

In the best interest of Downswood Parish Council I find it necessary to make a formal statement to the council with regards recent communications between myself and the Chair of Otham Parish Council, specifically in reference to a proposed Public Meeting with Bellway Homes regards to the proposed development at Church Road.

I was copied on an email from Rachel Grey (Chair of OPC) where she invited Bellway to hold a public meeting for residents of Otham and Downswood at our community Centre.

I agreed to this but with the express caveat that the meeting was very clearly seen to be being hosted by Bellway and not the Parish Councils. Having Rachels agreement to this I asked Teresa to check available dates and these were duly passed to Bellway and a date agreed.

I was somewhat surprised when I was later copied on an email where the Community Centre booking clerk was requested to confirm a date of 12<sup>th</sup> March for a Public meeting to be hosed by Downswood and Otham Parish Council.

I immediately raised a very strong objection to this and suggested that the booking be changed to confirm that Bellway were hosting a meeting to which residents of Otham and Downswood would be invited to attend.

This was met with some strong objection by both our own Clerk Teresa and especially Rachel, the chair of OPC who both suggested that it was in fact correct to say it was a public meeting held by our joint parishes.

I did discuss my reasoning for making such an objection with my vice chair, the chair of planning and our County Councillor, all of whom were in complete agreement that a meeting of such a nature would not be in the best interests of Downswood. I made it very clear to Rachel that we would not in any way want to be seen to be endorsing the proposed plan or pre-determining it's likely go ahead or be seen to be condoning it.

I felt very strongly that to host such a meeting would give the wrong impression to our parishioners that we were perhaps either in favour or such a plan or in cahoots with the developer.

It was felt that a meeting prior to a planning application being made could generate some feeling amongst residents who would then not follow the formal objection procedure as they may have considered that they had already raised their objections directly to the developer. More appropriately in my view, a meeting after the application is submitted where we could guide and generate more appropriate objections to the planning committee.

Further more, such a meeting would likely have given the developer the opportunity to at a planning enquiry make a false claim that they had consulted with local residents and would likely use the meeting as an opportunity to soft soap residents and try and allay any fears by making promises of mitigation in terms of improvements to Church Road – which although

they have mentioned are still at the bequest of the County Council to agree to and are far from guaranteed as happening.

Subsequently I received a draft poster from Rachel advertising the event – I did not feel that this was satisfactory and continued to give the wrong impression about the meeting and drafted what I felt to be a more appropriate alternate.

The proposed development is on the very periphery of Otham, and affect directly small number of their parishoners, whilst it abuts much of Downswood who will suffer significantly if it is allowed to go ahead. In the future Otham will benefit from significant Community Infrastructure Payments whilst Downswood will receive nothing.

Unfortunately Rachel was unable to accept this suggestion and decided that the meeting should be cancelled. Despite on 2 occasions inviting her to phone to discuss or arrange a meeting in person she ignored this reasonable request and did this all via email – the final email from her on the subject she chose to make personally offensive towards me, questioning amongst other things my knowledge of planning procedures and ability to chair a Parish Council.