our villages hold—not just for those who live here, but for the wider Norfolk community. Our villages are cherished for their distinct identity, sense of place, and the close-knit communities they foster. It is vital that any new development respects and enhances these qualities, rather than undermining them.

I have consistently argued that:

- Development must be proportionate and sensitive to local context.
- Community voices must be at the heart of planning decisions.
- Deliverability and sustainability are paramount.

Impact on Local Infrastructure

The scale of development proposed in the VCHAP for Wicklewood, Barford, and Barnham Broom would place considerable strain on local infrastructure. Schools in these villages are already operating near or at capacity, and the influx of new families would risk overcrowding and reduced educational standards unless significant investment is made. Road networks, particularly in and around Barnham Broom and Wicklewood, are not designed to accommodate the increased traffic volumes that would result from large-scale housing developments. This raises serious concerns about road safety, congestion, and the adequacy of public transport links.

Furthermore, essential services such as drainage, utilities, and healthcare are likely to be stretched beyond their current limits, with delivery statements and site assessments indicating uncertainty about the feasibility, funding, and timing of

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necessary upgrades. Without robust, funded, and deliverable mitigation measures in place, these allocations risk undermining the quality of life for existing residents and jeopardizing the sustainability of village communities.

Barford (BAR2): Recreation Ground, Legal Concerns, and Flooding Issues

There is considerable public unease in Barford regarding the proposed development of 40 houses at the BAR2 site, which would result in the loss of valued recreation ground facilities. The recreation ground is a vital community asset, providing space for sports, leisure, and social gatherings, and its loss would have a deeply negative impact on village life and wellbeing.

Residents have expressed serious concerns about the lack of clarity over legal issues associated with changing the use of the recreation ground. Questions remain unresolved regarding ownership, covenants, and the legal process required to repurpose this land for housing. The absence of transparent information and community agreement on these matters creates significant uncertainty about the deliverability of the site and risks undermining trust in the planning process.

In addition, Barford continues to experience ongoing and unresolved flooding issues, which have affected homes and infrastructure for many years. The potential impact of a large-scale development on a single site may exacerbate these longstanding problems, increasing the risk of surface water flooding and placing further strain on already inadequate drainage systems. It is essential that these concerns are fully addressed and that no development proceeds without robust, evidence-based solutions to protect both new and existing residents.

Wicklewood: Impact of Development South of Hackford Road

I am deeply concerned about the proposed development of land to the south of Hackford Road in Wicklewood. This site occupies a prominent position in the landscape, and its development would cause irreversible damage to the open countryside that defines the village's character. The loss of cherished views and green space would fundamentally alter the visual experience for residents and visitors alike, undermining the sense of place that makes Wicklewood so special.

Furthermore, the unnecessary expansion of the settlement boundary to accommodate this development risks setting a precedent for further encroachment into the countryside, eroding the village's rural identity and putting additional pressure on local infrastructure. I urge the Examination to consider the long-term consequences of such expansion and to prioritise the protection of Wicklewood's landscape and community character.

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Barnham Broom Allocation at Bell Road (BB1)

I am particularly concerned about the proposed allocation at Bell Road (BB1) in Barnham Broom, which has generated considerable public outrage. The meadow at the centre of the village is a unique green space, highly valued by residents, and has even been suggested as a potential village green. The loss of this space would be a significant blow to the heart of the community and its rural character. Other sites in Barnham Broom have been universally favoured in preference to the meadow at Bell Road, and over 600 local residents have signed a petition urging that this site is not considered for the development being proposed in the VCHAP. This level of community response must be taken seriously, and I strongly urge the Examination to reconsider the allocation in light of local sentiment and the importance of preserving vital green spaces.

Housing Density Concerns

The proposed development at Bell Road (BB1) would result in an unusually high housing density for a rural village setting. According to the VCHAP, the site is expected to deliver 40 dwellings on a relatively small parcel of land. However, once the requirements for green space, road realignment, and other infrastructure are factored in, the actual area available for housing will be significantly reduced. This means the effective density of new homes could substantially exceed the headline figure, potentially reaching levels more typical of urban environments than rural Norfolk villages.

Such a concentration of housing is out of keeping with the established character of Barnham Broom, where homes are generally more spaced out and integrated with the landscape. High-density development on this scale risks creating a built environment that feels cramped and disconnected from the village's rural identity. It would also place additional pressure on local infrastructure—roads, drainage, schools, and utilities—which are not designed to support such intensive growth. The result could be a lasting negative impact on both the quality of life for residents and the visual appeal of the village.

Neighbourhood Planning

I am also pleased to note that neighbourhood planning in both Barford and Barnham Broom is progressing well. These locally-led initiatives represent a far better, community-driven approach to planning, ensuring that development is shaped by those who know and care most about the future of their villages. Neighbourhood plans offer a positive alternative to top-down allocations, and I encourage the Council and the Examination to support and prioritise these efforts.

In Conclusion

I urge the Examination to ensure that the final VCHAP reflects the principles of proportionality, sustainability, and genuine community engagement. Our villages must not be treated as mere numbers on a spreadsheet, but as living communities

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whose character and future deserve careful stewardship. I ask that my comments are considered as part of the official record, and that the concerns of local residents are given the weight they deserve in shaping the future of South Norfolk's villages.

Yours sincerely,

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