

# The Parishes Opposition Group

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MAY 2008

During the course of 2007, The Five Parishes Opposition Group raised its public profile in its fight against the Kent Science Park's expansion plans.

## January / February 2007

The people of Sittingbourne give the clearest signal yet that they do not want



the expansion proposed by the Science Park. FPOG set up stall in Sittingbourne High Street as part of our own consultation exercise and collected a staggering 734 signatures in a single day.

## March

On Saturday 3rd of March hundreds of residents from all over Swale show their



support for the campaign joining our protest march along the High Street, where FPOG representatives handed over a copy of the petition containing 3,041 signatures to Swale Borough Council leader, Andrew Bowles.

On Thursday 8 March we take our message to the very top when FPOG deliver a 3,200-signature petition to 10 Downing Street. The group then meet with ministers in an effort to persuade central government not to allow house and road building, simply to fund the sprawling development of the Kent Science Park.



We have meetings with the then transport minister Dr Stephen Ladyman and Jim Paice MP shadow rural affairs minister for the Conservative party

## April

Further ministerial meetings took place in April when FPOG meet with Judith Armit, Chief Executive of the Thames Gateway, Caroline Spelman MP (Conservative) and Dan Rogerson MP (Lib Dem) who hold the 'Communities and Local Government' portfolios for their parties.



## May

Election victory for the FPOG chair, Monique Bonney, who stands as an Independent at the Swale Borough Council elections, winning with a clear majority.

## July

Walk away success as FPOG Countryside Character Campaign gets off to a good start with two successful countryside walks



to raise awareness about the loss of landscape character through inappropriate development.

## September

Mysterious pegs appear in fields over Rodmersham and Bapchild as Southern Water commence the installation of a new water main from Cromer's Wood near the Science Park to East Hall Farm in Murston.

## November

The FPOG's Countryside Character Campaign draws to an end with the awards for the winners of an art and photography competition held in partnership with the Campaign to Protect Rural England.



## December

A Government Inspector rejects the initial six-hectare expansion of the park outside the security fence. He cites the case for growth has not been proven and there are still options for reconciliation of tenants and accommodation within the park.

## January 2008

A second rejection within a month for the Science Park as a planning application for two further technology units is turned down on road safety grounds, much to the relief of Tunstall residents.

## Where are we now?

Swale Borough Council has now adopted their Local Plan which theoretically remains in force until 2016, but is likely to only last another 4 or 5 years. This includes the recommendation by David Wildsmith, the Government Inspector who was appointed to oversee the inquiry, that the Park should not be allowed to expand beyond the security fence.

## The Local Development Framework (LDF)

This new Swale-based planning document will replace the Local Plan during the course of the next four or five years. This does provide a further opportunity for the Science Park to include expansion outside the security fence into the planning framework. However, just like the Local Plan, there will be a full consultation exercise where all parties will be able to contribute.

## Expansion

The Science Park cannot now expand outside of the security fence until all opportunities for expansion **within** the security fence have been fully explored. This is not however simply a question of filling every spare plot of land with a new building, or claiming occupation of a building when the first tenant takes a single room.

The Inspector advocates a reconciliation of tenants and that reasonable utilisation of existing land and buildings within the security fence should be pursued in the first instance.

This is particularly relevant with the Science Park opting for single storey construction for all new buildings against a background of existing two and three storey buildings.

Then there are the related transport issues which accompany any expansion of the site and which are enormously unpopular with local residents, already concerned about their safety with current traffic levels.

## Housing Numbers

The 4,500 houses proposed by the Science Park to fund their expansion plans are not included in any current planning document. The adopted Local Plan provides no scope what-so-ever for the inclusion of any substantial housing development before 2016.

Looking at the current South East Plan which forms the basis for the LDF housing allocation to 2026, it is clear that the major housing development proposed by the

Kent Science Park could not be supported.

Swale has already allocated sites which would cater for the building programme to the end of 2026. This does not even include any housing allocation for either the Sittingbourne Town Centre or Milton Creek Area which is currently assumed to be in the region of a further 2,000 houses.

In addition the Highways Agency has indicated that the costs put forward by the Kent Science Park for the potential new motorway junction are woefully inadequate and that the total housing required to fund this would probably be around 10,000 units. To put this into perspective, its more than all the housing proposed for Sittingbourne, Sheppey and Faversham in the next decade.

## Transport

Without question the crux of the current transport infrastructure problems for Swale lie with the current M2 motorway junction. However this will require an estimated £40 million to correct and as the funding for this is not available, it is being proposed that an interim solution be adopted. However even this cannot be accommodated until post 2016 and will cost around £10 million.

There are some in KCC and Swale that see a new motorway junction funded by private development as their saviour. However the only study in existence, commissioned by KCC, proved that this was only viable with a major shift away from the use of the car which was simply not achievable.

Highways Agency has stated that a new junction is unlikely to relieve junction 5 sufficiently to permit all the planned development in Swale to proceed. It is also its belief that the construction of a new junction would almost certainly require the widening of the motorway between the two junctions and that such costs could not possibly be borne by the development envisaged by KSP.

There are also further problems in that the other key element of this transport solution lies with the completion of the Northern Relief Road. This has suffered major delays during the last year or so and even funding for the middle section which crosses the Creek looks somewhat fragile. KCC is backing a fixed height bridge due to funding constraints and the opposition wants a lifting bridge to provide waterside and economic development opportunities in Swale. All the major regeneration bodies in Swale are remaining deafeningly quiet on this issue.

There is also concern that the junction where the Northern Relief Road meets the A249 at Grovehurst is so inadequate it will require a further £5 million investment to stop a 3km queue forming. This is three times worse than the current queues at the Stockbury junction with the M2.

The final leg from East Hall Farm through to Bapchild, which has the potential to link up with the proposed A2/M2 link road, has no funding at all. Current estimates for the completion of this road by the Highways Agency are placing it well beyond 2017.

## Employment

Swale Forward are continuing to pursue the creation of 12,000 new jobs in Swale by 2016. Of these they deduce only around 1,000 would come via the Kent Science Park. Yet the Kent Science Park continues to be the major focus of employment generation almost to the exclusion of all other options.

Bearing in mind that employment at the Kent Science Park has stagnated with virtually no movement in the last four years and that the park can not now expand beyond the security fence, we can only suppose that this prediction is unattainable and therefore the Park will not play a substantial role in delivering employment opportunities in Swale prior 2016.

The fact that the Kent Science Park has failed to deliver on its own growth forecasts only serves to increase our concerns.

## What next?

FPOG will continue to research, lobby and inform, providing unbiased factual information from which informed decisions can be made.

## Join us on our Evening Summer Walk

Following the hugely successful walks last year FPOG have once again teamed up with the Sittingbourne Footpath Group to provide another opportunity to walk through some of the beautiful countryside at risk from the Science Parks expansion proposals.

The 6 mile circular walk will take place on Friday 13th June, setting off from Borden Church at 7.15pm until approximately 9.30pm. Sorry but dogs are not allowed.

If you are interested please telephone Andy Hudson on 01795 435586 just so we can gauge likely numbers.

## KEEP UP TO DATE

Don't forget to visit our website for the latest campaign information

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