

26 April 2012

Councillors,

**Than you and good morning**

### **Introduction**

I am Mike Hirsh; and I representing *The Friends of Uddens and Cannon Hill Woodlands*.

As some of you will know, I was, until eighteen months ago the Head of Service dealing with Planning application and related matters for East Dorset District Council. The site in question is therefore in my 'old patch.' I am the author of the letter which was sent out with your agenda.

This morning I will explain:

- Why the petition has been submitted
- What your own officer report said in January
- I will appraise policy
- I will update you on the Easter Monday Survey carried out by the Friends in the Uddens Plantation Woodland
- I will then expand on the concerns of business.
- You will be relieved to know I am not going to talk at any length about the Habitat Regulations as I set that issue out in depth in my letter.

## THE PETITION

The petition as submitted by the Friends and delivered to County Hall is signed by 6068 people.

That number is just extraordinary! Your Democratic Services Manager, Kirsty Rigler, cannot remember a larger petition. It is a reflection of **local concern** that cannot be ignored. Approximately 80% of residents in a two mile radius, walkers and employees on the adjacent industrial estate have signed it.

The wording of the petition advises:

**We petition Dorset County Council to spend the £1.75 million that has been awarded by the Homes and Communities Agency for the Uddens Site, be instead spent on a more suitable site elsewhere in Dorset.**

### **Background to the wording of the Petition – what was the motivation**

The petition focuses on the fact that County officers applied for grant funding to develop this site. There was a real concern, arising from this successful grant application, that there was the potential for the County Council to be pre-determined too.

This is not helped by the **Environment Overview Committee Report of the 12 January that went on to your Cabinet on the 1<sup>st</sup> February** which advises against this item:

“....Officers have since liaised with the landowner, the Forestry Commission and carried out preliminary design work to establish the feasibility of locating a 25 pitch transit site.....The County Council has submitted an Expression of Interest for external funding for this site and this has been well received by the Homes and Communities Agency who administer this grant regime.

.....this location would be well suited to improve the management of unauthorised camping in the south East Dorset area.....

It would be opportune, subject to this site finding favour at the next stage of the development document process, for a formal application for government funding to be made available for the early development of this site as a transit site,....”

The minutes of both meetings corroborated this position.

**To any member of the public reading this it looks like a done deal.**

Is it surprising the petition was started!

### **Policy Background**

Both my letter and the report covering this petition prepared by your officers’ consider policy. Here are 5 key points:

- First, the policy framework at National level changed a month ago with the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework [NPPF] and a daughter document on Planning Policy for Traveller Sites [PPTS]. The proposed site and the adjacent dwellings are in statutory Green Belt. In January you were minded to go for an early application. Now

the position is as set out at paragraph 3.8 of your officer's report covering this item today – it can only happen through a DPD allocation.

- Second, the settled community lives in 15 houses, yet the proposal is for 25 pitches. It is foreseeable that travellers will outnumber residents by at least 3:1. The proposal has always been in conflict with both your own and National policy (now National Policy C) in this respect.
- Third, the new National Policy explains the Government's aim is for Local Planning Authorities to '**have due regard to the protection of local amenity and local environment.**' This proposal fundamentally fails this policy. Imagine a large part of the site cleared for access and the pitches; imagine 25 caravans, 25 or more vehicles, paraphernalia and attendant clutter and about 70 to 100 gypsies or travellers plus dogs etc. stopping here on a regular basis. It is hardly rocket science to understand that this use will destroy any woodland's integrity within a short time. Human perception of place is an all senses issue –that cannot simply be landscaped away.
- The Castleman Trailway is a Dorset treasure which you are in danger of destroying in part. On Easter Monday the Friends surveyed 215 [this is a correction from my letter where I said 217] people in the woodland on the trailway. 197 said they would stop using it if there was a transit site in the vicinity. Either you have the wood and the

Castleman trailway, or you have a transit site. Of course if you do not have the wood its existing **Biodiversity** will be lost too.

- Fifth, NPPF's section **on Promoting Healthy Communities** advises that: *'Planning policies should protect and enhance public rights of way and access. Local authorities should seek opportunities to provide better facilities for users...'* **-this is the reverse!**

You will recall that the weather was miserable on Easter Monday. I was astonished that there were 219 people out getting wet and that 215 were willing to be surveyed. The Friends were upset at such a small figure. Significantly there were 99 dog walkers (45%) and 7 horse riders. Their favourite alternative venues, if the scheme went ahead were Holt Heath and Ferndown Common; 43% advised they would have to drive if they had to visit an alternative site.

### **Habitat Regulations Assessment and Appropriate Assessment.**

As promised in opening I am not going to explain the Habitat regulations and the need for an appropriate assessment. Except to say diversion of dogs on to the Heaths is a much worse problem than the horses in the appeal extract I provided with my letter.

It is a 'silver bullet' that will kill off this proposal. It is a pity the consultants appraisal missed it.

### **Local Business related issues: loss of livelihood.**

Last, there is a real concern in the local business community. The site is, after all, a short walk, and by that I mean three to five minutes, depending on where you start and finish, from the Industrial Estates. In my letter I referred to a few local examples:

- the Old Thatch PH
- Stapehill Farm, with its pre-school nursery
- Stapehill Abbey
- And the Arena Business Centre

In addition here are three examples specifically from the Uddens Industrial Estate

- Jim Brooks of Inoplas Technology advises in an email to me: “I am very concerned at these proposals. Our factory is probably the nearest premises to the proposed site and would be very difficult to secure properly. Whilst it had been my plan to invest in this site and to increase employment here I will not be making those decisions until this issue is settled.”
- The Directors of Farrow and Ball advise that: “it is detrimental to their business development plans and that it would obviously have an adverse impact on the future of the Uddens Industrial Estate.”
- Savills have written to the Friends on behalf the Birchmere Group, the freehold owners of 31 of the industrial units at Uddens. They foresee that the proposal will adversely impact on the viability and deliverability

of commercial uses both existing and proposed. They identify that the proposal puts the Blunts Farm, draft local plan allocation immediately next door. in commercial jeopardy. They also support the concerns of Farrow and Ball.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the County is pivotal as it has obtained grant. Agreeing not to use the grant for the Uddens site will allay the concerns of a large number of residents and businesses.

That is what the petitioners are asking!

Thank you

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