

TITLE SLIDE

PRESENTATION TO SPECIAL GROWTH, INFRASTRUCTURE AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY PANEL

Firstly Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to address the Scrutiny Panel on behalf of the St George's Barracks Advisory Group.

Recent surveys, public meetings and consultation shows that for those most affected, there is a very real concern that the County Council are embarking upon a folly of monumental magnitude, which will have a very real and very serious impact upon the community of Rutland for some 30 to 40 years. The anger felt in each of these villages is palpable, and the prospect of the development is already adversely affecting people locally. What I would like to do is to address some of the key issues and concerns of the local communities. Let us start with Consultation

CONSULTATION

It is difficult to achieve any consensus, when the proposal remains so broad and ill-defined with precious little detail. Even now, barely a month away from the full Council being asked to sign up to a Housing Infrastructure Fund bid, the range of housing lies somewhere between 1,500 and 2,770. Even the bottom end of that scale is unprecedented in this county, where our villages average somewhere in the region of 400 homes

(Ketton – 848) (Cottesmore- 511 outside the wire) (Uppingham – 1897).

At the end of last year and earlier this year the Chief Executive and her team made presentations to our villages. Unfortunately, in many cases these became ill-tempered and angry because most villagers felt that what was being presented was a fait accompli with no room for

manoeuvre, and no wish to take on board any ideas that the communities might have. Residents felt that the RCC line was “we know best” – any ideas put forward for more imaginative uses of the site were dismissed. From the outset, this whole project has been about how many homes the site can accommodate. On 24th April, Norman Milne and I wrote to the Executive and to every County Councillor expressing our concern about the way this project was being managed. 6 months on nothing has not changed.

There has been plenty of ‘tick box’ consultation, by which I mean that a process has been followed, however the reality is there has been precious little dialogue and no real impact. Most within the Community feel that their voices are entirely insignificant. In sum, the community feel totally rail-roaded by RCC, RegenCo and MoD. The Advisory Board has been a step in the right direction but it lacks teeth and is in danger of becoming solely an ineffectual talking shop.

You would think that at the very least, in putting together the Masterplan, the authors might have met with the respective Parish Councils to discuss their ideas and to seek input to the plan prior to any version being written. But No. We still have had no real consultation on what facilities are needed, what road improvements are needed, what is the environmental impact, how we can reduce the impact on the local communities etc. There simply was no need, because ‘Mother knows best’ and ‘Children should be seen and not heard’. Indeed, even the full County Council has not been informed in any depth of the proposals. The perception is that there has been little attempt by the County Council to meet the aspirations of those most affected, whilst the wish of a largely hidden and silent MoD, is perceived to be paramount over the

needs of Rutland. People are really angry that RCC do not seem able to stand up to the avaricious demands of the MoD. Remember that the land now owned by MoD was compulsorily purchased from local farmers at a time of national emergency with a commitment made at the time that once no longer needed, it could be returned to farmland for sale to the original owners. There are people in our communities who remember this happening.

Memorandum of Understanding

The Memorandum of Understanding is an area of real concern – we have had to fight hard through the Information Commissioner’s office to gain access to the full document. I am afraid that it is viewed by many as a ‘Secret’ document that RCC and MoD have hidden behind. We are aware of the need for the MoD to achieve ‘best value’ for the taxpayer however the MoU was signed off without due governance considerations (EG not signed off by Cabinet) It doesn’t appear to be offering real partnership but is a way of delivering housing more quickly – compared to the traditional approach which often leads to lengthy delays.

COMMUNICATION

There has been little pan-Rutland communication and it is amazing how many people from far flung places such as Cottesmore, Exton and Langham say they know nothing about RCC’s plans to build a new town in the County. Unfortunately, many people do have a parochial view of life, however RCC should be working hard to ensure that the County knows what is actually being planned for St George’s Barracks. This project will significantly affect and potentially damage the nature of the whole County.

CONSULTANTS

Let me now move on to the choice of Consultants for this project. One can fully appreciate that this is a new challenge for RCC and that they do not have the internal resources to prepare a Masterplan for a development of this size. East Hampshire District Council's experience of working with MoD at Whitehill and Bordon is clearly relevant and useful, and it is understood why their expertise should have been called upon to draw up the initial masterplan. However, when we ask the professional planners, lawyers, builders and architects working in our villages, the universal view is that the Masterplan is inept and not suited for purpose. Most importantly the Masterplan lacks imagination and appears to solely seek the maximum build within the limited space available. Indeed speaking of the Masterplan in June, Sir Alan Duncan commented:

“What the Council has called a Master Plan has been clumsily published and unhelpfully labelled. Calling it a Master Plan sounds like a fait accompli but this is a draft concept and no more than that. The confusion has allowed talk of three and a half thousand houses to gain currency and to become an assumed number.

There is insufficient explanation of the pace and staging of any future building and a plan which just has a single artist's impression on one side of paper has been utterly inadequate for going into the detail people are entitled to.”

The recently published outline proposals for Woolfox, illustrate the lack of detail contained in the St George's Barracks Masterplan.

As we move forward to the publication of the full Masterplan, we are concerned that RegenCo have been engaged to complete the work without a tendering process. No invitation was made to invite designs

that might have made imaginative use of the site. What we have instead is a huge modern housing estate. This is a public sector solution to what is a commercial business opportunity.

RCC speak of quality not quantity, but also of building up to 40% of homes as being 'affordable homes' – as experience in Uppingham and Oakham has shown, the reality is that affordable homes are simply not cost effective to a developer and are unlikely to be built to the scale sought by RCC. It is entirely laudable that the Council should seek to address the shortage of affordable accommodation in Rutland, however market economics will inevitably have a significant impact upon how many affordable homes are built.

SCALE

The biggest issue for the local communities is the scale of this development – 1,500 to 2,770 homes to be built in the heart of the County. This simply does not make sense and in the Government's terms is **NOT building the right homes in the right places.**

Much is made of the 'advantage', that such a development would make to the County. We are aware that Oakham and Uppingham Town Councils believe that a Development would increase the financial viability of their High Streets, however, St George's Barracks stands almost equidistant from Uppingham, Oakham and Stamford. For those of us that live on that side of the County, the natural commercial centre is Stamford. Therefore this estate will benefit Stamford but not the existing Rutland towns.

SUSTAINABILITY

Housing built in St George's Barracks is unlikely to be sustainable, particularly in terms of employment in this isolated site with little

employment infrastructure. The current lack of high technology employment and industrial capacity and capability within the County would suggest that attracting sufficient employment to this remote site will require vision and dedicated effort. Positive, imaginative suggestions for employment opportunities that would be appropriate for the specific location have been ignored by RCC. It is of interest to note that the local employment forum suggests that current industry does not seek new employment sites, solely inexpensive accommodation for their staff based in Oakham and Uppingham. The recent sale of land in Oakham for housing, that had previously been set aside for industrial development, illustrates that industry is not demanding more space for expansion.

There are real concerns that the site can never meet the criteria that need to be applied for it to be a sustainable community. As a result, there is real potential to create a dormitory town which would add little or no value to the County as a whole.

Let me give you an anecdote that illustrates the problem of building affordable homes in the wrong place:

A couple rented a new 'affordable' home on North Luffenham's Rosewood development – they loved the house, they loved the area, they loved the village school and they loved the community. However, with huge regret they have had to move – the reason being that they simply could not afford the cost of daily commuting for 2 x earners, which meant 2 x cars and increased child-care costs. Is this the model we wish to emulate.

TOURISM

Tourism is the key driver in the Rutland economy bringing in excess of £100m directly and indirectly into the county each year, largely driven by our rural nature and recreational pursuits in the county. The Masterplan lacks any imaginative proposals to enhance tourism, the lifeblood of this small County.

MINERAL EXTRACTION

We talk much of housing development at St George's but we must not lose sight of the massive quarry, probably at least 100 Hectares or 250 Acres in size. This is a priority habitat type within the current Leicestershire and Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan, and therefore appropriate weighting needs to be given to its importance. The health implications for residents living cheek by jowl with a developing quarry and housing development of enormous scale for a period of up to 40+ years needs careful review. We are concerned that there is no evidence that a contractor can deliver on the phasing of the quarry and complete restoration of the site and its habitat within reasonable time constraints.

CONCLUSION

I could go on ...

Please excuse me if I have re-iterated some of the concerns already raised this evening but I hope it illustrates some of the key issues felt by your constituents. I would hope that in reviewing the process you will take heed of the reality of the current situation, which is that the County Council have isolated themselves and lost the confidence of those most affected. Finally, we believe RCC has an obligation to hear, diligently listen to and act upon the views, hopes and aspirations of its communities.

If the current proposal is the only one on the table, it deserves to be rejected out of hand. If a genuine root and branch alternative is considered possible, we trust you will take our views into account from the outset we stand ready to work together to find a solution that is Right for Rutland.