

LYNSTED with KINGSDOWN PARISH COUNCIL



Letter to Roger Truelove, Leader of Swale Borough Council

15 February 2021

Dear Cllr Truelove

Swale Borough Council has launched a totally inadequate six week “Consultation” on the Draft Local Plan under Regulation 19. Unbelievably, this is the final step before submission to Planning Inspectors.

One week into this short consultation period and there has been no announcement in the local press, neither have residents received any letter. Most people have no idea this is going on.

Your Council’s behaviour is unreasonable in a number of ways that include:

- Failure to honour your administration's early promises (and those of the previous administration) to give residents and businesses a second democratic opportunity to contribute local knowledge, insights and expertise under “Regulation 18”. It has always been our understanding that the “Forward Look” was very much a ‘broad brush’ consultation and that we would have an opportunity to contribute to the final shape and robustness of the Local Plan before going to the final stage
- At the Local Plan Panel (LPP) Meeting on 26 January 2021, the Chairman effectively erased the Regulation 18 “Forward Look”. *“I think it is fair to say that when the new administration took over in 2019, the Local Plan Team had to work to a radically different strategy. Meaning that much of the work they had done for the previous year, didn’t really contribute much to this, to the direction that the new administration went.”* Surely this argues that the new administration should have started with a new Regulation 18 document that reflected this ‘new direction’. In effect, you have rendered meaningless the 3,000 responses made in 2018
- Rushing to Regulation 19 with the ‘legal minimum’, but totally undemocratic, deadline of six weeks is simply not good enough when faced with over 1,000 pages of such technical paperwork
- There has been no active engagement through, for example, on-line presentations, Zoom Meetings, or printed packs to each household in order that everyone has a voice
- You have presented more than 1,000 pages of draft documentation with key documents missing, such as Traffic Modelling. The LPP Chairman stated this would emerge in 'late Spring' – so why not wait until we have all the key evidence in front of us?

All this argues that it is only rational for the Council to extend the consultation period to twelve weeks.

Further, a timeframe should be added ahead of an extended consultation period during which SBC can initially engage in a meaningful manner with its residents. In order to bring us up to speed with your thinking; to let us learn about the good things in the Draft Plan and to comment on those which we believe are bad. This is what has been done by other Councils who, because of lockdown, have extended consultation periods (both in Reg18 and Reg19 stages). They have created online and printed tools to help Residents engage with this incredibly important process. For example, Wirral, Shropshire, Teignbridge, Dacorum, Crawley, Adur, Sandwich and Dover.

Crawley has taken a thoroughly reasonable approach: *“Update - 3 February 2021. The Viability Study and Transport Modelling studies are not yet available. To give interested parties enough time to review and comment on these studies, we have extended the consultation period. The consultation will now close on 31 March 2021. We may extend this again if the remaining documents are not ready in time. We will provide an update confirming any further changes.”*

Please explain why your Council has not adopted a similar democratic approach. Instead, you accuse your voters and their elected representatives of “spectacular grandstanding”.

I am copying this letter to your chief executive and our local Members of Parliament. It will also be shared with the local community.

Yours sincerely

JULIEN SPEED
Chairman
Lynsted with Kingsdown Parish Council