



BIRCHINGTON PARISH COUNCIL

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Birchington Parish Council launches ‘Your Village, Your Voice, Your Say’

This week, Birchington Parish Council launches its *‘Your Village, Your Voice, Your Say’* initiative to raise awareness of the outline planning application to build 1,650 new homes on agricultural land south west of the village.

The application comes as a result of the Thanet District Council decision in July 2020 to adopt the fiercely opposed Local Plan which includes an allocation of over 75 hectares (185 acres) of prime agricultural land at Birchington, for development.

Neville Hudson, Chairman of the Parish Council said ‘The plan to build so many houses, at pace on a green field site, without significant investment in village infrastructure risks overwhelming the existing community. We are particularly concerned that the consultation being wholly conducted during a national lockdown compromises full and meaningful debate.’

These are huge proposals likely to affect thousands of people over many years yet TDC is managing the planning application as it would an application for a dropped kerb or the lopping of trees. In some respects, such small domestic planning applications are more likely to receive more scrutiny as TDC would write to those likely to be affected to seek their views, whereas for this application to build 1,650 new homes it has simply posted information on the internet.

Anyone without internet access, those without sufficient internet ability or curiosity and those without the capacity to navigate large quantities of often complex documentation are excluded from consultation.

The application comprises more than 60, often complex, documents stretching to 1,000's of pages, they have been placed on the TDC website with no structure or navigation support. A monumental challenge for those who do find their way there and in sharp contrast to the approach taken by TDC for management of documentation and consultation concerning the Local Plan.

Placing documents on a website is not in itself consultation. Indeed, there are many people in Birchington who, two weeks into consultation, are unaware of the application and its proposals, the presence of the documents on the website or their rights to comment.

Association with others beyond the immediate household and public gatherings are forbidden; under normal circumstances printed documents would be available for inspection at libraries and the TDC offices but all these are currently closed. Even if special arrangements were put in place to make documents available for inspection a visit would risk a £200 fine as this would not be an essential journey.

‘Your Village, Your Voice, Your Say’ aims to address some of the shortcomings in the consultation process with information delivered through a mix of printed and social media.

Neville Hudson explained ‘Our aim is to help as many people as possible to know about these proposals and to give them an opportunity to express their views.’

The parish magazine will soon be delivered to every home in Birchington and will contain an extensive article about the planning application and how comments can be submitted.

In addition, leaflets will be available from locations around the parish.

There are active social media channels in Birchington where we will place information and signpost to the parish website (<https://birchington-pc.gov.uk/>).

This planning application represents a considerable challenge to the people of Birchington and beyond, I encourage everyone to consider what is being proposed and to express their views to TDC and to their elected representatives.'

Enclosed:

Parish magazine article

Leaflet

END