

BOROUGH GREEN PARISH COUNCIL

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ISLES QUARRY WEST & LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

An awful lot of rumour and innuendo has surrounded the above and through this article I would like to try to make matters clearer.

A number of residents have stated that they were unaware of how the Local Development Framework (LDF) affects Borough Green with regard to possible development of Isles Quarry West (IQW). If you have been a resident of Borough Green over the period of the LDF consultation then efforts by Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council (TMBC) to alert and interest you in possible outcomes of the LDF have been made to you. Similarly, Borough Green Parish Council (BGPC) has also involved residents via surveys, residents' questionnaire and subsequent public exhibition in planning for the future of the village.

During 2003/04, BGPC, with the aid of a grant from The Countryside Agency through their Vital Villages initiative, was able to employ a consultant (G V A Grimley) to survey the village, its residents and businesses. In January 2005 the results of these surveys were published in the Borough Green Parish Plan and a copy of its summarised report was hand delivered to each household and business in the parish inviting comments and advising that a weekend public exhibition would be held in February. At the exhibition several hundred residents attended and gave their views, both written and verbal, on a wide range of issues including housing. As the result of this feed-back, the Borough Green Parish Plan – Action Plan was drawn up.

In April 2005 a summary of this Action Plan was delivered, again by hand, to all households and businesses in the parish. The Chairman's Report prefaced this summary (I was Chairman at the time) urging residents to read the full Report at either the library or the Parish Office.

I now turn in greater detail to the Action Plan Summary Report and quote the following from some of the report:

EDUCATION:

ACTION PLAN (a) With the potential to build housing on the IQW site and the Primary School's inability to expand on its present site, consideration will have to be given to re-siting the school. Isles Quarry East would appear to cover this need but the infrastructure does not exist at present.

MEDICAL SERVICES:

ACTION PLAN (a) The Medical Practice is well-positioned should Isles Quarry West be developed, but will need to be enlarged which may have to happen in any event should the village demographics change to any extent.

HOUSING:

ACTION PLAN - There is a perceived need for affordable housing within Borough Green of all homes up to 3 or 4 bedroom homes.

- (a) Infilling on small sites will not gain any affordable homes.
- (b) The only large site available is Isles Quarry West where a suitable mix of housing could be built. This site will only become a realistic possibility on completion of the bypass and the County adopting the Haul Road.

We can find no record of any resident writing, telephoning or emailing with any comment – adverse or otherwise – to either the Chairman’s Report or to the Action Plan Summary. However, it is possible that comments could have been made verbally to individual Councillors but if so, none were reported and noted to the Parish Council.

Many of us are guilty of not reading what comes through our letterboxes, whether it be newspapers, election addresses, Parish Council Chairman’s Reports, consultation documents etc, etc. Many of us glance at whichever communication it is and decide to bin it. No one can be forced to read what comes through their door – you might kick yourself for not doing so at a later date but time marches on and deadlines marking the end of a consultation period pass.

With regard to IQW/LDF consultation, the proposal to release IQW from the Green Belt was first raised by TMBC in the Preferred Options Report which was published for public comment in September 2005 with a deadline for any comments of 18 November. TMBC held a weekend exhibition towards the end of September in the foyer and the Parish Office of the Village Hall. Posters were on display around the village publicising the exhibition. News releases were issued and the matter covered by statutory press advertisement, also an article on this matter in ‘Here & Now’. All documents were posted on the TMBC website. A lot of representations were received from residents regarding IQW at that time so there is absolutely no doubt that people did know about the proposal. Full details of the consultation exercise are set out on TMBC’s website.

The draft Core Strategy and Development Land Allocations DPD (DLA DPD) which both include proposals relating to IQW, were published and submitted to the Secretary of State on 1 September 2006 followed by a six week period for public comment. Again there were the necessary statutory advertisements, a press release and everything was on the TMBC website.

Most importantly **EVERYONE** who had commented previously was notified but not everyone responded. In particular, Woodlands Residents Association were notified but it is now clear that the Chairman had changed and the addressee failed to pass on this rather important letter for reasons unknown.

Objections received during the statutory period were heard at the Public Examination before an independent inspector during May 2007 (for the Core Strategy) and November 2007 (for the DLA DPD). The Inspector found both plans to be “sound”. The Inspector’s recommendations are binding on the Borough Council. The Core Strategy was adopted in September 2007 and the DLA DPD adopted on 22 April this year. The principle of development at IQW is therefore now enshrined in the Development Plan.

Borough Green Parish Council (BGPC) did make formal comments at each stage of the process, in each case supporting the principle of development in Isles Quarry. It formally sent a copy of the Parish Plan – Action Plan to the Borough Council which specifically includes references to the development of Isles Quarry to help meet the affordable housing needs of the Parish which are noted above. At no time did it make any comment as to how many houses this should be. The Borough Council took this document into account when deciding on the best option for meeting affordable housing needs of the wider rural area.

At the earlier stages of the LDF process, IQW was one of the local sites that had been identified but following evaluation, the Borough concluded that if Borough Green was to be the right place for more housing to meet the affordable housing needs of the wider rural area, then Isles Quarry was the best site to meet this need, particularly as its development would bring forward other benefits to the community which none of the other sites would do.

Isles Quarry is a large site of which only part of it can be developed, the area that is already covered by Lawful Use Rights. These “Rights” are for industrial and similar forms of development only. There are few, if any, planning conditions that can be applied to the use of Isles Quarry for such purposes. The haul road could remain unadopted or even be removed, and there would be no “benefits” to the community.

On the other hand, if some housing development were to be allowed in the Quarry there would be planning gains/benefits for the community in terms of adoption and upgrading of the haul road, weight restrictions on Quarry Hill Road, contributions towards enhancing public transport, leisure activities and medical provision in the village. It was also understood by the Parish Council that vehicle movements of such a development would have no greater impact than those the site could currently generate.

Any parish council has a duty of care to its residents to protect, promote and enhance their parish and it was the decision of your parish council that it would prefer to see residential use over which planning conditions and control could be applied and benefits gained for the community, rather than industrial use that would bring next to nothing.

Over the past 10 years some 70 dwellings have been built in the village – but the population has actually fallen. Like it or not we have an aging population with fewer people living in family sized homes. Primary Schools have falling rolls due to a number of reasons including financial ability for couples to start a family. Over the years a considerable number of parishioners have asked various current and former members of the parish council just what BGPC can do to help provide “affordable” housing so that their sons and daughters can continue to live in Borough Green. Development at IQW, including affordable housing, will help to address these problems.

It is understood from Hanson’s consultants that they anticipate unveiling their plans for Isles Quarry at a public exhibition to be held in the Village Hall during July when all residents will have an opportunity to comment on the detail of their proposals.

I apologise for the length I have had to go into, but hope that you have a greater understanding of the process the Local Development Framework went through and that you further understand that everything referred to in this article is a matter of fact, the majority of which being on public record.

Sue Murray

Vice-Chairman Borough Green Parish Council

Borough Council Ward Member for Borough Green & Longmill

14 May 2008