



GORDON HENDERSON MP

Member of Parliament for Sittingbourne and Sheppey

HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Cllr Mike Baldock
Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Planning
Swale Borough Council
Swale House
East Street
Sittingbourne
Kent, ME10 3HT

Dear Mike

SWALE'S LOCAL PLAN

Thank you for your letter sent to me as an "Occupier" in Swale, which I assume was sent to every household in my constituency, as part of Swale Borough Council's consultation on its draft Local Plan. I am responding not only as a resident of the borough, but also as the Member of Parliament for Sittingbourne and Sheppey. Because of the importance of this subject, I am sending my response as an open letter for wider circulation.

In your letter you explained you were expected to find sufficient land for the future housing needs of the borough, which you calculated would be 10,000 homes. Helpfully you provided details of where you plan those homes should be built. Based on the figures you quoted, my constituency is being expected to accept almost half those homes. However, in my view, Sittingbourne and Sheppey's share will actually be far higher than you are suggesting, as I will explain why later.

I would like to formally register my very strong objection to your proposals for a number of reasons:-

- 1) Over the past three decades, my constituency of Sittingbourne and Sheppey has taken the bulk of the borough's housing developments. More than its fair share and enough is enough. My constituency should be allocated no more, let alone the unacceptable percentage suggested by the Local Plan
- 2) The proposed housing figures you quote in your letter amount to 6,320 homes, however, you claim in your letter that you "have to deliver" an extra 10,000. This means you still need to find land for 3,680 homes. You have not provided any details of where you intend they should be built, so I can only assume they are included either in the category: "smaller sustainable sites that come forward in the future" or "the regeneration in Sheerness". Either way, my suspicion is that most of those homes will end up in my constituency. If so, it would take the number of new homes you plan to impose on Sittingbourne and Sheppey to 6,480. That would be 65% of the borough's total, rather than the 37% you are currently suggesting. That is unacceptable.
- 3) The figure of new homes planned for Sittingbourne and Sheppey, fails to recognise that already in the pipeline are almost 2,000 more homes on the Isle of Sheppey, and many hundreds more in Sittingbourne, for which planning permission has already been granted (or is likely to be granted).



- 4) The infrastructure in Sittingbourne and Sheppey is already overstretched, including having one of the highest of patient to GPs ratios in the country; a lack of school places; a number of communities with high levels of deprivation; a low skills base; and congested roads. Lumping ever more homes on the area will only add to those problems.

Turning to the specific sites mentioned in your letter, I would like to make the following observations:

850 dwellings at Queenborough & Rushenden. There is already a large on-going development taking place in Rushenden, and another planned close by at Barton Hill Drive, Minster. What evidence do you have that: a) more houses are needed in the area; and b) a developer will be willing to build them, bearing in mind the Council's apparent insistence that a many of them will have to be affordable or social housing and 20% will have to meet your zero-carbon and energy efficient criteria? The reality is that such requirements will make any development uneconomic. Just witness the "eco" development in Scocles Road, Minster, where most of the homes remain unsold.

850 dwellings at Sittingbourne town centre. Where exactly in the town centre do you plan to build those houses, because the Local Plan does not make that clear? The centre of Sittingbourne is already heavily congested and imposing even more homes on the area will just exacerbate the existing problems.

Area of Opportunity at Teynham for 1,100. Imposing such a large number of homes in Teynham and Lynsted, will have a devastating impact on this rural community, which will see the same sort of transformation witnessed by residents in Iwade, turning it from a large village into a small town. Such a large development would also put additional strain on the overstretched A2, adding to the already unacceptable level of air pollution in the area. The proposed bypass will not help the situation, nor will it help congestion in Sittingbourne, indeed, it is likely to exacerbate the problem in the town.

Finally, I note in your letter the attempt to blame the Government for the decisions you are being forced to take. Whilst I accept the housing targets imposed on Swale are unacceptably high and, as you know, I continue to lobby ministers to reduce them, the Government does NOT dictate where those houses should be built. That will be the decision of Swale Borough Council.

I therefore implore you to take into consideration the level of development that has already taken place in my constituency in the past 30 years and change your draft local plan to remove the three sites listed above. Instead, you should reconsider your opposition to "garden communities" (which have the advantage of being able to provide the necessary new infrastructure, which is not easy to achieve with smaller developments spread across the borough).

I would suggest that your proposed development in South East Faversham could be expanded into such a garden community.

Yours Sincerely
Gordon

GORDON HENDERSON MP