

SEVENOAKS DISTRICT COUNCIL

10 DEC 2019

COMMUNITY & PLANNING SERVICES

Thymebank,
14, Coombe Road,
Otford,
Sevenoaks, Kent TN14 5RJ
6th December 2019

The Director,
Planning Department,
Sevenoaks District Council,

Dear Sir/Madam,

Residential Development at Fort Halstead, Kent.

The latest phase of this attempt to impose a large residential estate at Fort Halstead on one of the highest summits of the North Downs in the vicinity of Sevenoaks is even less desirable than some of the earlier ones, with which I was involved in consultation. The increased density of housing here is doubtless intended to match the suburb planned adjacent to Knockholt Station, which is also on the main Sevenoaks – Bromley/Orpington road, and thus will exacerbate the present traffic problems. A by-product of the expansion, seemingly, would be the enhancement of the profits to the developer.

Earlier schemes, with a reasonable business/local employment element, have been sidelined in favour of a straightforward "cram them in for profit regardless of the impact on the environment and long-established communities", which is not assuaged by gestures of the odd surgery, etc., and the occasional bus to satisfy local supermarkets, at least those on the bus route. This increase, from 450 to 750 homes, with a corresponding increase in the number of cars necessary to escape from this elevated enclave imposed on a rural area, is unacceptable. The proposed Heritage Centre, a cultural sop, is perfectly capable of establishment by the residents, as has happened in neighbouring communities such as Otford and Kemsing, without 'investment'.

The illustration in the *Sevenoaks Chronicle* (25th November 2019), presumably authorised, indicates a large block of 3-storey tenements, perfect in urban Liverpool, but not atop the North Downs, an AONB! Such might well have been required to prosecute Great Britain's defence in time of war, but are wholly indefensible in peacetime for commercial gain.

An increase in adults seeking employment, with the ever-present lure of Central London, can only add to the problems of commuters by train from the Sevenoaks district, by joining London Bridge and Charing Cross trains from Sevenoaks Station, and those for Victoria squeezing into already packed trains at Otford, with similar overcrowding in the evening rush hour in the opposite directions.

It is high time that the needs of the present population are taken fully into account, given that the district around Sevenoaks has long been recognised by central government as a crucial element of London's Metropolitan Green Belt. The creeping suburbanization spreading across this part of South East England, exemplified inter alia by the loss of countryside associated with the neighbouring District Council's planned development in the vicinity of Borough Green/ Wrotham, which has scant concern for transport, medical or educational facilities. However, Fort Halstead has one dedicated facility already in place: a new cemetery – perhaps its ultimate salvation!

It is difficult to see how the road system leading to Star Hill – the projected western entrance to this development – can be expanded without serious continuing detriment to the communities of Knockholt, Halstead, Rushmore Hill, Dunton Green and beyond. Similarly, Dunton Green, Otford, and Kemsing, to the east are already seriously inconvenienced by excessive road traffic, with consequent danger to pedestrians, notably children, the disabled and elderly. These will all be adversely affected by traffic using the eastern entrance to 'the Fort'. Otford, in particular, is already cursed by non-state junior schools, with parents negotiating the village in order to disgorge hordes of pupils from SUVs, putting in peril all those daring to walk on its narrow historic High Street, having only a single pavement for part of its length, to attend the Village School or visit the shops. Even without an influx of yet more would-be commuters, Otford already has serious parking problems.

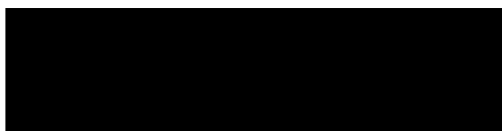
The impact of changes in retailing should not be ignored in connection with this and other postulated major developments. The exponential increase in 'white van' deliveries can only increase the traffic problems both at Fort Halstead and the other satellite settlements, as well as within the local road system.

Another concern, only recently appreciated, is the light pollution likely to be generated by this settlement. Otford and many of the other village communities in the Darent Valley have preserved their age-old unlit status, and the spread of street lighting on this hilltop can only increase the ambient light levels in the district. Otford, the long-time choice of residence by my wife and myself, is the chosen host to the Orpington Astronomical Society, a serious and long-standing learned society, which utilises our (unlit) Recreation Ground for its nocturnal observations. This is likely to be fatally compromised should the proposal be approved. The latest TV satellite weather forecasts graphically illustrate the extent of light pollution in South East England with the consequent impact on wildlife. Is not a part of this development an SSSI – or has this been eliminated?

It is indeed ironic that a Merseyside developer should seek to achieve its financial objectives by a development some 220 miles from its home ground. Surely development in North West England, described as being in need of investment, would greatly benefit the local community, without causing wanton, needless damage to Kent.

In conclusion, I urge you to reject the present application. The proposed development is too large and in the wrong place.

Yours faithfully,

A solid black rectangular box redacting the signature of the sender.

C.P.Ward Dip. Arch.

