

## **Report from Swale Borough Councillors**

The Local Plan determines where future developments in the borough will be built. In 2015 Swale Borough Council submitted a plan for 540 homes a year. A government inspector required the target to be raised to 776 homes a year – a total of 14,124 homes over the period 2017 - 2031. Although this level of housebuilding has never been achieved, the government required the plan to be reviewed to increase the target to 1,038 homes a year – requiring an additional 10,000 homes by 2038. Swale Borough Council must make a plan that can deliver. If the plan is judged to be incapable of meeting this target, it will not be passed by a government inspector. This would mean that Swale Borough Council would lose all control of development.

Now the government proposes to increase the housebuilding target for Swale to 1,483 homes a year. Swale Borough Council are working hard to adopt a revised plan before we are forced to adopt this new – and completely unrealistic - target.

The difficult issue is to decide where all these new houses should go. The cabinet at Swale Borough Council voted for a steer that 14% of development in the emerging plan should be on Sheppey, 10.5% in Sittingbourne, 35% in Faversham, 10.5% in the rural areas and 30% would be windfall sites. Windfall sites are applications that come forward outside the local plan. Tim Valentine was the only cabinet member to vote against, and successfully argued for an option for 45.5% of development to go to the Faversham area to be removed from the resolution.

We will continue to campaign against inappropriate housing developments in the countryside. However, the likely outcome is that the plan will include development of 2,500 homes and employment sites on land owned by the Duchy of Cornwall south-east of Faversham, and 1,000 more homes near the junction of Graveney Road with Love Lane and Whitstable Road.

The arguments for development at the east of Faversham are that: (1) Some of the traffic generated will make use of Brenley Corner avoiding the A2 and the air quality management area at Ospringe: (2) Development in the Faversham area is more viable and so greater numbers of affordable homes can be delivered: (3) The plans submitted by the Duchy align better with the ambitions of the new administration (e.g. 40% affordable homes, and one-for-one employment opportunities on the site): (4) The distance from these developments to the centre of Faversham means that it is at least possible for everyday needs to be met without using a car.

We reject the idea that endless growth in a limited world is desirable or possible: this “Build Build Build” philosophy is working itself out in endless housing in limited countryside, to meet targets which have been set to drive economic growth, while failing to meet the real housing needs of local people. We would prefer a radically different housing policy, but we are doing all we can to limit the damage from the system in which we find ourselves.

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