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Representor Number: 787328

Matter 3 (MUX 1, SW Sittingbourne)

Re: Cryalls Lane/Wises Lane, Land at SW Sittingbourne

I submitted a letter under the prescribed process and was further informed supplementary points may also be submitted later, which I am now doing.

The Swale Council pro forma asked me if I chose to make any legal points. I seek to expand on the issue suggesting there may be points arising under the Localism Act 2011 and the necessary preservation of prime agricultural land.

You will establish I am sure that there is no consensus whatsoever among the community in favour of this location as a house building development.

The Swale council shows little to demonstrate their observance in the area of the Localism Act 2011, for brevity I will enumerate my points:

1. Regional development plans were abandoned under the Localism Act and yet Swale have bisected the area previously outlined under Thames gateway, now defunct, to zone necessary housing development; boosting Sittingbourne's absorption of new housing while minimising exposure in Faversham
2. Swale failed to promote its Local Engagement forum under the said Act and allowed it to fail.
3. Swale have not initiated community development plans or been proactive in inspiring the community to express their future development aims through this medium. This is one of the cornerstones of this legislation.
4. Swale have not consulted on a two-way basis with the affected communities over the proposed extensions to the Local plan. This left the community without the option to hold effective consultation with their own local authority who are the author of these changes. Their stance was this was an ongoing examination and they only have to meet the Inspector's wishes for expansion of the plan but what they have come up with is a major new development and the community can only appeal to the Inspector not through them directly. They claim to have had insufficient time to do so owing to the Brexit Referendum for instance on 29/6/16 taking up 3 weeks of their timetable.
5. The consensus of local opinion is well expressed elsewhere but there is one plain truth and that is "do we want bread or bricks?" England has to double food production over the next 30 years under Government targets set even before Brexit. This is absolutely prime grade 1 agricultural land even superior to that found in the Weald of Kent. You can build houses on brownfield land but you cannot cultivate crops on brownfield land. This land is classified as best and most versatile. Local people seek to make best use of redeveloping brownfield sites for housing and protecting and safeguarding prime agricultural land for food production. It is an essential part of our local rural culture and heritage.
6. In addition to this, local opposition hinges on root objection to urban sprawl swallowing up this large tract of beautiful landscape and stealing the countryside gap between town and village. The community resists completely this desecration of their neighbourhood.
7. It is said Kent County Council and Swale Council have been in discussion for around 2 years with potential developers on this subject and before this, there was a large exercise to suddenly and unexpectedly to deal with leakage and the environmental issues arising from the Borden Nature Reserve under various proposals and it is now clear how relevant all that activity would be in the preparation of this new housing development. Yet in all that time no open and honest consultations

were held with the Public or with our elected Council officials. It has all seemed very under-hand, clandestine and secretive.

8. What a happy coincidence that any contamination arising from the former Council tip beneath the Borden Nature Reserve will have been cured before this Housing development is considered and that the local electricity sub-station on Cryalls Lane will have been up-rated in capacity with a huge additional switch-gear room erected which is about the size of a house and nearing completion. The levers of power have seemingly been slid into place in good time in preparation of meeting the development before any review decision has even been taken. How opportune of the KCC and Swale Council. At least, this is how it appears.
9. Is their total ignorance about the precious value of our agricultural assets? You will be aware of just how little grade one land exists in England. The map on the [www.magic.Defra](http://www.magic.defra.gov.uk) website from the last Countryside survey in 2007 shows a rich band between London and Norfolk and a bracelet of land around the North Downs escarpments of Kent together with Thanet and Romney Marsh. It cannot be attached as reproduction is prohibited. That is all the grade one land we have left; but who protects and safeguards it? Does DEFRA or the NFU? Someone should; high up in Government because even before the Brexit Referendum (and in the face of rapid climate change globally and rapidly expanding human populations which place escalating stresses on our food chain). The country's target was to have farm production doubled over the coming 30 years. That is no mean feat for a country already proud of its high levels of efficiency at intensive farming. It is easier to double production where efficiency levels are low but in our case efficiency margins are already high. The land in question is large enough to be viable as it has been historically. It is classed as best and most versatile and as the map shows it surpasses anywhere else in southern England which is mainly grade 3, good or moderate land; but our Council in their infinite wisdom are advocating it be surrendered in SW Sittingbourne to the built environment despite there being brownfield sites available. The Council's advocacy more reflects pressure and expediency rather than wisdom. You can build clusters of houses on brownfield sites but you cannot grow vital crops upon them. Arable, vegetable, soft and hard fruits can be delivered from this tract of land not possible elsewhere on brownfield sites too small and unsuitable for cultivation. This land is of an even gradient is well-drained and has a favourable climate and infrastructure for its purpose, agriculturally.
10. When the Public were first allowed into a local framework meeting without any prior consultation, and deprived of any right to speak they were admonished by the Chairman for expressing mild dissent. The public felt mis-treated and insulted and that the whole process was cut and dried. It was a display of arrogance by a Conservative council confidant of its majority, right in the faces of those who had elected them. Quite astonishing, but whose interests were they really serving and protecting? Was it indeed their vested interest in Faversham over that of Sittingbourne?
11. The transport and logistics entailed by the plan also attract major practical levels of justifiable criticism. The housing envisaged is not linked to Swale's own definition of housing need and is aimed toward future commuters from London and an expansion of the already over-worked term of expanding Sittingbourne yet further as a dormitory town which is surely its destiny under the current plans. Our own local housing needs as defined by Swale Council will stand un-met by this Plan inspired by house builders seeking to exploit major profit opportunity not the salvation of the local townships. It seems to be the borough and county councils who seek to force this through over the heads of the local tax paying community and without having the courage of their convictions by holding direct meaningful consultation with their existing residents.
12. It is as if the principles of the Localism Act in word and spirit, has been totally set aside by Swale BC. It is the law which conveys rights within the community governing future development on a democratic basis that has to be upheld.