

# MONKS HORTON PARISH MEETING



Monks Horton Parish Meeting would wish to make a number of objections to the proposed Folkestone & Hythe District Core Strategy.

## **Otterpool Park**

The major development that will affect the lives of all the surrounding communities is the proposed new town at Otterpool. From its outset in 2016, the Otterpool Park project has been flawed.

### **Failure to meet criteria for locally led garden villages, towns and cities**

Shepway District Council (SDC), now Folkestone & Hythe District Council (FHDC) stated that Otterpool Park will be *'planned from the outset on Garden City principles'*. This refers to the Department for Communities and Local Government's (DCLG) invitation for councils to apply for 'Locally led garden villages, towns and cities'. Otterpool Park fails to meet a number of the criteria required for support for new Garden Towns. The FHDC draft Core Strategy stated *'Community involvement and participation in the planning of Otterpool Park has been encouraged from the outset'*. Shepway District Council (SDC) did not consult with local communities at all prior to announcing that a new Garden Town would be built at Otterpool Park. Local MP Damian Collins announced in the local paper that the decision had been taken, even before it was presented to the council members for voting. Subsequently, well into the design stage, there have been two Community Engagement events organised by SDC's consultants, Kevin Murray Associates, where plans were shown to the public. Reports showed that there was very little local support in principle for a new town.

The DCLG Garden Town criteria stated *'We welcome expressions of interest which make effective use of previously developed land (brownfield land) and/or public sector land'*. Only a tiny percentage of the proposed site for Otterpool Park is brownfield land. It is nearly all quality farmland in **'The Garden of England'** and its loss may be very significant at a time when we may need to reduce imports of food and produce more locally.

The criteria stated that a Garden Town *'may be on a new site away from existing settlements, or take the form of transformational development, both in nature or in scale to an existing settlement'*. The site chosen for Otterpool Park has been squeezed in between and abutting the villages of Sellindge to the West, Lympne to the South East and Stanford to the North. It also subsumes Westenhanger and Newingreen. It is neither *'away from existing settlements'* nor is it *'transformational'*.

### **Local housing need**

SDC's revised Places and Policies Local Plan was submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20 July 2017. It stated that there was a requirement for 8,750 houses to meet local needs over the next 15 years, up until 2031. Suitable sites had been identified throughout the region and these had been chosen through consultation with local communities and with careful study of the infrastructure. There was no mention of needing the extra 12,000 houses proposed at Otterpool Park in the 587 page Places and Policies Local Plan document.

Local communities are not convinced of the need for a new town at all, especially in the present changing political and economic climate. The South East of England is already heavily stressed. Post Brexit it may be that other regions will become the focus for development and economic growth. The Government is determined to 'level up' the country by concentrating more economic development in the North of England. The Covid-19 pandemic will have a devastating impact on the economy and how we live in future. It seems unwise to commit to such a large project based on assumptions of the local housing needs 30 years hence.

The fact that FHDC is the major landowner at the Otterpool Park development site is of great concern for the local population as it is perceived that there is a conflict of interests in that it is able to grant planning permission for its own development, without the normal objective checks and scrutiny.

## Viability

It has been difficult for the local communities to scrutinise whether FHDC are suitable property developers for such a major project. When Otterpool Park is being discussed at council meetings, the public gallery is cleared before any financial aspects of the project are raised and the meeting continues behind closed doors, much to the annoyance of interested members of the public. A few facts have emerged into the public domain:

- FHDC's application to the Government for a £281,000,000 grant towards the cost of infrastructure at Otterpool was refused.
- FHDC are now going to borrow £100,000,000 for the project.
- FHDC's partners in the development, Cozumel Estates Limited, owners of Folkestone Racecourse, have withdrawn from the project and are selling FHDC the land for £25,000,000. This is a massive increase in the value of the land value due to it becoming an integral part of the new town plan.
- It has been reported that so far FHDC have spent over £50,000,000 on the Otterpool Park new town project and not a single house has been built.

## Water Supply

In the 2008 British Geological Survey research report RR/08/02 – 'The Chalk aquifer of the North Downs' it stated in the Executive summary *'The North Downs has a long history of water supply development which has concentrated mainly on the Chalk aquifer. It is likely that the future impact of climate change processes will only exacerbate the existing conflict between supply and demand. The future for the Chalk aquifer of the North Downs will unfold within a framework of increasing national and EC legislation aimed at environmental protection and enhancement which will demand increasingly stringent control over water abstraction, use and reuse.'* Since this was written, there has been, and continues to be, continued development along the Chalk aquifer of the North Downs. Neighbouring boroughs have plans to build 34,000 new homes. These developments are all drawing off the same water resource. To put it simply, the well will be running dry and the water company will not be able to provide what is not there.

According to Affinity Water (AW):– *'However there is neither the water resource, or the main transfer capacity, to serve 12,000 new homes and therefore an alternative solution will need to be sought. One option might be to buy in supply from neighbouring water companies such as South East Water if they have spare capacity at any existing or proposed reservoir.'*

*'While AW have some headroom at present in terms of water resources, additional resources are likely to be required and it will be necessary to look at further abstraction or water treatment or a combination of both.'* AW have always declared that they would not build a desalination plant. A water desalination plant is extremely undesirable as it would cause huge environmental damage, uses enormous amounts of energy and is very expensive to run. AW also stated that they could only supply water to 1000-1500 Otterpool Park houses on the existing infrastructure. The proposed 500mm trunk main installation from Paddlesworth Reservoir which, in effect, is a transfer pool to serve Otterpool Park, would not solve the problem. No amount of pipework infrastructure will be of any use if it can't be filled from Groundwater resources. In any event, the Paddlesworth reservoir is only 13 megalitres in capacity. Compare this to a reservoir proper of Bewl Water in Mid Kent where the capacity is 31,000 megalitres.

The planning application contains reference to technological solutions and restrictions, with very optimistic assumptions of water consumption per person. Limiting personal consumption to 90 litres per day seems excessive and unrealistic. It will not be possible to impose restrictions on Otterpool Park and leave the rest of the FHDC area to continue as before. The plan highlights that 5% of existing properties may be retro-fitted with water saving technology, this means that 95% of existing properties will not and are therefore facing higher water bills.

This year we experienced the wettest February since records began and yet in May local residents were asked to economise on water consumption as stocks would be low this summer. This situation is likely to be the norm in the future with climate change.

## Local infrastructure and services

The Otterpool Park development must be seen in the context of other housing developments in south east Kent. There are 14,500 new houses planned or in construction within the FHDC area under the Local Plan plus a number at Otterpool Park (the figure keeps changing). Ashford, Canterbury, Thanet and Dover are planning for 34,000 new houses in their strategy plans.

Shortages of GPs, Dentists, Nurses, Carers and Teachers are well reported. The shortage of GPs locally has led to a number of surgeries within the Council area closing. The Council cannot guarantee that these shortages will be reversed, and the proposal for Otterpool Park will only exacerbate matters.

The increased housebuilding around Ashford has put huge pressure on the William Harvey Hospital and local GP surgeries. Any proposed medical centre at Otterpool Park should be provided **and staffed before** the very first residents move in.

## **Transport**

Although at Otterpool Park it is intended to provide employment for its residents within the new town, it is very likely that many would need to travel to work elsewhere. The area is very poorly served by bus services, so residents would need to rely on cars. Otterpool Park will generate considerable additional traffic, not only for the M20 and A20, but also the A261 Hythe Road, B2067 Aldington Road and B2068 Canterbury Road. These latter three will struggle to cope with the extra demand, which may well lead to an increase in pedestrian, cycle and vehicle accidents. Additionally, this demand will lead to congestion, pollution and disturbance to communities outside the immediate Otterpool catchment area. The local road network to other towns is far from adequate to be able to cope with any increase in traffic. Apart from the M20, all local roads are narrow, single carriageway country lanes.

In June 2020 a report from Transport for New Homes, a group promoting alternatives to the car, and supported by the RAC Foundation, said that research has suggested that garden villages may be little better than the reviled edge-of-town estates they were supposed to supersede. The report has warned that England's new garden villages and towns risk becoming car-dependent commuter estates.

Access to Otterpool Park would marketedly increase traffic flow through Sellindge, where there have been recent roadworks, at considerable expense, to narrow the road and so reduce the speed and volume of traffic. The traffic lights controlling the single file, alternate flow under the railway bridge also restrict the A20 traffic capacity.

The need for an high-speed rail service from Westenhanger has not been assessed objectively. If Westenhanger Station were to become a stop on the High Speed Rail Link (HS1) it may cause Otterpool Park to become a dormitory town for London commuters. HS1 service would appear to be a very desirable asset to take the workforce out, and bring it home, which would seem to contradict the aspirations of local employment.

If Westenhanger Station were to become a stop for HS1 it could attract many London commuters from outlying villages and so there would need to be provision for a large car park, and access, to cope with high levels of commuter traffic. It is understood that the plan for Otterpool Park does not factor in the additional space required for car parking should HS1 services be installed.

The proposed HS1 stop would also add to the journey time for commuters from Folkestone, Dover and Thanet and add to congestion on the trains. There is no further capacity at the London Terminus and the peak hour trains are already full at Folkestone. The proposal may not be acceptable to the train operator.

## **Employment**

The proposed creation of local jobs is aspirational and cannot be guaranteed. The full effects of the Covid-19 pandemic will not be known for many months, but unemployment is sure to rise. One effect may be that fewer people choose to fly away to holiday destinations but prefer to visit the South coast. The focus on tourism will inevitably lead to far greater levels of vehicle traffic on roads not able to cope with such increases.

Employment opportunities are unlikely to occur until late in the development. In the meantime residents would probably need to travel to work outside of the new town. The area is very poorly served by bus services, so residents would need to rely on cars. The local road network to other towns is far from adequate to be able to cope with any increase in traffic.

Within the land designated for Otterpool Park there is already a large site which has planning permission for business development: Link Park / Enterprise Way has 57 acres for potential business development yet, in the 15 years since this was given planning permission, no companies have taken advantage of this. SDC / FHDC has a poor record in attracting new business to the region.

The Otterpool Park plan also envisages a thriving, vibrant High Street. Again this goes against national trends (Ashford has been touted as an exception, but as it has lost it's Debenhams and M&S). Online shopping has taken a massive share of the retail market.

**Monks Horton Parish Meeting asks that the proposed Otterpool Park new town be cancelled. It is not wanted, it is not needed and it will have a devastating effect on local rural communities and the countryside.**

## **Policy CSD9 – Sellindge Strategy**

The **first phase** refers to 'a major residential-led development' and 'following extensive community engagement'. In fact, the idea to create a focal point to the village with houses around a village green to the south of the A20, opposite the Co-op store, was initiated by members of Sellindge and District Residents Association. It was in response to Shepway District Council's (SDC) unacceptable proposed housing development sites. The concept of a village green development had local support and in 2010 Urban Initiatives were appointed by SDC and the Homes and Community Agency to produce a masterplan for the village of Sellindge. This process was commissioned to engage with local people to establish a consensual approach to change and improvements, and it covered areas such as new houses, developed facilities and benefits for the village. Residents were persuaded to accept 250 houses, double the number that they had been hoping for, but SDC assured them that this (Taylor Wimpey first phase) development would mean that **Sellindge would be spared further major house building**.

In 2016, the 'Places and Policies Local Plan' identified five sites in Sellindge which were suitable to build a further 54 houses. Together with other sites in Shepway, the PPLP stated that SDC would be able to meet all of the local housing needs up to 2026.

Meanwhile SDC had decided, with no prior public consultation whatsoever, to create a 'Garden Town' of 12,000 new houses on land adjacent to Sellindge village. At subsequent Community Engagement events there were assurances by what is now Folkestone & Hythe District Council (FHDC) that the Otterpool Park development would mean that Sellindge would be '*spared further piecemeal housing developments*' the phrase used by FHDC Leader, David Monk.

The draft Core Strategy Review 2019 showed a further 350 houses (**second phase**) are to be foisted on the village **without any community consultation**, in addition to the 54 houses in the PPLP allocations and the 250 in the first phase. This totals 654 new houses, more than doubling the size of the village.

Concentrating so much new house building in this small area will drastically change the character of this rural village and affect the lives of the community and bring no real benefits to them. Building would be on green field sites previously used for grazing. The village currently enjoys distant views across open countryside and to the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The so-called 'landscaping' is simply screens of trees to block the view of new houses and beyond. The area to the south west rises up and any housing development built there could not be screened effectively.

FHDC does not say how it would limit potable water consumption to 90 litres per person per day (including external water use). This ambition seems over optimistic. If the population of the region were to increase by tens of thousands as proposed with the Otterpool Park new town development, the local water company have declared that they would not be able to meet the demand for water.

Sellindge Surgery has not accepted the new residents of the first phase (apart from the children) onto their books as there is insufficient capacity to provide a GP service. The surgery has been unable to recruit more doctors for years and enlarging the building will not solve this problem.

**Monks Horton Parish Meeting asks that new, 'piecemeal housing developments' in Sellindge be stopped, as promised by FHDC Leader, David Monk.**

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*Chairman*

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2 July 2020