

## **Leader's Statement to Full Council – Wednesday 22 November 2017**

### **Housing allocations:**

I make no apologies for returning to the main item in my last Leader's Statement. As Members will know the review of the National Planning Policy Framework is expected to result in Swale's housing numbers increasing from the current number of 776 houses per annum to somewhere in excess of 1,000 dwellings per annum. It is strongly hinted that pressure from London's unmet need, and the apparently accepted inability of green belt authorities to equally not meet their own need, could put Swale and similar authorities in the firing line to take up the short fall.

The good news, yes there is some, is that although we are waiting final confirmation, we expect the figure of 776 dwellings per annum to be protected until April 2022. The downside is that we await clarity on whether the shortfall (1,120 dwellings) will be added to the target for the rest of the plan period, ie from 2022 to 2037. To save you all doing the mathematics this could mean that in the 2022 to 2037 period we would need to be looking to provide 10,000 to 12,000 additional homes, beyond that in the recently adopted plan.

I think I have been perfectly clear that the "death by 1,000 cuts" option of spreading this growth across the whole Borough and in the process antagonising every local community (and every ward councillor) is not one that I would look forward to.

Increasingly, most local planning authorities are being forced to look at the option of a new settlement or settlements such as Otterpool Park in Shepway. The issue with new settlements is that the lead-in times are usually a minimum of 5 to 10 years before housing delivery commences. They are also almost always dependent on the provision of expensive infrastructure, not least new road networks.

As you will all know Swale is constrained by the large number of environmental special protection areas to the north and the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty to the south. This leaves a corridor effectively from Newington in the west to south-east Faversham (Boughton and Selling) in the east. Even a new settlement of up to 10,000 dwellings would, from evidence elsewhere, only produce circa 300 dwellings per annum, ie 3,000 dwellings over the target period. This would suggest that to comply with the estimated targets, Swale may have to look at more than one new settlement plus some additional dwellings on further (greenfield?) sites at the start of the planning period in order to meet the five year supply target.

I repeat my assertion included in my last Leader's Statement that it is in my opinion impossible, I could even say barmy.

I would draw the Members attention, if they have not already seen it, to the Secretary of State's statement on Thursday of last week, he has put 15 councils "on notice" that they face direct intervention from the Government unless they bring forward plans for significant for extra house building. These councils include one here in Kent, Thanet. The Secretary of

State has given them a deadline of 31 January 2018 to explain why the Government should not directly intervene in their planning processes.

### **Air Quality update**

Air quality is a matter the Administration take seriously and we have recently produced an interim Air Quality Action Plan to cover all five declared Air Quality Management Areas along the A2. This updated Air Quality Action Plan has been thoroughly revised to reflect the commonality and strategic nature of some of the measures being proposed rather than treating issues in isolation. Other specific local proposals will be retained to reflect individual needs. We are in the process of drawing together the Air Quality Steering Group, which will consider the viability of establishing a Low Emission Corridor along the A2, before consulting more widely on the proposed Strategic Air Quality Action Plan and its submission to Defra in 2018.

In addition to this Planning have adopted an Air Quality Technical Guidance document which clearly identifies the mitigation measure developers should provide when submitting major planning applications. The recent High Court decision on Pond Farm, Newington by Gladman Developments Ltd will also inform the decisions made for planning development in the Borough.

This of course has to be read in conjunction with the first part of my Leader's Statement tonight. Taken together it seems that planning development will have to take account, and rightly so, the impact on air quality, especially air quality management areas, whilst at the same time meeting artificial Government targets or having Central Government take those functions away from us. Should they do so I wonder how they will meet their own targets whilst complying with guidance and indeed high court decisions on air quality.

**Cllr Andrew Bowles**  
**Leader**