



## A NEW ERA FOR SAVE CAPEL

**O**n March 9, 2020, Save Capel held its first AGM at the Goldsmid Hall in Tudeley.

A strong turnout of campaign members braved a wet and squally evening to hear updates on various aspects of the campaign, much of which is covered in this newsletter.

their dedication and commitment Save Capel would not be in the strong position it is now. Those taking a well-earned break from the demands of Save Capel are Robert Assirati, Farah Brookes-Johnson, Joanna Ginsberg, Mark Ginsberg, Mike Howells, Andy Rankine and Suzi Rich. Thank you all for everything you have done.

remained were duly appointed to the new Save Capel Executive. And so the baton was handed to Chris Callander, Maggie Fenton, Stewart Gledhill, Dave Lovell, Jan Mueller and Ian Pattenden. Executive meetings will also be attended, where possible, by two non-voting members, representing community



The new Save Capel executive team, from left to right: Jan Mueller, Ian Pattenden, Maggie Fenton, Dave Lovell, Stewart Gledhill and Chris Callander.

Before the presentations, the evening's Chair, Dave Parrish, carried out several formal tasks.

The first order of business was the ratification of Save Capel's constitution. This document had been circulated to members ahead of the meeting, and no comments or queries had been raised on its content. A show of hands unanimously voted in favour of the constitution's adoption.

Before announcing the new executive, Dave thanked those that had worked so hard over the previous months as part of the outgoing steering group, without

Dave then explained that there had been seven applicants for positions on the executive, with one having to withdraw for personal reasons. Under the terms of the constitution, with fewer applicants than total places on the executive, no election was required, and the six that

organisations.

This new group represents a strong blend of individuals with prior experience of the steering of the campaign and members who have knowledge of but have not been directly involved to date and who bring with them fresh ideas and perspective.

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# SAVE CAPEL: THE JOURNEY SO FAR



**W**e have come a long way in 10 months. In May last year, news about the Draft Local Plan led to Capel Parish Council calling a meeting of residents and Save Capel was born. We quickly raised our profile, and a bit of money, with demos, fetes and quizzes. We held meetings with agencies and politicians, made a lot of noise in the media, and dressed the parish in purple and green – who couldn't fail to notice what we thought of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's (TWBC) plans?

In the summer, we headed towards the mysteries of Regulation 18. We formulated arguments and alternative solutions, and embraced a growing support beyond the parish. We have encountered misinformation and hypocrisy, a complicated consultation process and, more recently, a planned 'charrette' which seemed designed to by-pass engagement with the affected community.

Alan McDermott, the chair of the Planning Advisory Panel, chair of the Planning Board and leader of TWBC was allegedly heard to say we couldn't win. But Alan, we are winning! Look at our support. Over 4,000 people signed our petition, we are in regular communication with 1,700 supporters, and we now have 300 active members. MPs praise us in Parliament, and neighbouring borough councillors support us, journalists call us, an editor says we're the best community campaign he's ever

seen. We've been in the papers, on the radio and TV. We've marched in Tunbridge Wells, we've rambled in Capel, we've even swum down our flooded roads.

## THE ARGUMENTS PUT INTO REGULATION 18

There really should be an assessment of the cumulative effects of all the proposed Capel developments, including KCC plans to excavate gravel, but TWBC carries on taking each segment in isolation. The cumulative impact will surely be devastating, but TWBC has made no guarantee of any such assessment.

*"Green belt should only be developed in 'exceptional circumstances', but in this case, there are none."*

Instead of a rural parish in the green belt, Capel will become an urban sprawl – precisely what the green belt was designed to prevent.

Green belt should only be developed in 'exceptional circumstances', but in this case, there are none. The borough has 20% non-designated land yet little development is planned on it. More importantly, there is brownfield

land. The National Planning Policy Framework says development should be on brownfield first, then non-designated land, and only then on green belt or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. But TWBC seems to be aiming at green belt first. If their planners are not pro-actively seeking out the alternatives, we are!

And a flood plain is a desperately poor place to build. Still, Hadlow Estate and the other developers around Paddock Wood, and the planners of Tunbridge Wells, appear to be ignoring the events of this winter and the mounting national pressure. Don't build on a flood plain!

And what other damage will be done? There will be loss of wildlife habitat, protected species, and highly productive agricultural land. There will be a spoiled landscape and damaged heritage. There will be an increase in pollution, adding to the climate emergency. There will be a lack of transport infrastructure and medical resource. The trains will be unable to cope; we'll have a town divided by a railway line with no station, and exaggerated claims of affordable housing.

But Hadlow Estate still wants to masterplan their unsustainable town, other landowners want to exploit East Capel, and the planners have trapped themselves into taking what they thought was the easy option.

But now it doesn't look so easy. We've made it hard – we're punching above our weight and will continue to do so!





### REGULATION 18 RESPONSES

During Regulation 18, Capel residents, supporters and neighbours, fired in their objections. According to the Head of Tunbridge Wells Planning Services, the Local Plan drew the borough's highest public response ever – 2,000 people, raising 8,000 comments.

But are those figures quite right?. At the time, over 3,700 people had signed our petition, but Tunbridge Wells planning services appear to have counted that as one person, although they have recently acknowledged the petition itself. Some objections were diced and sliced, but others are counted as a single comment. That includes our 50-page brownfield report, which was logged as a comment but not as an objection! So, the actual figures are probably far higher. But the system is so convoluted it is hard to tell where the facts lie.

However, looking at section 5 of the submission, 30% of all responses across the entire borough were about Capel. And of the 800+ unique respondents on Capel well over 95% objected to the plan - an overwhelming rejection! We will provide a greater break-down of the Regulation 18 feedback in a dedicated future communication.

We had strong support from neighbours and agencies. This included local MPs and borough

councillors, and other resident associations including Paddock Wood, Golden Green, East Peckham and Hadlow. Support also came from Brenchley & Matfield Parish Council, Tonbridge Civic Society, Tunbridge Wells Friends of the Earth, Tunbridge Wells Ramblers, High Weald AONB. Even the MoJ objected to the TWBC plan!

But not all areas support us.

*"Surprisingly, perhaps, many developers are also not in favour of the plans."*

Hawkenbury Village Association is actively supporting the Tudeley plans. Its website recommended its members attended the now postponed charrette, "...because if ideas like Tudeley Village are blocked then the pressure for new housing will again be placed on Hawkenbury." We find this to be a sad attitude, but if the charrette is rescheduled, we intend a measured response, asking they withdraw the advice.

We also have a lot of sympathy and plan to meet with other

campaigns, such as Marden and Cranbrook, to share experiences and explore possibilities of working in tandem. We are not alone!

Surprisingly, perhaps, many developers are also not in favour of the plans – at least the Tudeley aspects of the plans for Capel. TWBC dismisses this as promoting their own building plans, but some companies are already in the running for developments. Here's what a few said:

Berkeley Strategic Land Ltd: "...there is a disproportionate level of growth towards Tudeley Garden Village and the multiple sites within ...Paddock Wood."

Dandara: "...the development quantum proposed at Tudeley should instead be reallocated elsewhere, with a large proportion going to Royal Tunbridge Wells."

Persimmon Homes South East: (The)"... settlement at Tudeley Village... is not currently a sustainable location and cannot viably be made a sustainable location."

Persisting in this madcap plan for Tudeley and East Capel is not just unsustainable and unsound, ill-conceived, unwanted and unnecessary, the climate shows us it's downright dangerous for our parish and neighbours.

We therefore urge TWBC to think again and stop this daft Local Plan.

## WE CAN'T DO IT WITHOUT YOU

**S**ince the new group came together just a couple of weeks ago, we have had the AGM to prepare for and then the curveball that was the charrette. As you can imagine, that kept us quite busy.

Over the coming weeks, the immediate priorities for the executive include looking at how we structure our group going forward, and what we need to put in place to ensure it is as effective a team as it can be.

Medium-term, our top priorities will be fundraising – to support any legal challenges we may need to make – and to prepare for the Regulation 19 consultation.

But, we recognise that Save Capel is not just the work of an executive. It's the time, energy and effort everyone involved puts in. We have achieved so much, and we could not have done it without the amazing support we have had from across the community. And for that, we want to say a huge thank you.

We believe Save Capel should be a democratic campaign which serves the community it is designed to protect. So, we established membership to recognise and engage those supporters who are more deeply invested in the outcome. And to give those members the

opportunity to have a say in Save Capel's future direction as they did at the AGM, by giving the new executive its mandate.

Our established workgroups/ teams will continue to be as important as ever. We may also require discrete project teams – brought together to complete individual tasks – the brownfield group being an example of this. More details of those requirements will be shared in the future.

And finally, we want to hear ideas and thoughts from you: how the new executive can help you to support the campaign and how you can support the executive and the broader campaign. So please do share your thoughts with the team. You can email us at [savecapel@gmail.com](mailto:savecapel@gmail.com) with anything you'd like to share, propose or ask. We want to hear from you.



# THE WORK OF THE FLOOD GROUP

**T**he Save Capel flood group is formed of volunteers with extensive knowledge of flooding history, previous prevention measures, and those being investigated to reduce flood risk in Capel.

The team co-ordinates the research and analysis of the relevant regulatory, industry, and planning guidance, to provide convincing arguments to justify why Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) is wrong to propose 2,800 houses at Tudeley and 1,500 in East Capel.

We have established links with several agencies, and members of the group will attend April's planned parish Flood Committee. We have spoken at TWBC Cabinet and KCC Planning Committee meetings and have participated in the inspector hearing (under Regulation 19) on KCC's Mineral Plan.

Much of our early work concentrated on the preparation of a flood report for the Regulation 18 consultation. This report has also been sent to all Tunbridge Wells councillors, several Tonbridge councillors and the leader of Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, together with local MPs and interest groups.

Extensive flooding evidence has been gathered, and we thank so many of our supporters for providing personal accounts and photos.

## **Why is flooding so important to the Save Capel campaign?**

Recent flooding events have clearly demonstrated the vulnerability of Five Oak Green, Tudeley, and the surrounding areas, which are affected by flooding from several sources.

The Leigh flood storage area was built in 1982 and a £15 million expansion, which could increase the storage capacity by up to 30%, is expected to be completed in 2023.

The Draft Local Plan is reliant on this flood mitigation – which provides no benefit to much of the area proposed for development in Capel. However, the Draft Local Plan does not include appropriate measures to protect the new developments or existing communities from a future breach or release.

Such a release could be much



greater than in 2013, potentially causing extreme damage to properties over a wider area, and could pose a risk to human life.

For Paddock Wood, there is a flood plan, but it appears to be inadequate for the scale of development.

*"Flooding continues to be one of the main issues in our fight to stop these reckless proposals."*

TWBC has produced an expensive Strategic Flood Risk Assessment which is planning two additional reservoirs to the East of Colt's Hill to protect the proposed 1,500 new houses in East Capel.

However, they appear to have excluded the raising of housing floor levels in the building designs, and the necessary drainage systems for some reason, perhaps, because these would affect the profitability of the development. This suggests planners may not have fully addressed the flood risk on this floodplain or the effects of climate change and any potential breach of the reservoirs.

These proposals do not include measures to reduce the flood risk for existing communities in and around Five Oak Green. The Alder Stream flood mitigation project proposed by the Environment Agency has now been deferred in the Local Plan.

In contrast, there is no plan for Tudeley.

The proposed development of 2,800+ homes in the Draft Local Plan does not include any assessment of the increased flood risk to existing communities. The surface water flows from Storm Ciara cascaded through the heart of this 375-acre site, flowing down Sherenden Road under the railway bridge. This caused subsidence to gardens and the road surface and has required KCC Highways to re-surface the road.

The northern parcel of the proposed Tudeley Village site is particularly at risk. It includes land already part of the Medway floodplain, and the resulting run-off from any development of the higher areas south of the railway would add significantly to the flood risk.

The additional costs of any railway crossing(s), and the necessary extensive flood mitigation, would likely make the development unviable. We believe that this, together with the masterplan approach with the landowner who has no proven development experience, renders the plan an unacceptable risk for the borough.

Our MP, Greg Clark, has said: "No Local Plan should be approved unless it demonstrably reduces the risk of flooding to existing residents, and, obviously, does nothing to add to that risk. "The soundness of any Local Plan in this respect should be demonstrated independently, objectively and publicly as a precondition of adoption, and any draft plan should be revised until it meets this condition".

The Draft Local Plan specifies that flood betterment is one of the key justifications for the release of green belt land; therefore flooding continues to be one of the main issues in our fight to stop these reckless proposals.



# FINDING ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

**T**he brownfield team is looking into site availability across the borough, to identify all possible brownfield sites, and to ensure that Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) exhausts this potential for development before even starting to consider building on the green belt.

Several volunteers have been supporting this work carrying out in-depth research and analysis. There are too many to mention – you know who you are – but THANK YOU, your support has been invaluable, and hopefully we can continue to call on you.

TWBC's existing brownfield register is pitiful. It only includes 40 sites with less than 1,000 dwellings. And only about half of these have had planning approved. Given that the borough's housing target for the plan period is more than 13,000 dwellings, based on the council's own data, brownfield sites will not make a meaningful contribution to the plan.

The good news is that there is actually substantially more

potential. To date, we have identified around 150 sites with a potential of just under 5,000 dwellings. This comes from two sources with roughly half the potential in each. They are either new brownfield sites which are currently not in the plan or on the register or sites which were rejected in the plan, but that we believe are much preferable to developing at Capel (note these are typically NOT brownfield)

We think density should also be considered – that is the number of dwellings placed in a given area. The 5,000 dwellings mentioned above are based on a density of 30 dph (dwellings per hectare) which is the TWBC standard for the plan. In reality, this is much too low and should be closer to 50 dph. If that were the case, we would already be at more than 8,000 dwellings!

We are also encouraged by recent announcement of the Housing Ministry to prioritise brownfield development requiring councils to update their registers and to focus on increasing housing densities & building 'upwards'. We



are sincerely hopeful TWBC will take note and change tack.

So, what happens next? The brownfield team will be focussing on two key activities. First is new brownfield potential. We have covered most of the borough, but there are still a few parishes to explore. Our second priority is to formally log at least the larger sites on the borough's brownfield register to ensure they are considered as part of the plan.

If you, or anyone you know, can help with this project, please do get in touch via [savecapel@gmail.com](mailto:savecapel@gmail.com). We would greatly appreciate your help. And thank you once again to those that have supported this work so far.

## CHARRETTE OR CHARADE?

**A**s we suspect you all know by now the planned charrette being organised by Hadlow Estate has been postponed. Before the announcement, at the Save Capel AGM we outlined the campaign's position on the activity.

The charrette, which is defined as an intense period of design activity, included five workshops accessible by invitation only. A number of local groups were specifically invited to send representation, including the parish council and Save Capel.

Save Capel was allowed to send one representative. We asked if we could send two, based on the breadth of coverage in some workshops – for example flooding, infrastructure, sustainability and access in one. But our request was denied. We felt that as a group representing over 4,000 people against the plans, being able to have the same representation as other 'community' groups

representing just a handful of people was unbalanced. It demonstrated a lack of true interest in hearing our views, rather showing that we were being reluctantly invited for show.

There were also three early evening open studios, an initial presentation, mid way point presentation and a closing presentation which were all open to the public.

The initial reaction of Save Capel Executive was probably the same as most people in the community; we wanted nothing to do with a charade that only addresses designing something that doesn't take into account the needs of the existing community nor bring us any benefit.

But we realised that there were both pros and cons to attending.

It could be good publicity for Hadlow Estate and tick its community engagement box.

But at the time we realised that it will go ahead with or without us but

attending would better inform us about the developers' thinking, ideas and how they would or wouldn't address various issues.

If no one attended it could have been registered and used against us as apathy, a lack of interest or that no one actually objects.

Hadlow Estate probably didn't want us there having given us very short notice, a choice of location designed to deter attendance with poor parking, and generally making it hard to attend for those with work commitments.

So, on balance and having taken professional advice (which did reinforce going), Save Capel did intend to send representation to the closed sessions. However, the attendees would go under protest and with clear rules of engagement. We would only listen, we would make clear that we object to the site in principle and we would neither engage nor be involved in the design in any way.



# THE CAPEL GREEN BELT PROTECTION SOCIETY

**C**apel Green Belt Protection Society (CGPS) was set up with a longer-term focus on protecting the green belt in Capel. The society is a member of the London Green Belt Council (LGBC) and plans to establish the real needs of the community.

To this end, CGPS has been in discussion with Capel Parish Council regarding the development of a 'Vision for Capel' (VfC). This will capture ideas from the whole community focused on what the parish really needs and requires in terms of housing and also support for clubs, societies, schools, roads, businesses and other requirements. The VfC will build on the Capel Parish Plan of 2006. The society would work for Capel Parish Council who are initiating a Neighbourhood Plan – to be part of the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Local Plan. The VfC data and information would feed into an official Neighbourhood Plan.

*"Vision for Capel will be focused on what the parish really needs."*

The society will shortly be approaching all interested parties who wish to participate in Neighbourhood Plan workshops – seeking membership of the society and volunteers – to enable a positive discussion of what the Parish of Capel really needs.

The Trustees of the Society are Martin Pengelley, Konrad Legg, and Dave Parrish.

Save Capel is not anti-development, we support sustainable development and especially affordable housing in both the borough and in Capel Parish. But any development needs to be proportionate, suitable (for local needs and in line with the local environment) and above all sustainable.

## Q&A

### **Are the rumours that the school at the Postern end of the parish is being pulled true?**

It does indeed look as if Hadlow Estate has suggested the school is no longer in the plan. Obviously, there is no comment from TWBC on this.

In a document submitted by the Estate's development partners, Turnberry, as part of Regulation 18 there is a section which shows their suggested amendments to the draft local plan. In it they have suggested the removal of the words 'a new secondary school', and they have suggested that details of the planned school and the expansion of Capel primary be replaced by simply 'making provisions for improved facilities'.

There are several suggested changes which raise concerns. This includes Hadlow Estate solely driving the master planning as opposed to the previous position where Hadlow and the council jointly develop it.

These are requested changes. They have not been commented on by the council yet, and we suspect they will not be fully addressed until we see the revised plan ahead of Regulation 19.

### **I've heard figures up to £100,000 being required to fight the plans. Do we have a master plan for how we will raise that kind of money?**

The parish council has earmarked a sinking fund in its budgets for the next three years. This amounts to around £30,000. It's a solid start in reaching our targets, but the short answer is no, we do not have activity in place that will deliver that kind of revenue. However, several options are being explored. The excellent work so far, with events and activities, has been invaluable and needs to continue, but it will not be enough. And so we are looking at aspects such as sponsorship, corporate donations etc. and very much looking for suggestions and ideas from the community around how we can move efforts to the next level.

### **So if we are chasing significant funds, how can people make donations?**

Mechanisms for making donations have been delayed while the campaign investigated a number of options which would have enabled funds gifted to the campaign to be boosted. However, we realise this process has taken too long, and an immediate priority for the new executive will be to ensure donations can be made easily, and soon.

### **You are exploring brownfield options, but are you looking at other alternatives – other areas, for example?**

There are alternatives outside the brownfield. They were identified by the council themselves. But the current plan is placing around 63% of the Borough's requirement in the parish of Capel because it's an easy option. So yes, we will be encouraging the council to revisit other proposed sites. But the brownfield land available offers huge potential for the council to meet its targets, and so that is a key focus for us.

It is also worth noting that the window is still open for new sites to put themselves forward. We understand that around twenty new sites were put forward at a meeting last December.

### **If we don't get thousands of houses in the parish, is there a possibility we will still get hundreds?**

In terms of the sites planned at the moment, we suspect it would not be financially viable for the developers/landowners to develop them with hundreds rather than thousands of homes due to infrastructure requirements. But other sites in Capel accommodating a smaller portion of the Borough's requirement is a possibility. If that situation arises, we will examine it in the same way we have with the current proposals.

