

Presentation to Cabinet

on Policy N3 of the proposed revisions to the Local Plan concerning Thanington Recreation Ground

Monday 8 September 2025

I have asked to speak this evening as I would like to challenge Policy N3 which proposes tarmacking over a large part of Thanington Recreation Ground for the construction of a 900 space Park & Ride. I have three strong objections to this proposal.

Firstly, I find the description of the policy disingenuous. It talks only of relocating the sports facilities, but totally disregards the fact that the site is - as it says on the tin - also a recreation ground. It is the only meaningful amenity open space for residents of an estate which is in the top 10% of the most deprived areas in the UK. Relocating the sports pitches will do nothing to compensate this deprived community for this loss.

Secondly, the conversion of this green field to a huge car park raises many of the same issues as the Council's former proposal to convert Wincheap Water Meadows into a Park & Ride, namely the destruction of functional floodplain, damage to the Great Stour Local Wildlife Site and urban sprawl within the Stour valley Area of High Landscape Value. Given the biodiversity crisis and the predictions for more extreme flooding events as a result of the climate crisis, we urgently need to protect our precious green spaces along the Stour corridor and not view them as expendable whenever it is expedient to do so.

Thirdly, the residents of Thanington have already fought this battle, and won. In 2008, under the leadership of John Gilbey, the Council was forced to abandon a similar proposal. Announcing the news in the Gazette, opposition leader, Alex Perkins, said: *'In the interests of giving everyone in Thanington the happy Christmas that they deserve, the highly controversial Park & Ride scheme for Thanington Recreation Ground has been scrapped.... It has been confined to the scrap-heap where it has always belonged.'* It would be foolhardy and unfair to inflict this ill-conceived policy proposal on the Thanington community again.

Having spent 7 years fighting to save Kingsmead Field from the Council's hatchet and 3 years fighting the Council's plans to turn Wincheap Water Meadows into a Park & Ride, I know from personal experience that it takes huge community resources to fight a battle like this and that such battles create deep-rooted and long-lasting distrust and resentment of the Council.

To avoid another bitter battle, please consider alternatives to this flawed policy now, such as a three-tiered car park on the existing Park & Ride. Please don't lock yourselves into a path of no return by waiting until it is too late to change course.

And, finally, if you remember just one thing from my appeal, please take heed of Alex Perkin's advice and assign policy N3 to the scrap-heap **'where it has always belonged'**.