

14 Meadowgate  
Urmston  
Lancs.  
M41 9LB

20<sup>th</sup> July 2021

Trafford Council  
Planning and Development - f.a.o. Mr T. Parkinson  
Trafford Town Hall  
Talbot Road  
Stretford  
M32 0TH

Dear Sir,

**Re: Planning Application number 105019/FUL/21 (Meadowgate Farm, Cob Kiln Lane, Urmston)**

Thank you for your letter of 9<sup>th</sup> July concerning the above planning application.

We write to **Object** to this new application to build a children's nursery on land at Meadowgate Farm, Cob Kiln Lane, Urmston M41 9JT. We are local residents whose property adjoins the subject site. The boundary is the centreline of the Old Eea Brook.

Our principal concerns are: the impact on the Green Belt; the increased risk of flooding; noise; and the additional traffic that would be generated.

### **Demolition of existing buildings**

The only satisfactory part of this application is the proposal to demolish the main shed, "an unattractive industrial building" (to quote from the applicants' Design and Access Statement). You will recall that this was built without planning consent in the late 1990s and only retrospectively approved by the council in 1999 (application H/48070).

### **Green Belt**

The application land is sited within a designated Green Belt area. The applicant's ground for removing the land from the Green Belt appears to be the notion that a purpose-built children's nursery will be more attractive than the existing steel-clad warehouse and stables. That is a matter of opinion, and some people might agree with it, but it is not a justification for development of Green Belt land. The main building will be much larger in area than the existing warehouse. With the car parking and drop-off area it would expand the developed area and increase the urban feel and appearance. It would make this part of Urmston Meadows an extension of the town rather than the gateway to public open space and the Mersey Valley.

For development within the Green Belt to be approved, applicants need to demonstrate "very

special circumstances” (to quote from the National Planning Policy Framework<sup>1</sup>). They have not done so. There are already many existing nurseries in the town. The website [daynurseries.co.uk](http://daynurseries.co.uk) lists no fewer than thirty within three miles of our town.<sup>2</sup> This list is not comprehensive and does not even include the nearest to Cob Kiln Lane: “Cheeky Cherubs” on Higher Road<sup>3</sup>, which is less than half a mile away from the application site.

In our opinion this application fails to demonstrate any need for another nursery, or any other special circumstances.

We note also that, unlike the previous proposal, this application seeks to clear away all equestrian and dog training activities, and replace them with “areas of wildflower meadow” and “a community orchard”. These are superficially attractive but it is not clear how they would be maintained, nor who would have access to them. It leaves open the possibility of additional inappropriate building as a second phase of development.

*If the Council should feel minded to approve the application, then the landscaping should be made a condition of approval, along with a timescale and a clear commitment to making those parts of the site publicly accessible.*

## **Flooding**

The applicants’ Flood Risk Assessment has, sensibly, been revised from the document that accompanied the previous application for this project. It acknowledges the extensive flooding of the site that occurred on 20<sup>th</sup> January this year, but still concludes that the site is “acceptable for development” (page 25).

Furthermore, the main mitigation measure has not changed from the earlier proposal. The Flood Risk Assessments for the original proposal and the present proposal both state that “fluvial flooding should be mitigated through the setting of nursery finished floor levels to be a minimum of 18.30m AOD, 300mm above the existing ground level of the proposed building footprint”<sup>4</sup>. Had the nursery been already built in January, with a floor level of 18.30m AOD, it would have been flooded.<sup>5</sup>

We note from pages 46 and 49 of the Flood Risk Assessment that, according to the Environment Agency, “there are no flood defences in the vicinity of the site” and that the Agency does “not have any plans to undertake works” on the north bank of the River Mersey which was overtopped in January.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/13-protecting-green-belt-land>, paragraph 143

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.daynurseries.co.uk/day\\_nursery\\_search\\_results.cfm/searchtown/Urmston#locations-top](https://www.daynurseries.co.uk/day_nursery_search_results.cfm/searchtown/Urmston#locations-top)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cheekycherubscommunitylearningcentre.org>

<sup>4</sup> Page 24 of the original document, page 25 of the replacement document

<sup>5</sup> We do not know the level at which the water peaked overnight. By the following morning the water was falling rapidly, assisted by fire engine pumps. The snow line and the movement of leaves, timber and footballs showed us how far the water had penetrated in our garden – over ten metres from the bank of the brook. We could also see how high the remaining water was where it covered Cob Kiln Lane. Here the spot height is generally 18.13 to 18.15 metres AOD. The water, despite the efforts of the Fire Brigade, still reached about a foot or 300mm up our Wellington boots. This suggests that the water level at that stage was 18.43 metres, or more than five inches above the proposed nursery floor level.

We conclude that this site will flood again, and with climate change accelerating, this will occur sooner rather than later. After all, this is a flood plain. Its function is to soak up flood water that would otherwise threaten populated areas.

The building, at whatever height its floor levels are set, will still increase the impermeable surface area of the site compared with the present rather basic barn. It is difficult to discern the precise dimensions of the proposed nursery building from the available plans, which are not in a format that allows for scaling up, but it appears to be roughly twice the size of the existing warehouse.

If the capacity and speed of uptake of the flood plain is reduced, the water will find somewhere else to flood. On the night of 20<sup>th</sup> January, the most vulnerable place was Northenden, some 4½ miles away as the crow flies and very roughly 7 miles upstream along the course of the river. Here the highest recorded level of the river is 3.27m above site datum of 26.36m, i.e. 29.63m AOD. That level was reached on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2021.<sup>6</sup>

Fortunately for everyone, and particularly the residents of Northenden who had to be evacuated from their homes, the rain turned to snow in the evening. Snow takes time to melt and so the run-off to drains and water courses was slowed, or else the peak water levels would have been higher. The Environment Agency subsequently “confirmed the waterway was just 2cm away from disaster”.<sup>7</sup>

This was an unusual event, but prolonged heavy rain and consequent flooding are becoming more common in the UK as a result of climate change. The flood plains in the Mersey Valley are necessary to protect housing and businesses on low lying ground elsewhere.

## **Noise**

We have no objection in principle to the sound of children playing, but this proposal is for as many as 115 pre-school children. In our experience these youngsters are gifted with powerful lungs and given to shrieking out at unpredictable moments. Trees between the site and our property will dissipate some of the noise, but our home is built on much higher ground than the nursery would be. We feel that much of the noise would simply sail over and around any barrier of trees.

There is also the noise from car traffic to consider, particularly as vehicles stop and start to negotiate what will still be a very narrow road (Cob Kiln Lane) and the crossroads where the lane meets Meadowgate and Meadow Road.

## **Traffic impact**

Our fourth objection is to the impact of additional traffic from the development, which would have just one point of access for motor vehicles. The two ends of Meadowgate are already a pair of cul-de-sacs, and motor vehicles can only enter or leave via Stretford Road.

The applicants’ Transport Statement argues that this proposal involves less traffic than the

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<sup>6</sup> <https://flood-warning-information.service.gov.uk/station/5101>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/thousands-homes-were-just-2cm-19670842>

previous one, on the grounds that it would cater for slightly fewer children (a reduction of 10) and the stables would be demolished.<sup>8</sup>

Nonetheless, an increase in traffic would be inevitable, and it would be concentrated in the morning and evening commuting hours. Unlike the traffic to the stables, these cars would mostly be making two way journeys – they would not park up on site but return and, most probably, continue to or from a parent’s home or place of work. In contrast, and from our own observations, the motor vehicle traffic associated with the stables is spread throughout the day and the week. Of course there would also be delivery vans, refuse collection lorries, tradesmen’s vans, and on occasion, emergency vehicles.

The existing junction of Meadow Road, Meadowgate and Cob Kiln Lane is difficult to negotiate, in part because of the constricted width of Cob Kiln Lane. Not all drivers visiting the farm and the Tack & Feed shop notice the road markings or understand the order of priority here. The “main road” is Meadow Road to/from the east end of Meadowgate, with give way lines on the west end of Meadowgate and on Cob Kiln Lane, or properly speaking, the southern part of Meadow Road. Since the southern part of this road is so narrow, with limited room for two vehicles to pass, the usual practice is for southbound vehicles to wait at the crossroads while northbound vehicles move up towards them. This of course blocks the crossroads. It is particularly inconvenient for large delivery vans and refuse lorries, which are unable to turn within the width of Meadowgate and so reverse across the junction in order to complete a three point turn.

The idea of creating extra passing space on Cob Kiln Lane by cutting back vegetation is helpful but vegetation invariably grows back. We doubt that the Council’s resources are sufficient to keep the tall, bushy hedges in order throughout the growing season.

The vehicular approach to Stretford Road from Meadow Road is already very problematic for residents, who have to view at least 7 turnings onto this main thoroughfare before crossing it on foot or in a vehicle. If the plans for the nursery are approved, they would increase traffic on Meadow Road to the detriment of current users. Those people who might be able to walk to the nursery would find crossing the main road with very young children a considerable challenge. The appearance of fast moving vehicles coming round the bend from the Church Road traffic lights can be something of a shock.

We note from the Transport Statement that “no accidents were recorded in the study area during the 5-year study period”. This is true, according to the Crash Map website<sup>9</sup>. However, the years cited include the pandemic year of 2020, a particularly quiet year for any kind of pedestrian or vehicle movement, other than delivery vans. Accidents by their nature do not occur at regular intervals but are liable to cluster. The Crash Map website tells us that four incidents were recorded in the five years ending in 2015, involving seven vehicles and five casualties. In the past 22 years, the longest period available to study, there were 16 incidents involving 32 vehicles and 20 casualties, all involving Stretford Road and the staggered junction with Gloucester Road and Meadow Road. The good news is that they were all classed as “slight” rather than “serious” or “fatal”. Nevertheless, this is to our minds a rather less “enviable accident record”.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Page 3, paragraph 1.6

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.crashmap.co.uk/Search>

<sup>10</sup> Page 9, paragraph 2.18

Perhaps we have all become more careful in the last five years. Perhaps some of us have simply been deterred from using the roads at busy times.

Commendable efforts are made by the applicants to encourage walking and cycling, by planning facilities such as a footpath and bicycle stands. However, the conclusion we draw from the Walking Accessibility Isochrone<sup>11</sup> is that walking and cycling would be maximized by locating the nursery in the centre of the built-up area, not on its fringe. The 400 metre radius would then cover a full circle of homes, not just a north facing semi-circle.

The assessment also highlights the close proximity of National Cycle Route 62 (the TransPennine Trail). Our experience of walking and cycling through Urmston Meadows and along this path is that it is attractive in good weather, less so in bad weather. Unlike highways it becomes extremely muddy in wet weather and for prolonged periods following heavy rain. Unlike highways it is unlit after dark. It is unlikely to appeal to members of staff in the depths of winter.

*If the Council is minded to approve the application we would suggest that improvements be made to the highway:*

- 1) Re-ordering of priorities at the crossroads of Meadow Road and Meadowgate
- 2) Resurfacing of Meadow Road
- 3) Extension of peak hour waiting restrictions at the north end of Meadow Road, to allow for the additional traffic queuing to join Stretford Road, and traffic joining Meadow Road from Stretford Road
- 4) Building a new "Pelican" crossing for pedestrians, to link Meadow Road and Gloucester Road

Please note also that, before the Covid pandemic, Cob Kiln Lane and Public Footpath no. 53 were heavily used on Monday mornings by the Urmston Meadows Walking Group.<sup>12</sup> These walks have been suspended during the pandemic but they used to attract well over a hundred people. There were different walks for people of different abilities but they all began at the same point (St Clement's Church) and at the same time (10.15 a.m.) and would usually set off along Cob Kiln Lane. Any increase in vehicular traffic along this narrow lane would have a negative impact on these walkers as well as cyclists.

Finally, we would draw your attention to the considerable numbers of Urmston people who rediscovered the Meadows during lockdown, as one of very few options for exercise and walking when travel was discouraged. If it were not for Government advice on social distancing and minimising interaction with other people, we would have asked these people to sign a petition against the plans for the nursery. We feel sure that many, many people would have signed, and in even greater numbers than for the petition against plans for housing in 2018<sup>13</sup>.

Yours faithfully,  
Mrs S. L. Tracy  
Mr N. J. Worthington  
(both residents of 14 Meadowgate, Urmston)

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<sup>11</sup> Page 13, paragraph 4.1

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.walkingforhealth.org.uk/content/monday-meet-10am-urmston-meadows-walking-group>

<sup>13</sup> Withdrawn application 93241/OUT/17