

16 January 2023

Dear Sir or Madam,

Reference: Consultation on District Plan

I expect that we are not alone in having had difficulty in using the online consultation questionnaire. We have made 3 attempts to use the online form, saving as we went, but on each occasion when we returned to the partly completed document, those sections that we had populated had disappeared. We found this a most unsatisfactory process.

We wish to object to the District Plan insofar as it relates to developments in the Whitstable area.

We are residents of Whitstable and are most interested in those proposals which involve the Whitstable area, although we have looked at the Plan for the whole District, and attended the consultation meeting in Whitstable on 06/12/2022. Those officers who were present will no doubt have fed back to the Council that they had not expected such a high degree of interest in the proposals, and were surprised both by the number of people who attended and by the anger and intensity of the comments that were made. They had not prepared a presentation, but were put into a position where they had to make one on the hoof, as they could not talk individually to the many people who attended.

This level of interest probably reflected local frustration, anger and anxiety about the proposed scale of developments in the Whitstable area. For those of us who live in South Tankerton, the proposed developments south of the Thanet Way threaten to completely destroy the character of the area. The anger may well have been compounded by virtue of the fact that many of us who attended had found out about the meeting only by word of mouth. As I understood it, the response of officers, in a nutshell, was that the City Council could not afford to write to all individual residents. This clearly will not suffice as a response. Not only do more efforts need to be made to communicate with residents, but elected members need to be prepared to front up such meetings. After all, the eventual plan will be that of the Council (not the officers) and local members will be aware that residents are watching their voting patterns in deciding how to vote at the next local elections.

Whitstable has seen a vast amount of development in recent years, and these have begun to impact adversely on the quality of life of residents. The local infrastructure is insufficient to cope with any more large-scale development.

Residents are already concerned about the lack of green space. There is little green space in the town, apart from small areas in Westmeads Road and the Church Street Playing fields. South of the Thanet Way, the only green amenity was that at Grasmere Pastures which is now being developed, in spite of the Council originally having objected to it on the grounds of unsuitability.

Whitstable town centre is now always busy, and hugely over congested at weekends. It is very difficult to find parking spaces. The town centre simply is not able to cope with the huge volume of through traffic. Many local residents simply avoid the town centre and the beach during the summer.

At rush hour, there are major pinch points all around the town. The roundabouts on the Thanet Way alongside Chestfield Station are frequently blocked by drivers queueing for the takeaway facilities at McDonald's and KFC. Neither the Council nor the Police ever seems to have taken any action to resolve this problem satisfactorily. Queues build up on the Herne Bay Road on both sides of the mini roundabout. This junction will become much worse once Grasmere Pastures has been further developed, as the traffic exiting the industrial estate and housing development will increase significantly.

In Chestfield and Swalecliffe, residents have been concerned for years about the risk of flooding and the inability of the water supply and sewage systems to cope. This will be exacerbated by the development of the Grasmere Pastures site, where the lower end closest to the Brook has frequently flooded, even before the new development was started.

It seems to us particularly incomprehensible that the Council should even consider adopting into the plan areas which are currently used as farmland. At a time when we have a growing population; concerns about climate change; the need for more emphasis upon use of local products to minimise our carbon footprint; and a greater emphasis upon food security following in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it does seem bizarre that any consideration should be given to turning farmland which is actually in agricultural use into further housing and industrial development.

Turning to the specifics of the Local Plan, we would comment that in general terms it is very difficult to know what specifically is being proposed. There is generally not enough detail for local residents to know what development is being proposed and what it might actually look like. In many instances, the proposals for things such as "green wedges" or "green corridors" seem like damage limitation rather than proposals that would benefit the local community.

Policy W1

Policy W1 is very strong on rhetoric but very weak on detail. Everybody will be able to agree that apple pie and motherhood are desirable, but local residents need to see the detail and how the changes will affect them in practice. The references to protecting the green environment, sustainability and biodiversity are welcome, but are very much at variance with the proposals for continued

development of a very large scale throughout the whole district. This has affected the quality of life of local residents. The town centre is virtually inaccessible in the summer months, and many local residents already vote with their feet and stay away, particularly at weekends. It is difficult to see what references to green corridors actually mean. Cornwallis Circle and the beach do not really amount to very much in terms of green spaces. There is no managed parkland to speak of and such amenity as there was, for example Grasmere Pasture in South Tankerton in and the green space adjacent to Golden Hill have already been built upon.

Policy 1b

The character of Whitstable has changed beyond all recognition. What was a small fishing town 30 years ago is now a large urban sprawl, which is becoming indistinguishable from Herne Bay. There needs to be some recognition of the fact that given the proximity of the town to the beaches, the configurations of the town centre, the road and rail infrastructure, and so on, there is a limit to how far development of the town and its surrounding area can continue without completely choking the town and making life increasingly difficult for all its citizens.

There are lots of references to business development, and also references to primary and secondary schools across the district, but residents will be very concerned about the absence of additional GP practices and hospital places. There will also be increased demands upon social care services which are stretched beyond all reasonable limits. There is also no reference to extra provision to cope with water supply and wastewater management. There is already a problem of sewage spillage into our seas and flooding particularly in parts of Whitstable and Chestfield/Swalecliffe.

Policy W2- Whitstable Harbour

Whitstable Harbour is a working harbour, and the recreational development on the site has already made life difficult for fishermen to pursue their trade, unimpeded by tourists and other residents. The idea that the harbour could be further developed as a site for walking and cycling is absurd. At busy times, it is so crowded as to make it an uncomfortable place to be for people strolling and using the shops and hospitality services.

The priority for the City Council should be to rebuild the burnt out restaurant area, which is an eyesore and an embarrassment, given the length of time which has elapsed since it was destroyed. If that facility were brought back into full use, that would expand the commercial and recreational potential of the site close to its maximum. It is a small harbour. It is hard to understand how additional parking space could be created without further impinging upon the available space. More specifics are needed for residents to comment upon before this plan could be approved by elected members.

Policy 3a

Whitstable really does not need any more industrial development or business parks. There is the John Wilson industrial estate; there is the Joseph Wilson industrial estate; there is the St Augustine's Business Park at Swalecliffe and new industrial units on the Thanet Way at Swalecliffe; there is a business park next to Estuary View and there is a development underway of the John Wilson industrial estate now encroaching upon Grasmere Pasture. There are some vacant units on each of these estates.

It is very difficult to know what the Council means by its proposals to protect and enhance the urban area's network of open space. This is very much at variance with what the Council has actually done in recent years. The references to the Tankerton Slopes Site of Special Scientific Interest is really taking credit for the protection of an area which could not be developed in any case. Convict's Wood would no longer be a local amenity if the development proposed for Brooklands Farm were to go ahead. Creating tiny green corridors in a sea of concrete could not be regarded meaningfully as environment protection or providing social benefit.

Policy 3b

The reference in W3.9 to combating climate change in the context of a proposal to concrete over existing farmland in order to build a sports facility, amongst other things, is completely ridiculous. There are already adequate sports facilities across the district, whilst the opportunities the people to walk in the open air are now very limited and are being further constricted. It is also worth noting that the need to ensure food security has been highlighted by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which has led to increased food prices and greater awareness within both Government and the general population that we need to be more self-reliant in terms of food production. At the same time there is evidence that younger people wishing to get into farming are finding it increasingly difficult to do so, although we need new generations to move into farming. It is therefore imperative that farmland is preserved, even if existing farmers wish to retire. The answer is clearly not to sell off farmland for residential or industrial development.

Policy 4a

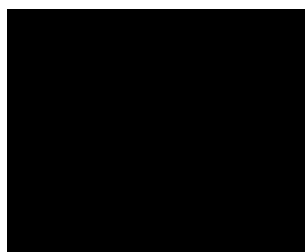
The proposals for the development of Brooklands Farm seem wholly undesirable. There is already a lack of green space within the area. There is already massive road congestion in the area, especially around the Chestfield/Swalecliffe Station area. At times it is impossible to use the Thanet Way in either direction because of people queueing for McDonald's/KFC. This will be exacerbated by the exit from Reeves Way when the Grasmere Pastures development is completed. Local residents are very worried about the risk of flooding, which has long been a concern in the area and which will now be exacerbated by the new development.

One other major concern is about access to health services. The Whitstable Medical Practice, which was once excellent, is now struggling and residents can often no longer get an appointment within 3 weeks. Canterbury Hospital no longer has the full range of facilities, and local people have to go either to Margate or to Ashford for A & E facilities and other services. The Local District Plan must address these issues, alongside improved educational services, social care services, and maintenance of the local road network, which has become almost unusable, both because of the lack of maintenance, with potholes appearing ever more frequently, as well as constant road closures, including Bullockstone Road for 12 months, Hackington Road, Thornden Wood Road and so on.

I regret to say that other more detailed comments that we had made in the online consultation have been lost, but I am sure that you will understand the general drift of our concerns.

I calculated that if the Council were to achieve its target of 1250 homes per year in the years up to 2045, that would be an additional 28,750 homes in the Whitstable District. If all the proposed housing developments proposed in the District Plan were actually built, I dread to imagine what the population increase would be. The South East of England as a whole cannot sustain this level of development, let alone little fishing towns like Whitstable.

Yours sincerely



Jeremy and Catherine Shannon