

From: Clerk@dockingparishcouncil.gov.uk
Sent: 06 July 2026 14:08
To: 'Hannah Wood-Handy'
Cc: 'Stuart Ashworth'
Subject: RE: Request for Assistance Regarding Serious Concerns Arising from Freebridge Housing Development

Hi Hannah,#

The two concerns that Council is raising are:

- a) Freebridge stated within its application that it had the support of the Parish Council, despite never approaching the Council to seek or obtain that support.
- b) Freebridge sought to influence the Parish Council's position by presenting the local connection as conditional upon the Council supporting the application, implying that the local connection could be withdrawn if that support was not forthcoming.

The Parish Council's concern is not simply Freebridge's conduct, but the effect this may have had on the planning process. If the Borough Council has been led to believe that the Parish Council supported the application when it did not, or if similar representations have been made elsewhere, this could have influenced the assessment of the application.

As the Local Planning Authority, Council I under the impression it is for the Borough Council to determine whether information submitted in support of a planning application is accurate and whether any material considerations have been misrepresented.

For that reason, this matter that cannot simply be referred back to Freebridge, as the concern relates to the integrity of the information relied upon during the planning process. And Borough Council's awareness of these issues is crucial for fair decision for sustainable development.

Kind regards,
Annalisa

From: Hannah Wood-Handy <Hannah.Wood-Handy@West-Norfolk.gov.uk>
Sent: 03 July 2026 17:22
To: 'clerk@dockingparishcouncil.gov.uk' <clerk@dockingparishcouncil.gov.uk>
Cc: Stuart Ashworth <stuart.ashworth@west-norfolk.gov.uk>
Subject: FW: Request for Assistance Regarding Serious Concerns Arising from Freebridge Housing Development

Dear Annalisa

I refer to your recent correspondence with Stuart Ashworth and your further clarification (also dated 11th June 2026) that Points 2 and 3 are matters for Freebridge to consider and not the Borough Council.

With regard to point 1, I appreciate that you have concerns regarding the way that this application has been presented to the Parish Council. However, that is also a matter for Freebridge to answer. In terms of the planning issues, if the application was submitted as a Rural Exception Site i.e. as an exception to normal planning rules, we would expect that the site is reasonably related to the existing settlements and amenities, local affordable housing need is evidenced (as it has been) and the scheme be genuinely affordable housing led in accordance with Policy LP28. As part of that process, consultation would occur with the Parish Council and support gained. That way, local connection criteria (at Parish level) can be guaranteed in perpetuity.

However, there is also another route given that the site is adjacent to an existing development boundary of a Key Rural Service Centre in that Policy LP02 supports residential development of up to 25 dwellings outside but adjoining development boundaries (subject to relevant criteria being met). In such cases, only 20% affordable housing provision can be secured, and no local connection criteria can be applied. It would appear from the very submission of this application (as evidenced in their Planning Statement) that Freebridge has chosen the latter route but are still committed to providing full affordable housing albeit only 20% can be secured via legal agreement. In planning terms, this is still fully acceptable and in accordance with local plan policy, but I accept that the Parish Council is disappointed in that approach and would prefer to see guaranteed local connection criteria applied. Freebridge has stated within their documentation that a local lettings policy could apply (rented homes only) but that is a voluntary mechanism and cannot be secured via the planning application.

I hope that I have clarified the planning issues.

Kind regards

Hannah

Hannah Wood-Handy, Planning Control Manager – Environment & Planning

Tel: 01553 616734



From: Clerk@dockingparishcouncil.gov.uk <Clerk@dockingparishcouncil.gov.uk>

Sent: Thursday, June 11, 2026 09:51

To: Stuart Ashworth <stuart.ashworth@west-norfolk.gov.uk>

Subject: Request for Assistance Regarding Serious Concerns Arising from Freebridge Housing Development

[External Email]

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Dear Stuart,

Following recent events relating to a Freebridge Housing development in Docking, the Parish Council is writing to request assistance in addressing a number of serious concerns that have arisen during the planning process and in relation to ongoing housing management by Freebridge within the parish. These concerns are set out below.

1. Freebridge conduct, strategy and engagement in relation to the Docking planning application
 - a. That Freebridge Housing stated there was Parish Council support for the scheme in order to progress the application, at a stage when no consultation had taken place and no such support had been given, and that the application proceeded on the basis of that false representation
 - b. That following the Council's objection, Freebridge Housing stated that the Council had changed its position despite no prior consultation having taken place, and implied that the Council had not properly understood nor competently engaged with the planning documents
 - c. That the scheme would not proceed with a local housing allocation or local occupancy approach for Docking unless Parish Council support was secured, and that if Parish Council support was not given, housing would instead be prioritised on a borough-wide basis and Docking would not be prioritised within that approach, thereby placing pressure on the Parish Council in relation to its response
 - d. That it was also stated that, had the Parish Council not supported the project, it would not have proceeded, but that it was also stated that, due to investment already made, it was "too late" to undo the application, and that Freebridge Housing would not reverse its position based on a false representation of Parish Council support. There is no record of any such support having been given (nor even having been consulted prior to the first objection).
 - e. Concerns are raised regarding the reliance on the local housing needs survey used to support the scheme, including questions as to its independence and impartiality in circumstances where the land had already been identified by Freebridge and the survey was commissioned and funded by Freebridge
 - i. That the interpretation of the survey findings appears flawed; so that reported demand may not represent net additional housing need where respondents are existing Freebridge tenants seeking to move within the existing housing stock, resulting in internal transfers rather than new housing demand and potential vacancies elsewhere within the system
 - ii. that expressions of preference to live in Docking may reflect desirability rather than demonstrable housing need in a settlement with limited employment, education provision and public transport, raising questions as to whether the evidence provides a sound and reliable basis for the scale and location of the proposed development
 - iii. That recent developments in the area have not been filled fully locally (for example Brancaster with 2 from Kings Lynn rather than all local need and where residents from Docking would have been closer and better fulfilled the local need restriction) along with ongoing empty Freebridge properties in Docking.
2. Management of existing Freebridge housing stock
 - a. The Council continues to receive repeated complaints from residents regarding Freebridge housing within the parish, including:
 - i. reports of drug-related activity within certain estates
 - ii. reports of an social behaviour affecting housing areas
 - iii. concerns regarding poor property condition, including damp, mould, and inadequate heating provision
 - iv. delays in repair response, including heating failures during winter periods
 - v. concerns that properties are not being maintained to an acceptable standard of habitability
 - vi. concerns that some properties have remained empty for extended periods, which raises questions regarding the accuracy of stated housing need and allocation pressure within the area
 - vii. concerns that properties have in some cases been allowed to fall into such disrepair that Freebridge Housing has indicated they are no longer economical to repair and may be sold or disposed of rather than retained and refurbished to meet ongoing housing need, with the Parish Council considering this approach to be inappropriate in the context of declared housing demand

3. Communication and responsiveness: The Council is also concerned about the handling of concerns raised by residents, including
 - a. delayed or inadequate responses to complaints
 - b. lack of clear resolution following reporting of issues
 - c. failure to engage meaningfully with residents raising serious concerns
 - d. loss of confidence in complaints handling and escalation processes

Request for assistance The Parish Council would be grateful for assistance in reviewing and addressing the matters set out above, and for consideration of appropriate responses where relevant.

Given the seriousness of the issues raised, the Council respectfully requests that this correspondence be treated as a formal escalation.

A written response would be appreciated within a reasonable timeframe.

Yours faithfully,

Annalisa

Clerk/ Responsible Financial Officer: DockingParish Council.

Please be aware that the clerk role is part time and the inbox not monitored out of hours - so I will respond when I am in the office.

Docking Parish Council Website: www.dockingparishcouncil.gov.uk

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