



Capel, make some noise!

We certainly did... and it felt good! It was good for 130 of us to march through TW on July 29th and good for 80 of us to stand together last night to show TWBC that we have a voice. We showed the Councillors who we have elected and entrusted to care for TW that we care deeply about Capel. That we will hold them accountable for their actions and decisions and will watch their every move.

And watch, we did. This is what we saw and heard:

The Councillors were marking their own homework. 11 sit on this Board and only 7 turned up. All bar one Conservative. No Lib Dems, No TWA. How sad. Guess what? 5 of the people who attended to vote on the draft Local Plan being fit for public consultation are also on the Planning Policy Working Group; they have worked on the draft Local Plan behind closed doors for years. There was no open scrutiny of the decision, no debate, just a lot of back slapping and a few weak questions and comments from the two Councillors (one Conservative, one Labour) sitting alongside.

Save Capel and CPC were the only members of the public to make a statement and our 6 minutes was aggressively enforced. The Chair could have allowed just a minute more to let our speaker finish a sentence, but chose to cut him dead. The Chair then let the Head of Planning speak for 23 minutes. Later in the meeting a PPWG member spent 9 minutes rambling on about garden villages, with clearly no knowledge of the issues in Capel. His information seemed to come entirely from The Sunday Times. Insulting. Unfair. Undemocratic. The Chair would have gained a great deal from showing good grace and judgement, but he played to his own stereotype.

One of the Councillors commented that she would be dead by the time the houses in the plan were built. This was in reference to a green space in her ward being destroyed. Her words resonated. Given that the plan stretches to 2036 and most of the decision makers are approaching 70, are they really best placed to plan for our children's future? Their analysis and delivery skills certainly weren't on show at this meeting.

One of the Councillors stated that building houses on green land can improve wildlife habitats. How silly. Recent national press used the example of adding bat boxes to derelict buildings and ticky, tacky boxes as improving otherwise sterile spaces for wildlife. Not quite the same as destroying living, breathing, fertile land for tarmac and concrete then adding in a few nesting boxes.

We were very lucky that due to the fundraising in our community and the expertise of Castle Planning and the Capel residents working with them, that we had the ability and resources to deliver a comprehensive letter outlining our issues to TWBC before this meeting. We certainly would not have been able to cover them all in 6 minutes. During his 23 minute response to the issues we raised in the letter, the Head of Planning did not say *“sorry Capel, the thousands of houses that are destined for your parish were revealed to you only 12 weeks ago. We know you haven’t had a chance to have your say about them when everyone else in the Borough was in the Issues & Options process in 2017. It couldn’t be helped but bear with us and we’ll listen to all of your concerns during public consultation.”* No, he ignored our plight and ploughed on to say that we had been consulted on the plans more regularly than we had stated and that statements of common ground were close to completion with TMBC and Maidstone. Both of these statements are misleading. The meetings he refers to were based on a plan that did not include Tudeley New Town. They are pointless, if they did not include the discussion of thousands of houses on the Tonbridge border and running along towards flooded areas in Maidstone (particularly Yalding). The size of the sites in Tudeley and East Capel are the size of Monaco!

The Head of Planning also clearly concurred with an assessment of the agricultural land around Tudeley and Capel being ‘poor’. TWBC’s own assessment of the land shows it as Grade 2, i.e. good. Even grade 3 isn’t ‘poor’. But then, that’s what happens when you mark your own homework... you make big mistakes and you inhibit your own learning. Back to school TWBC? When they granted permission for a Solar Farm close to the proposed housing sites, TWBC deemed the loss of “best and most versatile” land in Capel to be serious enough to make it a condition that they upgraded the soil at Mabledon to compensate. Ah yes, Mabledon, the land with the A21 top and bottom and walking distance to an existing rail station. Good place for a garden village perhaps? Included in the draft Local Plan...er, no. Tudeley’s much more of a cash cow for the landowner. The same landowner that objected to 4 acres of his precious soil being lost to the A21 dualling, who is now offering up 400 acres of it to be paved over. Perhaps you would like to write to him? He is very keen to engage with the community and can be contacted at Hadlow Place Farm, Three Elm Lane, Tonbridge, TN11 0BW. His name is Harry Teacher.

The Head of Planning’s only saving grace was that he stayed after the meeting to speak to several Save Capel supporters, to try to explain the points he had addressed. He could have easily walked away. We are grateful for that time and consideration. We look forward to receiving his letter via Castle Planning and will respond accordingly.

As we left the meeting, after a disappointing decision to allow this shambles of a plan to go forward to public consultation, with heavy hearts we walked down the steps to leave the Town Hall. There, framed by a picture window, lay the old cinema site, desolate, undeveloped, ugly. 18 years of nothing. The Council Leader’s legacy? From what we saw at this meeting... a fitting tribute.

Let’s stay positive, press on to the next meeting and onwards to public consultation. On the next page, you will see an overview of the next 2 years. We are hopeful that in 2036 we will look back at this time and see the fruits of our labours. A thriving, green parish for our children, grandchildren and new families to enjoy.

Where do we go from here?

We will speak again at the TWBC Cabinet meeting on August 15th. We have to continue expressing our concerns in the hope that a Council official or a Councillor will listen. We will continue to vigorously oppose the plans to build 4,000+ houses in Capel on green belt. We will do this throughout the Regulation 18 process and Regulation 19 process and onwards to the Planning Inspector. We do have other avenues to explore with our legal team and will keep you updated. We will help everyone in Capel and beyond to understand how and when they can comment on the draft Local Plan. We will make sure that exhibitions are well publicised and that facts and supporting arguments are freely available.

2019

August 2019: The TWBC Cabinet (15th August) will decide if the draft Local Plan is in a fit state to move forward to public consultation. **Save Capel** will attend this meeting. It is open to the public.

September 2019: TWBC run a 6 week consultation period from Sept 20th to Nov 1st. This is known as **Reg 18**. Every issue, big or small, must be raised here. TWBC and others must raise objections here if they wish to pursue them in Reg 19. It is important that we understand the National Planning Policy Framework and that we are ready to object to specific points with sound, weighty, evidence based arguments. There is no independent inspector involved.

May 2020: Borough & Parish Council elections. Please vote. **Save Capel** will help you to find and meet the candidates who understand Capel's issues and future plans.

August 2020: TWBC publish their Pre-Submission Local Plan. This will have been developed by TWBC from Nov 2019 (the end of Reg 18). **Reg 19** consultation on this plan begins for 6 weeks. This is narrow and more focussed, with reference to the National Planning Policy Framework's "tests of soundness" and formal legal points considered. Only issues raised in Reg 18 can be addressed in Reg 19. No independent inspector.

October 2020: Final Development Plan developed by TWBC, to be published in Dec 2020. Submitted to Secretary of State for Housing, who appoints an Inspector to examine it.

2021

The examination by the Inspector will take place in May 2021. This is the point at which **TWBC's plans are, for the first time, subjected to independent scrutiny**. Hearings held where legal submissions can be made. **Save Capel** will attend the hearings. The Inspector should publish their report in September 2021 and a final "set in stone" plan should be adopted by December 2021.

"Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts." Winston Churchill

