

Statement submitted by Sian Lazell – against development of land in Tenterden Ref 21/00790/AS

There are four main points and concerns that I believe should be strongly considered valid reasons as to why this development should not be approved. These are: conservation of green spaces, the suitability of the type of development proposed, issues with traffic on the town and surrounding areas, and pressure on town infrastructure.

Conservation of green spaces is crucial, and becoming even more important, to the wellbeing of people, wildlife and the environment. This has always been the case and has been the general consensus for years, even though it feels at times that the call for preservation of such spaces is largely ignored. If it wasn't before, it has never been more evident than during the pandemic how important green spaces – either for direct use or simply as a surrounding environment – are to human health and wellbeing.

The loss of these spaces is also having a damning effect on wildlife, even if it is not obvious to some. A well-publicised report in the last few years showed we have lost nearly half our wildlife since the 1970s, with 41% of species having declined and unbridled urbanization playing a big part. 26% of the UK's mammals are at risk of becoming extinct. On a species level it is even more shocking – hedgehogs have declined by 95%, turtle doves by 98% and the common toad by 68%. On top of this, everyone should be very aware by now that we are in a climate crisis, whether some like to believe it or not, and preservation of these green spaces is needed now more than ever, for wildlife conservation but also for clean air and cooling. I need not go on, this all publicly available information.

Safeguarding land for more local, sustainable and wildlife friendly agriculture is also highly important. We live in a time where the population is expected to increase substantially over the coming years, requiring more food and crops. Even though we can as small communities feel unaffected by this issue at times, it is a very real and present problem everywhere. But the solution must be achieved in a sustainable and environmentally friendly way – part of this will require a shift towards more local agriculture operations away from intensive farming. As a county, we can be proud that we already sit within the former, but this can only be sustained if these agricultural spaces are preserved and not continuously bought up and concreted over. As you drive towards Ashford town, through the back lanes, it is shocking to see field after field being swallowed up by horrendous developments, with lines of red brick trailing back to the horizon and encroaching more and more into the countryside.

All of the above are robust reasons why we should not continue to allow such sprawling developments – we are not talking about a few houses here, we are talking about hundreds.

A counter argument is often that we are in dire need of housing. There is not a lack of housing, there is a lack of affordable housing. And while these new developments often claim to offer affordable housing, as the proposed does at 50%, I can tell you first hand what they offer is not so. Affordable housing is arguably needed the most by first time buyers who are yet to get on the property ladder. I have recently bought my own house and it was an absolute struggle. I have only just got a foot on the ladder at 30. I have not just given up luxuries, I have given up everything that should be part of a healthy independent adult life for years, so I was able to save the majority of my wages every month.

These new developments are, as standard, astronomically out of the price range of those who need affordable housing the most. I had a very hefty deposit that I was able to accrue by living at home while I saved (a privilege not everyone has), I was earning over the average wage by the time I came to actually

get my mortgage (a lot of people do not) and had a perfect credit score, yet only just scraped through with a mortgage purely because of my sole income. All this to buy a house that, let me tell you, is a dump. And I am only able to make it liveable because I am again privileged to have relatives in trade jobs. Why is this relevant? Because it demonstrates that even I, who was arguably in a much better position than my peers, could never afford to buy on these newer developments that claim to offer 'affordable' housing. Shared ownership on these houses is also not the saviour it is made out to be, with many ending up in a dire financial situation paying out through two avenues and also at a very real risk of losing hard-earned money. The quality of these large new developments, which often go up quickly and are rushed off to sale rapidly (many before building is even finished), is also well-publicised and is frequently demonstrated to be shocking. Snag lists are endless – you can easily find evidence of surveyors called by home owners on completed developments of this type finding hundreds of issues per house. These are all additional reasons why these huge sites are not only a blight on the landscape, ours of which is currently considered the 'jewel of the weald', but also simply not suitable for what is needed or for the reasons they propose.

Lastly, it should be obvious to anyone that allowing such a gigantic development of hundreds of houses will put enormous pressure on a small, historic town that at times already suffers with traffic volumes, traffic flow and poor broadband connectivity in areas and surrounding areas. Many people visit Tenterden, it is a thriving town with huge appeal. Part of that appeal is not only the aesthetic, but the availability of outdoor spaces and amenities that are not overcrowded by an overpopulation in a small area. Adding such a gigantic development will bring with it a vast number of people and vehicles, in a very short space of time, putting immense pressure on town infrastructure and, arguably, damaging the appeal of Tenterden that makes it such a thriving and successful town.