

Housing estate plans for old animal rendering plant at Thruxted Mill, near Chartham, withdrawn

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Controversial proposals to build a housing estate at an abandoned animal rendering plant outside **Canterbury** have been dropped following years of planning.

Thruxted Mill, which has been likened to a “horror movie setting”, was previously used to process cattle infected with BSE, known as mad cow disease.



Thruxted Mill, outside Chartham

The site, near **Chartham**, has stood empty for about 15 years, with there being widespread concern that the ground remains contaminated.

But developers eyed up the seven-acre plot for housing, and Trevor Heathcote - the man behind numerous companies, including Countrystyle Recycling - devised a scheme to build a 20-home estate.

The proposals were **granted outline planning permission in 2018** by Ashford Borough Council, but a **legal challenge** from resident Camilla Swire halted the project's progress.

And now, three years after gaining the go-ahead, Mr Heathcote has withdrawn the application.

The bid proved divisive during the planning process, but former Secretary of State for Housing, Robert Jenrick, determined an environmental impact assessment (EIA) into potential land contamination was not necessary.



The proposed housing development has been withdrawn

However, a legal challenge was launched and a High Court judge found the minister lacked “expert evidence” in reaching his decision. The ruling was therefore overturned and an EIA was required.

Now, 18 months down the line, the application has been pulled - without any sign of an impact statement being submitted.

A decision notice from this month signed by Ashford council’s head of planning, Simon Cole, states how no further action will be taken due to the bid being “withdrawn at the applicant’s request”.

It is not known if the developer is considering a revised application or if the project is now dead in the water. The planning agents for the scheme did not respond to a request for comment.

Thruxted Mill was one of just four locations in the UK authorised to dispose of carcasses infected with BSE as mad cow disease crippled cattle numbers in the late 1990s.



The former Thruxted Mill animal rendering plant in Penny Pot Lane



The site has been vacant for years

Nearby residents had long complained about the smell and lorries bringing dead livestock to the site, with reports of piles of carcasses regularly being dumped in the yard area.

Back in 2018, it was estimated that the cost for developers to properly disinfect the Penny Pot Lane site would total £1.75 million.

Councillors recognised how the old mill “has the most dreadful legacy” and looked favourably upon the idea of giving it a rebirth as a housing development.

But with the plans now withdrawn, it seems the neglected site will remain an eyesore with an uncertain future.

Join the debate...

- **Chris Garrod 2 wrote:**

31/12/2021 18:12

It was rumoured at the time that waste fluids from the infected cows, got into a river that ran near Ashford.

There was a high number of people in the Ashford area who caught CJD and died. It was strongly suspected that contaminated water courses in the area could have been responsible. This was vehemently denied by Ashford Borough Council at the time.

What people don't realise is people are still dying from CJD, but this being kept quiet by the NHS, and the Government's of the day.

So the question is how are people still contracting CJD?

Any building at the Mill site will be a ticking time bomb for who ever lives there.

- **Jill Emburey wrote:**

31/12/2021 11:55

"Gobsmacked" was my first reaction to the news that Housing Minister at the time, Robert Jenrick (? - no, me neither) decided it was just fine and dandy to ok plans for the housing estate without expert input on contamination of the site.

To my understanding, BSE is a transmittable disease to humans. And he thought it ok to waive an EIA? Thank the Lord for a resident bold enough to get their own expert advice and take the eejit to court.

If not for this site, when would he have deemed it necessary for an EIA on a building application? Just as well he's not Russian - he'd probably have given permission for new housing in Chernobyl!

30/12/2021 12:32

As far as I can see, the revenue from development could have been used to clean up the site, made it less visually harmful to the ANOB, and provided a more acceptable use than putting it back into industrial use which it's already permitted for. Turning it over to nature is very honourable but unrealistic, who has the money to buy it, clean it up, and then turn it over to fields?!!?

30/12/2021 11:36

I thought you had to carry out soil tests etc on sites like that. I know that when they were looking into building on the abattoir that they had to look into the history of the land. You can sometimes build a commercial premises but not residential on some land. I'm still surprised that residential premises were allowed to be built on the site of the old Tannery site Canterbury. If the land has been contaminated I thought it affected the water source. Just like you cannot build on old rubbish tips a fact that local councils seem to overlook.

- **Guitarplayer1949 wrote:**

30/12/2021 07:10

That business served a very useful purpose including disposing of animals which were infected with BSE and I think that it's very unfair to even mention this. One of the major issues here would be the very narrow lane through Penny Pot woods which would be inadequate for large amounts of traffic and it would mean damaging the beautiful road going through the woods. Leave it alone. The land should just be turned back to nature.