



Dartmouth and Kingswear Society
Conserving, Enhancing, Informing, Enjoying

President: Sir Geoffrey Newman
Chairman: Dr John Baldock
Secretary: James Dodd

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Rebecca Black
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South Hams District Council
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13th February 2012

Dear Ms Black,

Re: West Dartmouth Development

Thank you for your letter of 17th January responding to the points our Chairman, Dr John Baldock, raised on behalf of the Dartmouth & Kingswear Society. You invited him to come back to you if the Society had further points for discussion and, in his absence, I am doing so on behalf of the Society.

The first point we raised referred to the silence of SHDC councillors and officers over the proposal by Millwood Homes to make a “considerable departure from the site boundary of the adopted Dartmouth Site Allocations DPDs” (your phrase). Your reply indicated that the subject is a matter for debate and careful consideration by SHDC, and that you were not in a position to respond in detail to the point he raised. However, you did say that members and other Council officers would not recommend approval for a revised Masterplan without more substantive evidence and a clear rationale from Millwood Homes to justify any departures from the allocated site boundary.

We would be grateful if you would advise further on this. What progress have you made with your debates and considerations? Have Millwood Homes brought forward any evidence or justification for their proposals to depart from the boundaries set by the Inspector, either formally or informally? If so, when will they put their case in the public domain and how is the Council minded to respond? For example, will the Council take any proposed departure to the Inspector for his consideration? By not making their case public, Millwood Homes risk wasting their time and resources developing plans on assumptions that, when put to the test, are found to be invalid. It would be prudent for them to test their assumptions about boundaries first before progressing to consult on more detailed issues like street scene, etc.

With regard to Dr Baldock's second point regarding terms of reference for the consultation process, the Society finds it deeply worrying that none were set. Frankly, this omission opens SHDC to challenge on grounds that will do no good to its reputation. It is surely not too late to set up proper terms of reference for the remaining work.

Thank you for pointing out that the information regarding Millwood Homes' options on adjoining land is already published. The Society notes this.

To the issues Dr Baldock raised in his letter, we would now add the Society's views about employment opportunities. It would be fair to describe the present information as vague, and yet in the Society's view, the whole WDD project stands or falls on the ability of the planners to attract employment that is sustainable and sufficient in quantity to justify the building of so many houses: no jobs, no people, no houses required, or conversely, jobs of the right quality, people to do them, high occupancy of houses (provided they are of the right sort). Can you, therefore, be more precise about plans to attract potential employers? Who is charged with responsibility for this? (We assume not Millwood Homes – it is surely outside their competence.) What analysis of prospects has there been? What approaches have been made, no matter how tentatively, to individuals and/or companies? How encouraging (or otherwise) have been the responses?

The Society remains of the view set out in the last paragraph of Dr Baldock's letter to you, which may be summarised as: pursue the WDD with energy and determination; avoid creating an isolated community; enhance the overall sense of community by ensuring the WDD is kept as a natural extension of Townstal; contain any negative visual impact; and avoid ribbon development and urban sprawl by keeping to the footprint laid down by the Inspector until such time as the situation with Milton Farm changes. To that, we would now add: exert every effort to secure the prospects for jobs as a matter of priority.

Finally, we are very concerned to note the point you make in your last paragraph about timescales for taking this forward remaining uncertain. A project of such importance to the community and the Council deserves a clear published timetable. Time lost in the early stages of a large project spanning years, will not be easy to recover.

Yours sincerely

Peter Shaw
Vice-Chairman