

KALC, Shepway Area Committee – Otterpool Park Garden Town

Following a recent Area Committee meeting the 5 parish councils Lympne, Postling, Saltwood, Sellindge and Stanford directly affected by Otterpool Park Garden Town are setting up a joint committee to scrutinise the project.

Otterpool Park Garden Town is a project being promoted by Folkestone and Hythe District council via their management company Otterpool Park Limited Liability Partnership to build up to 10,000 homes, with retail and industrial areas and associated infrastructure on and around what was the old Westenhanger Racecourse.

The planning procedure adopted is a 3 tier approach, the current application (Tier 1) comprises setting out a spatial design of the proposed development and the strategic design principles that will guide detailed design in the later tiers. It is as yet unclear how a Tier 2 submission relates to the usual reserved matters applications.

The planning process has been protracted and is still on going. Land purchases and the employment of numerous consultants has already cost tens of millions of pounds.

Part of the planning process dictates that consultation with local Stake Holders is an essential requirement prior to any approval being given. Local Parish Councils have spent many hours over many years discussing the project with the various parties associated with the development delivery without seemingly any significant acknowledgement being made within the submitted planning documents of the suggestions and objections raised in those discussions.

Local Parish Councils accept that the needs of local people of all ages dictate the requirement for the provision of a fairly large number of affordable, environmentally friendly homes within the district, and that the old Westenhanger Racecourse site may be an appropriate site for these homes, providing any development comes with adequate infrastructure planning and provision prior to, and during the build process.

The size of the proposed development, with regards both total area and number of homes will inevitably have a much more significant impact on the existing local communities than a smaller more contained development particularly regarding Visual Impact, Loss of Agricultural Potential, Health and Well Being, Traffic Congestion, Education and Health Provision, Potable Water Supply, Waste Water Treatment, and Electricity Supply.

The 3 tier planning approach has meant that any detailed planning for, and resolution of the above issues has been deferred to the 2 later planning stages, which has allowed Otterpool Park LLP to deflect any legitimate questions asked by the Parishes with the answer that they will be dealt with during the later planning submissions.

As discussions between individual Councils and Otterpool Park LLP have made little progress regarding obtaining firm commitments for provision of adequate upfront infrastructure and protecting the local area from large scale disruption in its various forms, during the build period, which is quoted as 30 years, an additional and more joined up approach may produce more recognition of the issues identified.

After considering the current lack of progress being experienced by all the member Parish Councils, the Kalc Shepway Area Committee meeting agreed that the five Parishes that are responsible for parts of the land comprising the Otterpool development, Lympne, Postling, Saltwood, Sellindge, Stanford should, under the umbrella of the Area Committee, set up a joint group to formulate and establish terms of reference to better pursue and communicate their observations, objections, concerns and ideas to Otterpool Park Limited Liability Partnership. [?? and the District Council]

Recent financial problems experienced by Folkestone and Hythe, as illustrated by the halting of the Princes Parade Project, have started to call the whole viability of the Otterpool Project in its current form into question, At least under the present setup the overall vision is being controlled by a company accountable directly to F&H. At a recent F&H committee meeting a councillor suggested that the Council might consider

selling off the entire Otterpool Park project to a developer This possible change in accountability has made a robust examination of, and response to the ongoing application even more essential, which the setting up of this joint group may aid.