

Alexander Gunyon

From: Jane Hewland [REDACTED]
Sent: 30 May 2024 18:36
To: Consultations
Subject: Objection to Site C12 in the draft Local Plan

Categories: Blue category

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Dear Sir/Madam,

This submission will be rather different from most you have received. I don't feel competent or qualified to comment on the effect on schools or local traffic of 2,000 new homes, because I don't live in Canterbury or any of the affected villages. I'm from the most overpopulated part of London, the Isle of Dogs. But the Blean is an invaluable refuge for me and that is why I am making this submission.

I know that new homes are desperately needed. But there must be ways of achieving this in and around Canterbury, that do not involve altering forever one of the richest and most beautiful expanses of agricultural and wild land in North Kent. This is an area where the footprints of us humans have been restricted to a few tracks. We can walk, we can cycle, we can ride. And thousands of families come here to do just that. But we must stick to our paths and know that we are only passing through. We are guests of nature here. Once you "pave paradise and put up a parking lot", you will have changed the character of this unique natural asset. You will never be able to get back what will have been lost.

Canterbury and the Blean together are my escape, when city life becomes too much. I am sure I am not alone in this. Every Easter and probably half a dozen more times during a typical year, I get the train to Canterbury from crowded, polluted, concreted-over East London. I labour up the hill to Kent College and turn right onto the Crab and Winkle Way. The moment you cross the road and head along the track into university lands, the quality of the air changes. I can feel my lungs free up. Breathing becomes a pleasure. And as the lungs fill with fresh clean air, the mind expands too, with a peculiar kind of contentment. There's something about the peace here that you never get in paved places. It's a living and breathing peace.

The quality of the soil is something else too. This is incredibly rich farm land. (Surely vital to our food security, in an uncertain world.) If you walk the Crab and Winkle Way in spring, especially in late April, early May, you can almost feel things growing. This is a place to come listen to the dawn chorus in the grey light of a spring morning. If you are quiet and patient you will see birds of prey circling and swooping above and small mammals scurrying to escape them, across ploughed fields. The word "lush" is the best I can come up with, but it doesn't really communicate just how overpowering all that life and fruitfulness feels. And how life saving.

I always stop off at St Cosmos and St Damien, where I take a moment to offer a prayer of thanks and think about all those who have passed that way over thousands of years. When I walked my pilgrimage from Winchester to Canterbury in the middle of the pandemic (August 2020), I brought my grandsons on a detour up here, on my final day after receiving my blessing in the Cathedral. It was an incredibly emotional day none of us will forget. The two boys just stood in silence and stared around them for ages. Even though it was raining and dusk was gathering. I could feel the place casting its magic spell on them too. I can't bear to think that they may not be able to bring their own children and grandchildren to fall in love with The Blean, as we have done.

So I'm writing to ask that anyone involved in this decision simply go take a walk in this priceless landscape, before you decide. Any time of day or night. Don't cycle. Walk. Stand somewhere. Listen. Look. Then close your eyes. Feel what this place can do to you. Because I feel sure that if you do this, you cannot possibly allow it to be destroyed.

That's all I wanted to say. Thanks for the chance and for reading this.

Best wishes,

Jane Hewland