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To: <wendy@lelas.co.uk>  
Subject: my submission for the Ganges Inquiry  
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Proposed development at the former HMS Ganges, Shotley, Suffolk

Evidence for the Inquiry  
Inspectorate ref: APP/D3505/V/05/1185675

As a resident whose front room is 8.5 feet from the B1456 in Chelmondiston on the Shotley Peninsula, and who is also profoundly concerned that developments should not generate even more traffic movements in these times of dire warnings over climate change, I was appalled at the decision made by the Development Committee of Babergh District Council regarding Haylink's development proposals at Ganges. But I was equally appalled at the manner in which it was supposedly reached which had every appearance of having already been decided and was then justified on on the slightest of criteria. I was present at the time, and I was staggered that the committee, having heard the powerfully cogent speeches, much of it based on professional research, either then simply ignored it as though it hadn't been presented at all or dismiss the few points they did address on the 'evidence' of the vaguest, and unsubstantiated here-say on their part, or on (what turned out to be) apparently non-existent developments elsewhere.

Apart from giving rise to suspicions why such a blatant partiality was displayed by people in such a position of responsibility, the result was to trample on a whole list of critical criteria:

- it was a decision that ignored the expressed wishes of the overwhelming majority of people and all the parish councils on Peninsula.
- it was a decision based on an grossly inadequate accounting and assessment of the environmental impact.
- it was decision that just didn't take into account a scheme that is contrary to national and regional planning policy.
- it was a decision that flew in the face of the County Council's recommendation that other, more imaginative schemes relevant to the site should be considered, but if were to go ahead that it should be restricted to no more (i.e. preferably less) than 200 homes.

- it was a decision that ignored the recommendation of Babergh's Head of Planning to reject it on (un)sustainability grounds, the actual meaning of which many committee members appeared grossly - whether through ignorance or intent - to misinterpret.
- it was a decision that failed Babergh's duty to 'preserve and enhance' conservation areas in Chelmondiston and Woolverstone.
- Just the fact that it granted the permission without addressing any mitigation measures, is, I suspect, highly indicative of unreasonable, if not doubtful, motives behind this decision. There was no concern whatsoever for the wider impact at all, which only too closely reflected the developer's parameters.

Therefore I object to the above application, having similarly objected in the recent past to Babergh DC officers and elected councillors a number of times, to the Development Committee members of Babergh DC, to Suffolk County Council members and officers and to our MP, Mr Tim Yeo.

My objection relates to several layers of real concern, personal, governmental and global:

1. I have probably the most personal reason to object: my main room being just over 8 feet from the edge of the B1456 at Chelmondiston, and traffic is already at a stressful level. The development is at the end of a long B road, which will funnel all the substantial additional traffic past my little cottage's windows, and past a number of other houses directly fronting onto the road. This would also directly impact me professionally as a full-time musician. Sound is the currency of my work and I actually have to use the front room for my professional needs - for recording with a grand piano for which there is no alternative place. When I bought the property in 1998 I took this into consideration, planning to take sufficient remedial measures, such as extra glazing. However both increases in levels of general traffic and in regular lorry and tractor movements have been of a totally unexpected and significant degree and I have had to install 4 sheets of glass in the windows that front onto the road, plus use several blankets over them when recording, which together with the reduction in slack traffic periods has a significant effect on my ability to operate according to pressing production timetables. As I describe below it also has a mentally wearing effect on my ability to focus and work. The prospect of very increased levels of traffic is simply a nightmare prospect for me both personally and professionally, even if I was financially able to make such massive investments in the property and if it were possible to counter these direct effects sufficiently. But I am neither in no such position nor would it make sense. It would be a wasted investment given the reason for it - noise - would itself undermine the investment due to a reduction in market of my property and consequently of its market value.

Last year I took two recordings of traffic outside my cottage, one from a distance 8 feet back from the kerb, mid-evening on a Wednesday (copies of which I sent to district councillors and district and county council officers) down the side of the cottage at least shows how loud and often continuous it is just a few feet back from my front room.

(The second recording was taken in my back garden, approximately 25 meters from the road, because of the rum contrast between the bird and the unremitting noise of traffic). However these don't register the low frequency engine 'boom' and vibration, often topped by lorry 'clatter' that is so wearing.

Try to imagine the current level of noise and vibration blaring through a loudspeaker 8.5 feet from your front room, let alone the large step increases this development will bring:

- regularly enveloped by engine noise, vibrating rumble and road noise which goes through one's body and head;

- being regularly dosed by noxious fumes (which eventually get through into the living room) from lorry engines kept running temporarily parked outside while drivers

shop at the Chinese takeaway and Orwell Stores next door - and thus causing traffic back-ups waiting to pass the parked vehicles; be frequently prevented from loading

one's vehicle with equipment for work - being a professional musician;

- to be in constant general fear that a driver loses control and plough into one's house, with consequent dangers for people inside, (the cottage stands exposed 30' from of

the shop frontages next door almost to the road) or one's vehicle or oneself while loading at the roadside;

- not to be able to open windows during much of the day and be effectively house-bound, unable to sit in the garden due to the noise and vibration;

- to be wondering what effect from stress and fumes these phenomena has on mental and physical health. (German scientists' research shows that this pollution can bring

on heart attacks within an hour).

This is the current situation - so try to imagine, with me, the scale of such impacts with the scale and nature of the proposed development. It's strange that the Officers who

visited the area failed to take up the offers, including mine, to visit the homes and experience the circumstances of those who live daily with the B1456 outside

- to experience living in an area where a group of dwellings on either side of the road some of whose frontages actually form the border of the road surface, the actual

area used by vehicles, making even walking out of some properties here an extremely edgy and hazardous experience.

All these effects would necessarily grow massively should this application be granted. And the thought of the extra HGV traffic regularly passing my property during the long

construction period is just dire. It would make living and working here a misery and, the fear is, actually inoperable, given the work I do.

Yet there's been no sense or concern of what the living reality would be, despite the fact that is precisely everyone's reason for whatever they do and the choices they make.

Instead, in support of the application, the nominal capacity of the road has been used - and even that is directly disputed by an independent report. So when it comes to

people benefitting from a scheme when they themselves do not have to face this potential impact on the quality of their lives, including on the structure of their homes, the

value of their homes and consequent financial insecurity, or the air they breathe, suddenly such values which would be a priority for them, in common with everyone else, go

out of the window in favour of tactical and strategic manouvres to get what is wanted, not least by means of disingenuously narrowing the parameters down to considerations

of 'road capacity' and then stretching the definitions of what this might be to its limit whilst ignoring everything that contradicts it or shows the bigger picture.

If those in Haylink, as individuals, were to face such calamity for themselves, I don't think there's any doubt that they wouldn't see things in the wider perspective that I do.

Or would they suddenly become uncharacteristically (given the cause of the issue here) self-sacrificing in the way they are in fact asking me to be, for their sake?

It's not that Haylink isn't aware of the issue of the impact of traffic: it does actually address it in its presentation, but only by restricting its comments to the immediate vicinity of the site and ignoring the greater number of residents who live beyond the immediate vicinity of the development upon whom resulting levels of traffic would have a far greater impact. Shotley Gate, where the Ganges site is situated, will be the peaceful end of this road.

In such circumstances Council Tax-paying residents look to their councils to consider the bigger picture, which, after a lot of hard campaigning eventually emerged in some

quarters: but it is a sad fact that for much of the time residents did not see this reflected where it should have been and that if it hadn't been the initiative of the parish

councils on the Shotley peninsula in commissioning an independent report, promoted and supported by residents such as myself there simply wouldn't have been the the

radically different perspective to Haylink's traffic figures and criteria, or a proper environmental considerations beyond the borders of the Ganges site.

2. Nevertheless, under Section 106 the developers are required to agree to some measures in mitigation for impacts further afield. But they are only likely to make things

intolerable in different ways:

- as far as this village of Chelmondiston was concerned, the proposal was, to quote: (to)'provide a range of traffic management measures in Chelmondiston (subject to local

consultation) including: - gateway features, vehicle activated speed warning signs and carriageway surface treatment at Church Road/Main Road junction'. That this was

audaciously put forward as worthy of serious consideration was breath-taking.

The scale of the development and its effects simply has no relationship to the scale of these

proposed 'mitigations'. The latter proposal relates to a tiny area of the village (even if it were effective which remains unspecified) at that point. As a set of measures they

are woefully cosmetic in nature, heavily appearing simply to be tokenism.

- Whatever traffic control measures that could be put in place would not actually reduce the amount of vehicles/noise/fumes/vibration going past my window. Traffic

calming measures may slow down traffic, but whenever there is a slight holdup on the road at present tailbacks already readily result, and this produces more standing

pollution, more delayed and stationary engine noise, a lot more revving. Indeed in a relatively recent experiment in traffic calming in nearby Brantham the standing pollution

and noise was such that the residents forced the council to pull up all the road structures put there to control the traffic.

- Section 106 would be a further and significant step in the urbanisation of the rural nature of the village. The character of Chelmondiston is at the moment a real community that works by interacting on the street. Real communities create social viability and stability - something Babergh regularly promotes as being at the centre of its values. Are those values just PR - expendable when it comes to it? The thin of this wedge in Chelmondiston would be an increase in the difficulty for residents to access the main road which would give rise to demands for increasing traffic control measures - possibly leading eventually to roundabouts, lights, lane markings and possibly street lights. Such developments and changes in character then become the precedent, dynamic and justification for a cycle of ever more development until villages become more like depersonalised towns, complete with all the attendant alienated social problems (I've watched this happen in my home village (as was) in Leicestershire). Such problems in Chelmondiston are largely nipped in the bud because of the close interpersonal nature of life in a village. I should know - I live right at the centre of it, and know for my personal security how vital it is to keep hold of such a social asset. It is how I handle it and survive here.

- The proposal to restrict times of HGV construction traffic and the suggestion that some of it could be diverted to boats is simply ludicrous. Any increase on present levels is hardly tolerable to my living and working here, but is it really being denied that the increase wouldn't be significant, and for most of the (my) working day?

However, what is worthy of consideration and to be taken very, very seriously is a proposal that interestingly was alone often quoted in communications to me from councils and councillors from early on in this saga (and now forms part of Haylink's Section 106 proposals), namely an upgrading of the Shotley foot ferry. It has been frequently stated that upgrading the foot ferry would (only) take traffic away from the Shotley Peninsula, and no consideration it would also bring traffic to Shotley (!) yet there has been complete refusal on the part of anyone official to talk about this, let alone explain it. My question about it was blatantly avoided by the officers referring to the question as a statement and that they don't respond to statements. Which serves to further increase suspicion that increasing development potential is the real reason behind it and that it is well realised that it would have further significant traffic impacts on the Peninsula, as port development has on the marshes and mudflats around Harwich and Felixtowe. Yet it's in the public domain that Haven Gateway sees this whole area as a unique opportunity for development because of the proximity of the ports of Felixtowe, Harwich, Mistley and Ipswich. They were commenting as such at the upgrading of the foot ferry, saying that it is part of their vision for the development between these ports. It's hardly beyond belief that development companies are not wise to, indeed are not part of this agenda, see Shotley and the Shotley Peninsula right in the middle of it, and

haven't been planning it in. I'm not a developer and it's obvious to me from a developmental view. So, there can be no inbuilt off-switch to this developmental dynamic, that will decide that traffic pressures will only (ever) be from Shotley to Harwich, and not also vice versa through to Ipswich. There is nothing special here which goes against all developmental trends elsewhere that dictates that accommodating developmental pressures only creates more demand for development. All logic in the Haven Gateway scenario says that the ferry, like the marshes and flats around Felixtowe and Harwich will be subject to the same intense pressures to constantly upgrade and develop, so overwhelmingly obvious all around us already. As such the B1456 would be a future primary route for an impossible amount of traffic, and by not being willing to change transport attitudes to this road now leaves minds open to arguments for an overwhelming need to accommodate even larger transport pressures in the future. Now is the time to call a halt and look at alternatives.

It is equally puzzling that the Officers should have suggested that the few commercial units will also soak up any significant degree of traffic movement - the idea being that it will keep jobs local. How real can this be actually? If the development were to have a telling reducing effect on a need to travel out of the area there would have to be a sufficiently large commercial development to also draw traffic to it, including commercial. Unless, of course, they were highly self-sufficient - not likely given the increasingly outdated values (see below) underpinning the application. So where, realistically, are all these extra people going to obtain their incomes? By travelling in their vastly increased numbers in and out of the peninsula each day, along the B1456. Obviously so.

The number of houses envisaged, even by SCC, is grossly disproportionate in one place to the amount the government wishes Babergh to build. But even then, this is not just any old 'one place' - it's down the end of a long single road, in and out. It's particularly inappropriate as a soak for the housing target. So why is it being considered at all in these terms? - in relation to this the term 'brownfield site' is banded around. Why? It isn't a purely brown-field site - it is a partial brown-field site. It might cold-bloodedly get some of the housing allocation off Babergh's books - 60 or so over one year's worth - but the last figures I saw was that in the UK there are 224,000 second homes which is roughly equivalent to the official number of homeless families and single people. What it certainly does do though is to help ensure and reassure the construction industry that are to be more houses from which to profit yet further from.

- Increased bus services/cycling are referred to but we know that they don't have a record of increased usage as set against increases in car use. I cycle along the B1456 daily, in ever-increasing trepidation as drivers in a hurry take greater risks with my life as squeeze past me ever closer and faster. What of cycling with massive increases in traffic? Lack of bus use could well result in withdrawal at a later date, so negating this as an argument for section 106.

Given these considerations, I am not alone in having constantly wondered why Haylink would have had even the faintest hope, let alone enough confidence to spend a large amount of time and money lodging an application in the first place, let alone buying the site with such a scheme in mind. What reassurance must they have had to have thought it definitely worth going ahead - so that the Council then 'has to consider all applications' - to quote that oft-repeated phrase? What were the nature of the early discussions? What was Haylink given to understand? When? At what stage in relation to the Local Plan? I've asked and have had no logical, detailed let alone enlightening, persuasive, answer and again I was hardly alone in being puzzled by both this whole circumstance, and by the shortness of responses. The answer eventually came from the Haylink representative at Babergh Development Committee meeting at Shotley Village Hall when they complained that they had been promised that if they put together an new proposal, which they now had done, they would get a sympathetic response from the council (the officers subsequently recommended rejection on grounds of lack of sustainability).

3. It's not that aren't many other possibilities for the site that wouldn't entail a traffic explosion, and many have been suggested, but with no response or real debate. Why? The SCC Executive Committee stated that other, more imaginative and appropriate uses should be considered. In my previous letters of objection I drew attention to the dreadful dangers we face from global warming. We are in the process of burning up and decimating global ecosystems upon which we actually and finally depend. The reason is developments that build in more consumption of fossil fuel and other resources. Professor James Lovelock states that we have 20 years before the system flips and goes into a runaway 'positive feedback' loop ie self-destruction. New reports pointing this up in black and white terms are being published at ever faster rates. One of the latest, 'Forecasting the Future', from the Energy Savings Trust, echoes precisely the Chief Scientist and scientists working in the field who I quoted. Philip Sellwood, the EST's chief executive, says that 'without a drastic reduction in energy use, emissions of carbon dioxide - one of the main contributors to climate change - could bring disastrous results for East Anglia'. Drier summers could turn areas of agricultural land into dustbowls and dry out wetland wildlife habitat. It urges people to turn down thermostats, use energy-saving lightbulbs and reduce car use (my italics). Carbon has never exceeded 275 parts per million (ppm) in history before 19th century. It has increased from 315 to 378 since the 19th century and is now increasing 2 ppm every year.

Developments that assume and build in present energy patterns (the vast majority), including vehicle use, will have no future, and are a missed opportunity to establish patterns that do have a future ie as fully self sustainable as can be achieved, and not just light (accommodating) administrative interpretations definitions of sustainability that get banded around.

There is no more important phenomenon and issue that we face and it is the consequence of exponentially growing development and corporate single-minded and tunnelled focus on ever larger returns. There is a built-in assumption that endless and increasing rate of development is somehow natural, inevitable and right. But it's an assumption that assumes infinite elbow room to expand and for the ecological system to adapt, both of which are logically nonsense. We only can make that assumption because we still can, not that it's got anywhere to go. It hasn't - and a central reason is the exponential burning of fossil fuels. It is absolutely vital therefore that that planning decisions play a central role in bearing down on traffic movement by reducing the need to travel as much as possible. Not to do so would show a level of irresponsibility massively beyond that of teenage vandals it's much easier to get so worked up about. And housing at whatever level, particularly at Ganges is, by definition an increase in traffic, the more housing, the more traffic. The Haylink proposal embodies this. Unfortunately wasteful and profligate energy use is the norm for development companies in the UK, yet they are actively promoted through the corporate interlinks with national, regional and local government (the DOE's Construction Sponsorship Directorship, for example, and its intention to 'speed up' the planning process in response to 'business need' and that regional planning should be 'business led', and the hazy concept of planning gains which can frequently border on planning buying, and in some cases well beyond). This means values other than needs of both the local people and the environment increasingly comes first with token nods to these other considerations - when it should be the other way round.

Babergh, along with many other councils, is failing its government targets on energy. If this site is not suitable for Haylink's business then as the site was passed to them, then it should be passed onto something and someone more constructive. Environmental degradation critically affects everyone, not just locally, and all development should be seen in such terms. Sustainability, once a peripheral word, now in easy and constant use, to mean even the totally unsustainable, has meaning only when it wholly sustainable i.e. self-supporting. Endless development which demands yet more resource and creates more environmental impact, is by definition, unsustainable. The site, with its openness to prevailing winds, open skies (boasted about in Haylink's PR literature) and surrounded by strong tides is ideal makes it ideal for an energy farm, thus resolving, not just reducing, any impact both globally and locally (with little need to draw traffic and makes demands on local resources) whilst contributing to the current community. This site is not a problem but an opportunity and a special resource given the rise and increasing desirability of of micro-generators, wind, solar, voltaic and indeed tidal.

Taking all the above factors it is clear that this development is just part of this unsustainability, another step in the ongoing development of the whole area, which disregards environment and people within it. What does it take to even try to pass off the few shallow cosmetic measures proposed under section 106 as meeting these concerns?

Cheap one-off for Haylink. Permanently expensive for nearly everyone and everything else.

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Sunday, January 15, 2006

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