

[REDACTED]

From: Tony Slinn [REDACTED]
Sent: 04 April 2021 18:30
To: Planning Comments
Subject: Fort Halstead ~ 19/05000/HYB, Amended Application-proposed development of 635 houses

Importance: High

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Via email – planning.comments@sevenoaks.gov.uk

Ms. Claire Shearing, Case Officer
Planning Policy
Sevenoaks District Council
Council Offices, Argyle Road
Sevenoaks
Kent TN13 1HG

Ref: 19/05000/HYB, Amended Application—proposed development of 635 houses at Fort Halstead.

Dear Ms. Shearing,

The developer is now seeking to build 635 houses with 2.77 hectares of land (down 26% from the original 3.6 hectares) allocated for commercial development on what SDC said in 2015 was ‘a Major Employment Site in the Green Belt’ and one that had to be ‘employment-led’.

These hybrid applications, as the developer has shown via various amendments subsequent to SDC granting planning permission for 450 houses in 2015, are dangerous because SDC has granted permission to build on Green Belt land. So what happens should the developer say it still can’t market this commercial allocation and asks for yet more houses?

When the initial proposal to build about 1,000 houses on Fort Halstead first came up in 2010 it was thrown out by SDC, which backed the planning inspector’s view that the site: “Was not in a sustainable location as its inhabitants would have to travel a considerable distance to access transport, shopping, and other facilities and that the development was not needed to meet the district’s future development requirements.” SDC concluded: “In practice, this means that large-scale housing development at the site is unlikely to be granted planning permission.”

It’s even less sustainable today. Crumbling infrastructure, potholed, badly-maintained roads, over-stretched rail links, and public transport that’s been cut to the bone.

Why can’t SDC bring itself to admit that the ‘employment-led’ notion for reversing that sensible decision was and remains a non-starter?

In SDC's *Allocations and Development Management Plan*, adopted February 2015, it states on page 40 that the development: 'Should be employment-led and should maintain the site's role as an important employment site in the district. Provision should be made for a range of employment uses sufficient to provide for approximately 1,200 jobs.'

As SDC must be aware, behind the Mumbai Central restaurant, at the top of Polhill, there are still commercial outbuildings from the former garage that occupied the site. They're not let. Nobody wants them. Why should anyone, therefore, want commercial premises virtually nextdoor at Fort Halstead?

Given that the four-star hotel (76 jobs) has vanished and the application has increased from 450 to 635 houses—up over 40%—just how many more crammed together houses (housing density of 25 to 50 dwellings per hectare when the average density locally is 15 to 18) will the developer want next?

Including that the would-be developers of the adjacent Broke Hill golf course (also Green Belt land...) are appealing SDC's correct decision to deny planning permission for 1,000 houses, the cumulative effect from the bottom of Star Hill to Knockholt rail station, should all these planning applications eventually be approved, would be a ridiculous 3,500 houses!

Our letters to SDC over the past years have detailed at length the inadequate local infrastructure, and especially the appallingly badly maintained—and in places dangerous—roads. Regarding the latter, the main entrance/exit to Fort Halstead is onto Polhill itself. And that, as you must be aware, is a disaster waiting to happen as the outer verge on the steep downward side continues to deteriorate.

The *Polhill Ground Movement Report* of 27 July 2006 details just how bad things were. And they're getting worse. While we're aware that this is strictly Kent County Council's responsibility, what action will SDC take given approval of the Fort Halstead plan can only accelerate the road's deterioration?

Can you please tell us what of the 'Actions for the Future' and the 'Possible Remedial Works' outlined in the 2006 report have been carried out? Is it, as we suspect, none of them?

Can you also please tell us what, if Polhill is further restricted or even closed, will happen to the considerable traffic it carries today? Diverted through Halstead's and Knockholt's narrow, dreadfully maintained roads? And does SDC propose that the many, many thousands of traffic movements, including inevitable heavy construction plant entailed in building a sprawling housing estate at Ford Halstead, should also divert through our villages?

Have the courage to back both your and the planning inspector's original decision. This application is not sustainable, is unnecessary, will wreak havoc on local villages and the lives of people living in them, and will irredeemably concrete over what is, and what should remain, Green Belt land.

Yours sincerely,