



Press Release

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MANYDOWN HAS A MARIE-CELESTE MOMENT!

SOLVE CALLS ON THE COUNCIL TO EXPLAIN WHY MANYDOWN HAS BEEN REMOVED FROM THE LIST OF GREENFIELD SITES BEING CONSIDERED FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF 3000 HOMES IN THE NEXT 16 YEARS.

At last night's Council meeting to discuss where Basingstoke's next tranche of housing would be built, the Conservative Group revealed to a shocked and disbelieving audience that the single biggest piece of land in the Borough, bought and owned on behalf of all the rate payers and residents of Basingstoke for the express purpose of providing land for Basingstoke's future growth, had all of a sudden disappeared without any clear explanation! Just as the crew of the Marie-Celeste did!

At a time when our Council is cutting bus services, reducing rubbish collection services and cutting many front-line services, SOLVE has called on Councillor Rob Golding (Portfolio Holder for Planning), Councillor Stephen Reid (Chair of the P&IOSCOM) and Councillor Robert Donnell (Conservative Group Leader) to explain why they are not making land owned 100% by the Council available for development. If they insist on building on Greenfield sites, at least residents could benefit from the hundreds of

millions of pounds that could be generated from selling Manydown. Land bought by BDBC expressly for this purpose.

“When faced with cuts in services and job losses, it beggars belief that the Council is choosing not to profit from land bought with £10m of our money in 1996, for the express purpose of being made available for development, is not being developed for 30 years” said Peter Bloyce of SOLVE. “The facts that Councillors Golding, Reid and Donnell seem quite prepared to break their election promises not to build on Greenfield sites and ignore the central theme of the public consultation that residents do not want to see any large scale developments on Greenfield sites are regrettable but perhaps not surprising. However, what we find unacceptable is that they appear to have conducted a deliberate campaign to ensure Manydown is not made available for development, solely to protect their positions as Councillors in the wards in and around Manydown. In our opinion their conduct contravenes the rules and guidance that govern the issues of predetermination and conflicts of interest, and they have presided over a process that is unjust and will not stand up to scrutiny under the Council’s audit and governance obligations, let alone their obligations under national planning guidelines and legislation.”

The facts that lead SOLVE to this opinion allegedly include:

- The land was bought with rate payers’ money by Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council (BDBC) with the explicit intent that it be used for new housing developments.
- This land has already been subjected to a comprehensive planning process and was allocated as the most suitable area for an extension to Basingstoke Town. The SHLAA has also confirmed it as one of the most suitable sites for housing development around Basingstoke, subject to the necessary infrastructure being in place.
- A section of land in Manydown already has the necessary infrastructure in place to support the development of at least 1000 houses.

- After the Conservative Group took over political leadership of the Council, led by Councillors who represented west side residents, the next version of the SHLAA was revised. Despite the Inspector saying Manydown “is a good place to build a western extension”, the Conservative led BDBC and HCC agreed in a ‘Deed of Variation’ NOT TO “actively promote Manydown for high quality sustainable development through the preparation of the Borough’s first Local Development Framework”.
- Furthermore, they agreed that this decision could not be reviewed until “01 September 2011 or if later the date the Local Development Framework is formally adopted”.
- Councillors Golding, Reid and Donnell signed public pledges that “they would do everything they can as Councillors to stop Manydown being developed”. They then proceeded to take positions as Portfolio Holder, P&I Chair and Member and Chair of the Save Manydown Group without declaring their positions and presiding over Conservative Group decisions in which they had a clear conflict of interest, which is in direct contravention of the Local Government Association Probity in Planning documents which states “the use of political whips to seek to influence the outcome of ... planning ... is likely to be regarded as maladministration”.
- Councillor Golding, in his statements to the press, deliberately chooses to ignore the very clear and over-riding conclusions that the clear majority 73% state that their preference would be for "smaller developments across the whole of B&D creating extensions to towns and villages" or "small or medium sized development sites on the outskirts of Basingstoke town".
- Councillor Reid & Councillor Donnell, in their roles as Chair of the P&IOSCOM and Conservative Group Leader, removed Councillor Sven Godeson from the P&IOSCOM thereby reducing the democratic influence of Councillors immediately impacted by their pro-Manydown agenda.

- During the public consultation on the SHLAA, Councillor Reid committed to a site by site analysis of all land being considered for site selection, specifically setting aside 3 days to allow fair and thorough discussion of each site on its merits. In the final report, this commitment was not delivered on.
- Councillors Golding & Reid, in their respective positions as Portfolio Holder and Chair of the The P&IOSCOM, have blatantly ignored The Environment Agency recommendation which said “Environmentally in respect of ecology, flood risk and drainage sites BAS 102 & 103 ARE THE MOST CONSTRAINED in the whole of the SHLAA. We therefore have to score these as high risk sites.”
- For the northernmost site adjacent to the A33 (BAS 121), which this current site allocation report recommends allocation, the EA say “It is of greater environmental constraint when compared to many of the other sites and for this reason the site is scored as high risk.” The Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust also gave a very scathing response to the SHLAA inclusion of sites in the Loddon Valley for development. The Council’s own Landscape Capacity Study has given these sites a low rating.
- In the site assessment report [marked final] on the B&D web site on Saturday the 17th of September, the Site Conclusion for Manydown BAS 098 read: “The overriding ‘show stopper’ when considering this site however, is its current unavailability for development which would prevent it being developed”. On Sunday the 18th of September [also marked final] the conclusion has been changed to something that is radically different:
 - No mention of unavailability
 - No mention of play deficiencies in Winklebury that could be solved
 - No mention of addressing surplus places at Cranbourne
- Land in and adjacent to the Loddon Valley scores higher, as assessed by Officers and Government Agencies, in terms of environmental qualities and the potential for negative impact from large scale housing development than Manydown; meaning that far greater environmental damage will be done by the Council if development occurs on these plots rather than Manydown.

“Any of these facts in isolation could be seen as the normal course of local Council politics. However, when considered together, SOLVE is of the opinion that there has been an active, pre-meditated and self-serving campaign by some Conservative Councillors to manipulate and mislead the public with the result that Manydown will remain untouched while our public services are cut under the false pretence that the Council has no access to funds!”

Peter Bloyce concludes; “SOLVE does not support large scale development on any Greenfield sites east or west. However, if the Council are going to renege on their pre-election promises relating to our countryside and our environment, then we believe that Councillors have a duty to consider sites on their merits, not on procedural sleight of hand and disingenuous and self-serving politics”.

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SOLVE (Save Our Loddon Valley Environment) is a non-political group set up by local people to represent residents who believe our unique eco-systems and historic sites of national significance are as important as our economic aspirations, and should be protected for the continued enjoyment of the wider Basingstoke community. www.SOLVELoddon.org