

Speech to Gnosall Parish Council

Extraordinary meeting · 3 August 2026 · Application 26/42032/OUT

Christopher Williamson · Gnosall Planning Challenge

Chair, councillors, and fellow residents — thank you for allowing me to speak.

I am here on behalf of Gnosall Planning Challenge, but also as a resident who wants decisions about this village to be made openly, cautiously and on sound evidence.

Tonight is not a referendum on whether Gnosall should ever have new homes. It is about whether this particular application — up to 80 houses off Knightley Road — has shown that its drainage solution is safe, lawful and genuinely deliverable. Our submission is that it has not.

The decision before you can be simple and responsible. You do not need to resolve a technical dispute tonight. You only need to recognise that serious questions remain unanswered, qualify your earlier support, and ask Stafford Borough Council not to determine the application until the evidence has been independently checked and made public.

First, this is not a village where flood risk can be brushed aside as a theoretical concern. Borough-wide evidence identifies Gnosall as the Staffordshire rural area with the second-highest surface-water-flooding risk in the 2015 strategy, with 129 properties at risk. It records major overland-flow routes and extensive ponding around the Doley Brook and local drains. That does not prove this site will flood. It does mean that caution and proper modelling are essential.

Second, the applicant's proposed on-site basin does not answer the downstream problem. The scheme proposes 1,884 cubic metres of on-site storage and discharge at five litres per second into the existing surface-water sewer in Daffodil Drive. Those figures may sound reassuring, but they concern what happens on the development site and the rate entering the sewer. They do not prove the capacity, condition or lawful availability of everything downstream.

That matters because a November 2025 survey commissioned by the developer reported that the existing Tulip and Daffodil attenuation ponds appeared to provide about 472 cubic metres of storage against an 800-

cubic-metre design figure — roughly 41 per cent less. The Project Board record also says the low sides of the ponds could allow water in an extreme event to overflow without passing through the hydrobrake.

I want to be precise about this. We are not asking the Parish Council to adopt those figures as established fact. We are asking why credible professional findings of that seriousness have not yet been independently tested and reconciled before support was given.

The governance trail now demands a clear answer. On 19 December 2024, the current Chair of this Council formally warned Stafford Borough Council that the Daffodil ponds might not match the approved design, might have much less usable storage, and might allow the flooded brook to flow back into them. This was after former Parish Councillor Roger Greatrex had reviewed the current drainage at Daffodil Drive and reported that “the infill pipes are too low down and will not lift itself, meaning water flows back down the pipes rather than filling the pond”. We now know that these concerns were repeatedly recorded in the Pre-Project Board minutes from December 2024 onwards. For example, it was explained that “during period of heavy rainfall the surface water flows rapidly down Daffodil Drive making the flooding situation worse”.

An enforcement case was opened. That was a full year before the developer’s November 2025 survey was disclosed to Project Board members in December and reported similar concerns about deficient storage and uncontrolled overflow. Yet neither body of evidence appeared in the Council’s public-meeting slides before it supported this application. I make no allegation of misconduct. But residents are entitled to know what councillors knew, what was reported to the full Council, why these warnings were omitted from the public presentation, and how support could responsibly be given before the downstream system was independently checked.

In November 2025, the developer’s Peter Mellor himself collated the pre-project board minutes from 2024, while still seeking reliable ‘as-built’ drainage information and considering a survey. This was not a late objection or an issue hidden from the project team. It was in plain sight throughout!

There is a further inconsistency. In October 2025 this Council objected to the neighbouring polytunnel application and said its concerns would remain until the Flood Response Team was satisfied with all aspects of that proposal. That was a cautious and logical position. But Knightley Road shares the same wider

catchment of reservoirs, agricultural drainage, watercourses and flood pathways. It would be illogical to demand unresolved flood evidence before accepting the polytunnels, yet endorse 80 houses without first obtaining a cumulative assessment of those connected systems. We ask only that the same precautionary standard be applied here.

Third, hydraulic capacity and legal deliverability are different questions. The existing ponds are on land registered to FirstPort. The January Project Board minutes record discussion that the developer might have to acquire that land, and that the wider implications and obligations had not previously been considered. The proposed pipes also have to reach Daffodil Drive. We need the exact route, road and subsoil ownership, drainage rights, street-works permissions, Severn Trent approvals and long-term maintenance responsibilities — not an assumption that these matters can all be left to a condition later.

Fourth, the national sustainable-drainage standards published by Defra require exceedance routes, lifetime management, maintenance responsibility and safe access — including easements where needed — to be identified. The whole chain must work: the new basin, the connecting sewer, the hydrobrake, the existing ponds, the outfall and Hollies Brook.

One final question, which is not in our written submission.

The Environment Agency says this site lies over Principal and Secondary A aquifers, within a groundwater source-protection catchment. It says the historic household-waste landfill creates contamination which redevelopment could mobilise into groundwater and linked surface waters.

Yet Developer proposes lowering the attenuation-basin floor to retain permanent water, but specifies no liner and provides no groundwater assessment. The County flood authority itself recorded that no groundwater information had been supplied.

So where are the seasonal groundwater levels, basin lining details and assessment proving that its excavation and permanent water will not mobilise contamination towards the aquifer or Hollies Brook?

That cannot be postponed until after outline permission. It goes to whether this development is safe in principle.

So what are we asking you to do?

Please request that Stafford Borough Council does not determine the application until there is an independently reviewed flood model and a combined drainage assessment for the complete system. Require an as-built survey of the existing ponds, proof of the legal rights and consents, a credible programme for any remedial works, and a funded plan showing who will inspect, maintain, repair and insure every part of the system for its lifetime.

Please also require residents and this Council to be reconsulted if the drainage route, modelling, housing numbers or remedial works materially change.

Most importantly, please do not allow tonight to become a choice between blindly supporting the application and making accusations that cannot yet be proved. There is a responsible middle course: acknowledge the unresolved evidence, withdraw or expressly qualify your support, and insist that the Borough Council gets proper answers before making its decision.

The people in this room are not opposed to evidence. We are asking for it. We are not asking councillors to become drainage engineers or property lawyers. We are asking you to protect the village by making sure the engineers, landowners, water company and planning authority do their jobs before permission is granted — not after something goes wrong.

I therefore ask the Council to pass the following resolution:

“Gnosall Parish Council requests that Stafford Borough Council does not determine application 26/42032/OUT until the applicant has supplied, and the Environment Agency and Lead Local Flood Authority have had the opportunity to review, a reconciled flood model and combined drainage assessment covering the proposed development and the existing downstream attenuation ponds. The assessment must demonstrate hydraulic capacity, safe exceedance, lawful third-party rights, completed or secured remedial works and funded lifetime maintenance. Pending that evidence, the Parish Council qualifies its support and does not regard flood risk or drainage deliverability as resolved.”

That is a measured, evidence-led position. It protects residents, it protects this Council, and it gives Stafford Borough Council a clear list of what must be resolved. **Thank you.**