

This is a transcript of the Q&A session after Stephen Baughen's presentation at a meeting of Capel Parish on Monday 20th May 2019. Stephen Baughen is the Head of Planning at Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. At this meeting, he told Capel residents, for the first time, about TWBC's plan to build thousands of new homes in Capel.

This transcript was written up by the Capel Parish Clerk from an audio recording of the Q&A session. It was reviewed by the Chair and Vice-Chair of Capel Parish Council before being published. It does not replace the minutes of the meeting. It was an appendix to those minutes.

Q: Police force fits inside one landrover in this area. Public transport not mentioned. Oversubscribed schools. No existing problems addressed.

SB: Infrastructure, schools etc will be Masterplanned led approach. Will not be tacked on to existing schools. Don't know if existing school might need to be increased. Police, I cant talk for police & they are not funded via development but through council tax ... they can ask for more theoretically. Transport. Opportunity to look at new green transport holistically. Plan a triangle Pembury, Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge, & garden settlement. Will encourage public transport & less use of cars, bicycles & walking, electric bikes etc. Would allow a joined up approach through one large development rather than small new developments. Once the agricultural land is granted planning permission it will rocket in price and allow funding via developer. On the cusp of great change, technology changing rapidly with autonomous vehicles, dial a bus etc. Network rail have advised that there isn't sufficient capacity to have an additional station on the line.

Q: What advice have you taken from the EA regarding the wetland area of the Tudeley site?

SB: We have commissioned experts who have taken existing channels and modelled flooding from the Medway and existing rivers, streams etc & looked at how that will change with climate change & impact of the development. The EA are so happy with the work done they are adopting the flood maps TWBC are developing. EA consulted throughout.

Q: On TWBC website 321 houses in Capel are already at high risk of flooding. Are you going to allow for extra discharge through capel? The promised flood mitigation scheme has not been built? Has the culvert been taken into consideration (by railway)

SB: Yes & the consultants have looked at the Strategic flood risk and this will when completed go on the website as part of the LP Evidence Base this summer

Q: The EA mapping in this area is absolutely terrible (I have worked with them) Three quarters of the sites you are showing are at high risk of flooding. The site near Banbridges will be under water with climate change. Quite clear no Environmental impact assessments on these sites. Areas of Scientific Interest, protected species. etc it is an environmental disaster waiting to happen. Traffic -it

wont be 20 years for electric cars but 50 or 60. A dead duck if no train provision for these extra houses. Fire service, ambulances services, noise cars etc.

SB: Flooding. EA has adopted it. They say it is accurate. In terms of particular habitats of species we are very conscious of it & Master Planning will look at it eg ancient woodland, we will keep buffers. Not just housing we are allowing & can on this scale allow for employment opportunity. Let me explain the Master Planning system a little more & how it works

Q: What is the point of Greenbelt ?

SB: Its been a difficult decision. Longest standing policy but do you build in AONB or MGB? TW is a very constrained borough. National policy says boundary can be moved. It is only a draft plan & can be looked at again

Q; Looks like a done deal. Very simple, meet housing numbers from Gov. & your going to create loads of jobs. Cant magic them up. How many BC from Capel do we have who can opine on this? Just a sop.

SB: Sorry you feel like that. Not a done deal by any means. "Expands on consultation & timetable in answer etc" Final plan can be very different.

Q: Landowner happy to forfeit agricultural land? Any relationships between TWBC & Landowner. Any one who stands to benefit from the developments who is making the decision?

SB: All land has been submitted by landowners. No relationships – they would have to be declared.

Chair requests all questions taken in group due to time constraints

Q: Who is going to buy. 776 unsold or unlet properties in TN9 & 12. Where is the demand? Where are the profits going?

Q: What are the other options/sites? A, B & C plans? Is this the A plan?

Q: Why would you want to build 2 brand new roads? You could build a new road from top of PW to join up with the A21

Q: PW GP surgery already struggling. No GPs. Strain on NHS – hospital cant cope.

Q: Durtnalls yard. E.Impact & MGB, opposite ancient woodland & site borders AONB & yet TWBC have so failed to implement planning restrictions on the site. It is ironic then that you are able to take away our MGB status. It's ours & its precious to us. Vandalising it. With the new road (that you cant give us detail on) but would be through MGB is there any element of Compulsory purchase both on land or properties near it?

Q: 13,500 houses to build, are these the only sites allocated?

SB: No

Q: So how many houses on these 3 sites then? When did the Borough last provide any big open green space to balance the population?

SB: 4,000 Capel/PW & 2,500-2,800 at Tudeley. But in LP period 2036 only about 2,000.

Q: I live on the A228 surrounded by fields but will now become part of PW. Will their be CPO because with that amount of traffic I will have no access on to it. My house is now worthless now you've set this plan in action. I will be stuck living in a town now.

Q: The total amount of acreage esp Tudeley site? Makes sense now why KCC are pushing the application for the quarry site as it will feed these devs. Lived in the area for 30 years & where Tudeley dev abuts quarry it really does flood. You are putting a large no of properties & listed properties at risk. People who have just moved here to start families & planning there future here etc are now facing financial disaster. Other areas come to enjoy what we already have here. It will all be lost. If you are buying a house today this will not come up in any search. The quarrying, the developments ...disastrous for the area.

Q: For years petition after petition for traffic calming and a crossing, now we have a situation with thousands of cars coming through the village what are you going to do about that? (And Alders Rd)

Q: Will the new infrastructure be clean and green & hi tech or is this just an excuse for mineral extraction?

Q: I presume you have taken extensive legal advice support and Councils opinion that your plans are robust & safe with regard to the NPPF? Is that a document or info you are prepared to share with Parishioners?

Q: 80% of the house you have to build are in this area. You had 5 plans earlier with some spread more evenly. You would have had more support if they weren't just dumped here. Can we see the other plans & why have you chosen this one?

Q: It seems like TWBC is opting out of their responsibility. You admitted earlier it was easier for Councils to make developers pay for schools, hospitals & infrastructure with garden villages rather than smaller develops & Council doing their duty to provide it.

Q: Whatever we think, we have one BC amongst 40 others who are pleased its not in there area. When are we going to get the representation we deserve?

Q: These devs provide most of the housing required by TW's. There is a large area in the call for sites that borders Tonbridge - what provision is there that this isn't just the first step to a greater PW/Tonbridge conurbation that swallows up Capel and FOG?

Q: Sewage will be a major problem with this no. of houses which it already is.

Q: Boundary changes – how could this affect these proposals?

Q: How do we oppose this?

SB: Strategy first. Why so many in Capel? Allocations being made elsewhere. Several areas will be increased by substantial amount. Not the same scale as here. We consulted on 5 options and the reason why we propose here will be set out in a background doc. It was a case of looking at constraints, various landownership and a large part of the borough is AONB. Policy is major dev in AONB can only take place in exceptional circumstances, we are proposing some in the North & West. View the docs & consultation papers when the consultation starts for detail. Linked to that are boundaries, as far as we know they will remain the same but constituency for MP might be different. Boundaries could change in wards & parish to equalise numbers on pop.

Infrastructure. Road thru FOG & flood mitigation. Proposal assessed and developed for flooding impact to ensure risk isn't made worse, requirement that improvements be made in PW & FOG. Borough & KCC tells the dev. how much money they must provide. At the minute this is £16,000 per house – this will go a good way to providing schools, health provision. There also opportunities for funding from central Gov. and if this plan is adopted we will pursue these.

Q: When you consider how much the A21 overrun in cost, £16K a house will not be enough for infrastructure you mention eg Colts Hill Bypass, flood prevention, schools. It it comes to £32 million for 2,000 homes.

SB: With the 4,000 around PW it is more. We have commissioned experts. They understand costs & development industry. This will be set out in the infrastructure delivery plan. I understand you are sceptical but that is what the planning process requires. It will still allow developers to take a profit of around 20%. Landowners in the past have made a huge profit. This allows for the middle section and a greater % taken for infrastructure.

Developers won't build without around 20% profit, it all depends on the option taken out on the land. If to undertake the work requires X amount for mitigation that value usually comes off the land, if that mitigation isn't required it allows the landowners an uplift in value. I can say this as I used to work for 4 years for housebuilders and I know how it works on the other side.

Q: You are quoting a lot of things your experts know, do they know when your living room is 3 foot under water? The developments are in the wrong place.

SB: The flood mitigation will ensure it will not worsen the situation, it will allow the developments to be safe from flooding and there is a policy requirement that it improves the flooding situation for existing residents.

Q: Is it true they have stopped the dev in PW because the main sewage system can't cope?

SB: Yes, and that exemplifies the issue of bolting on to developments. Sewage provision is taken through legislation, the sewerage providers must provide a connection to the existing system and all slightly outside the planning system, SW say each developer must provide the monies so they can then provide what is necessary. What is happening in PW particularly with the Mascalls Court Farm site is SW said there is sufficient capacity in the existing system for up to 60 houses but no more. Further works are therefore required to that system for more than 60. A development on a masterplan basis allows for us to say to SW and other infrastructure providers is don't just say you will add to an existing system that is already struggling, if there is going to be housing here and here is there the potential to properly plan for that and make sure there's a ring sewer. Make sure there's sufficient water treatment work. This applies to a site like this, so that its not adding onto an existing system. It can be planned for comprehensively and strategically which will be one of the benefits of delivering it.

Q: Your telling us how much everything is going to cost, everyone taking their cut etc. How much are these houses going to cost? Who will be able to afford them? They won't be for the nurses & cleaners at the new hospital we'll need. It'll be commuters moving into the area, the trains can't cope at the moment. How does it benefit anyone?

SB: I agree, TW's as a borough does attract people from London. No point saying anything else. Some will be affordable.

Q: What does affordable mean?

SB: The plan requires a mix of housing on all sites including these. From flats up to larger houses. Some will then be Affordable but cant give you exact proportion yet (interrupted by a Cllr to say allocation will be 35%) Yes, that's what we anticipate but it could be more or less. AH is a mixture of shared ownership, (it doesn't mean they will be nice and cheap, people could be shipped out of London en masse) ...it doesn't mean that at all, a proportion will also be for social rent which is 40% below market rate. We need to ensure housing provided for a whole range, also accommodation suitable for the elderly & those with extra care needs.

Q: Worked in the industry for 22 years with people such as Berkeley homes & regeneration projects. Do you know how much affordable homes cost? Do you know what a months rent is on shared ownership? How much interest they have to pay the Gov? Do you understand about Help to buy? Many housebuilder's will allocate social housing off site through back door agreements. It will end up as executive homes, this village cant sell the ones we have. Other issue is if they are sold & fall into private landlord control, you will have no control who occupies them & what rents are set. If there is a change of Gov can we stop this?

SB: Planning services are aware of the various ways the dev industry works & costs etc so yes we do. In terms of a change in Gov. the proportion for TW's arises from the current Govs target of 300,000 a year. The coalition target was 270 labour gov. was also about 270. All of the main parties are looking to dramatically increase housebuilding. We are not political in any way. I don't think a change of Gov will alter the target but that is just my professional opinion..

SB: Hospitals & GPs. We are liaising with the CCG's about how this will impact on the NHS & we have factored it in & again dev contributions will provide. What the planning system can't do is actually provide the GPs etc but we can provide the buildings. It is for the NHS to address. In terms of relationships between developers, landowners & officers, all members of the BC must declare interests they have & it is on the website. Also declarations at the beginning of all meetings etc. In terms of officers there are none. Let me talk about the overall process. How best to object. The overall timetable is here, put your comments during the key phase of consultation in writing, liaise with your members etc. We look and listen to all comments. We are not doing this for fun, take from me as Officers we completely understand the impact our decisions have on people. The extent we worry about all planning apps is incredible. We know that at times we are going to massively upset people but it's the profession we have chosen. We do everything with a massive amount of consideration.

Q: The process, at the end of October, when all comments have been made, does it then go to an Inspector? Obviously CPC & parishioners are likely to reject these proposals, although Council has yet to officially declare opposition. When is the first time the Inspectorate involved.

SB: No, so all comments will be in a consultation document that will then go to Cllrs of TWBC who will make a decision on whether to proceed. Inspectorate will be involved at the examination time.

Q: So if we made comments objecting & you reject those, when we get to the Inspector will they still be valid comments?

SB: Yes, he will invite people to attend the examination which is held in public poss. in Council Chamber or a hotel over 3 weeks. You can register to speak. NPPF & Planning Practise Guidance they contain the info on process. The Exhibitions will also detail process.

Q: Areas selected covered in streams, ditches, watercourses & River Medway. Some are 100s of years old. Very high water table. These proposals wont work because the land is too low lying. So why are you putting more demand on the water courses infrastructure that already cant cope?

Q: You had 5 suggestions for site allocation. The more sporadic approach spread across the area could be handled & supported but surely no one has looked at your proposals & thought we'll easily get that through, that'll go down well.

Q: Have you got pictures of the other allocations across TWB?

SB: Not at this point because it will be 2 months before the plan becomes public and if dev's see elsewhere that their land isn't allocated they will put forward a planning application and try and exploit the time frame to get that speculative dev through. That info isn't publically available until later on. I wanted to come down to talk to Capel & PW tomorrow as soon as possible, we had to put it back by 8 weeks because of further work we needed to do. In Sept. we will have all of the maps showing what's proposed for eg Hawkhurst etc. Call for sites is on the website with 450 sites but not all have been allocated.

Q: As with the solar farm will the estate be required to replace the Ag land elsewhere for food? Where are you allocating this?

SB: The draft plan doesn't have all of the answers at this point. It has an overall strategy & over the coming years there will be further work & refinement. There will be sizable areas of green space & ancient woodland etc. so I cant give you the exact hectorage which will be determined through the masterplan process.

Q: Is the Planning Inspectorate Independent?

SB: Yes, completely. They are civil servants & expert planners who people can appeal to. They also examine Local Plans & have no bias to the area.

Q: Only the economy generates jobs not planning. Could this be stage one of something bigger. Is there something in law that will stop this becoming the merger of Tonbridge, Capel & PW?

SB: Developers will only build employment sites if they are going to get people in, we know there are employers looking for sites in and around TW's and that is over a range of employers. Everyday I have contact from businesses looking for premises. It won't be a mini Kings Hill on the edge of PW but not just offices, production etc. No, this will not lead to one conurbation. The plan will review the MGB boundaries. Current national policy allows for this. No proposal for dev in FOG, secondary school edge of Tonbridge.

Q: In a few years your successor will stand there & talk about the next phase.

SB: That may happen but certainly at this point in time the landowners have made it clear this is the smaller site they wish to pursue, there is a wider site on the Call for Sites. This is over 15 years & reviewed in 5.

Q: You indicated with a rough wave of the hand the masterplan approach to the highways system needed. Alders road is a small road as are the roads through FOG. Could you be a little more explicit about any direct link to the Garden village or any new roadway? Or even a rough indication rather than just a wave.

SB: No I can't. Traffic indications/research is suggesting a link to the A228 but I wouldn't want to say its this route before it is looked at, at a higher level. It would be wrong of me to do more than roughly indicate as more work has to be undertaken to determine exact location.

Q: If one is to object to the Inspector there will need to be some indication of proposals.

SB: This will be developed over time. If the Council following the consultation period does decide to undertake a consultation on the pre submission plan, then over the coming year or so a lot of that further detail will be added. It's a long time period.

Q: Will you be able to upload the docs from your experts about the underground water courses they will be building over?

SB: They will be available in one of the consultation periods.

Q: Can you clarify regarding roads because as Cllrs we've been privy to some of the info. The position of these new roads will not be made public during the public consultation, is that right? So people won't be able to make an informed opinion if they don't know where the road that you're referring to will be? It's vital that the public know about the infrastructure that is proposed. If for instance you're referring to a road from the garden village to the A228 that will affect people in Capel, if you're not then it will affect those in FOG. We all already have problems. CPC have already promoted an alleviation scheme to the north to take traffic onto A21 & A26. Without that info how are we and the public able to make an objection.

SB: That's a very valid point. It will come through the masterplanning process

Q: So you've just divided up the parish & FOG & you won't tell us where. Where's the connectivity? You are not sharing enough info. I understand why we've had to keep quiet but you need to say where roads will go. Most people here probably don't give a monkey about A228 bypass, a little straightening & improvement, they might prefer a link from Transfesa to the quarry to other side of Tudeley to take all the traffic. FOG & Tudeley are going to be destroyed by traffic. Maybe Alders Road which is AONB

SB: If you feel you can't make comments without the full picture ... there is a process. We are not there yet on the higher level ...

Q: Now we have had a discussion about a roadway which we now know will be decided without our input.

SB: I didn't say that

Q: Well, when I come to object I won't know what has been decided. I asked an hour ago, is there any risk to the householders or landowners here of compulsory purchase with this plan?

SB: Yes.

Q: Could you elaborate and who is at risk?

SB: It comes back to the point about the route of that road. The existing A228 is in the current local plan in the event of funding that that will go ahead. In terms of the other road & the link onto it, I can't provide that info. now. But it is something I will take away from today that more info is needed on the route from the Garden village.

Q: Why do we need it? All that money on the A21?

Q: We did suggest quite strongly that if this were to happen a northern route would be preferable but it seems not to have been mentioned at all. Instead of dissecting the Parish via a road from the new dev & north of Alders, a road

perhaps from the hop farm sweeping near the quarry which PWTC seemed to like too as connected Transfesa . Widen the road at Somerhill because of congestion.

Q: There's a big quarry. What about the wildlife? Take all the land & its gone. Great idea mate but people travel miles to spend time on the Medway.

Q: It's a trade off

Q: There shouldn't be any trade off.

Q: So when will these roads be built? After the devs. because that when you get your money?

SB: Could I just emphasise a couple of things. The first is this is just a draft, its not a done deal at all. Secondly these are incredibly difficult decisions the borough has to make. It is doing so in the knowledge that it will have a massive impact on people and that is fundamental to everything we do. Thirdly can I just say to those who have been shocked to see these proposals, I wanted to come and talk to you, so please do look at the Councils website, look at the whole plan, background supporting documents, explanations and reasonings to it. 6 weeks in Sept for consultation and exhibitions.

Q: Not everyone is on the internet, everyone in the parish needs to know. I want reassurance that every single household will have the full picture, including the road.

SB: Consultation starts 25th Sept, on the 14th Sept "The Local" mag which is sent to every resident will have 4-6 pages about the LP in general, dates etc. So it will go to everyone & not just be web based.

Q: I went to PW Exhibition & we were invited to opt for A,B or C & a PW Cllr said it doesn't matter which one you vote for they are all going to be built. That is what has happened. This is exactly what will happen with this exhibition, you will ask us what we want and do whatever you want.

SB: I understand your sceptism.

Q: Would you be happy if you lived in FOG?

SB: We do understand & take seriously the implications of what we do every day

Q: You are not going to offer Cabinet a choice of A, B or C, you are going to recommend this plan.

SB: Council have the choice to accept this or another plan.

(Complaint that CPC hadn't divulged info. explanation given that we were constrained by confidentiality from doing so by TWBC assurance that CPC knows no more now than the public)

Q: So why then haven't you come here with better more informed detail on the infrastructure?

SB: That work hasn't been undertaken as yet, within the allocation this is exactly where houses are going, the route of the road will go, that will be done through the MP process which is a structured way of developing a Masterplan for the layout.

Q: We haven't seen a single bit of detail tonight

SB: The plan is a huge doc. which will be available last week of July for the public. It will go to the Planning and Transportation Advisory Board. All the detail, all the policies will be there. I made a commitment to CPC that I would come & make public tonight but not at the high level which I can't release yet.

Q: Loss of farmland, we need food supplies, these are productive farms.

Q: Shouldn't MP have been invited?