Dear Minister

I am writing to request that you call in and independently review the recent decision by Surrey County Council to retrospectively award planning permission for a change of use at the Chalk Pit site, College Road, Epsom.

The grounds for this request are these:

* This is a retrospective application to legitimise an operation which has been operating unlawfully for well over a year. The operator has already been found to have committed several planning and permit breaches during that time.
* The site was previously used as a waste trans-shipment site, but the operator has unlawfully converted it into a waste recycling centre.
* The application also involves the construction of a building to enclose the operations which would be an intrusive development in a green belt area.
* The County accepts that this is “inappropriate development which would have an impact on the openness of the Green Belt” but officers supported the argument by the applicant that there are special circumstances to allow the development.
* The site is not one of those identified by Surrey in its Waste Management Plan. Officers acknowledged at the planning meeting that they had not asked for or carried out an assessment of available alternatives, even though there is a substantial waste management site a short distance away in Leatherhead which has been identified by the County as a designated site for waste management.
* The Environment Agency has carried out an independent noise assessment which showed a level two noise breach by the operator causing serious nuisance and disruption to residents. It also carried out its own internal review of its handling of the case which included an assessment that the construction of a building might not be sufficient to bring noise from the site to within lawful levels.
* Officers at Surrey County Council failed to provide information about either of these assessments to Members on the Committee, despite being asked to do so local County Councillors, and this evidence does not appear in the Committee papers. Instead, they provided Members with detailed information drawn from an earlier noise assessment provided by the applicant, which was proven to be inaccurate by the subsequent EA work.

These issues were subject to a formal complaint to Surrey by Chris Grayling, MP and one of the local County Councillors which has been rejected and is now subject to a complaint to the Ombudsman. The application was also opposed by the local Planning Authority, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council, on the grounds that it contravened a raft of local planning policies in the area.

I believe there are clear grounds for this application to receive a proper call-in and assessment rather than an endorsement of the County decision.

I look forward to hearing from you.