



# South Godstone Village Action

## Planning the big picture

Don't the people of this country deserve a choice regarding the type and character of place they live in? Do we have to cover over all the Green Belt with housing to satisfy an ever-increasing population of Britain?

To understand the planning issues we face today, we should look at the big picture to see how we have got to the current situation of one local community after another having to fight unwanted over development. Time and again people say our way of life is being altered for the worse. Increasing time spent waiting for; doctor's appointments, national health dentists, parking places, stuck in traffic jams, queuing to pay in supermarkets, you name it, it's all taking longer, it's just too many people!

We are a smallish Island with a lot of people, not enough land to feed ourselves, well certainly not with the types of food we like to eat, not enough land for houses where we need them how and why did it happen.

Well, a lack of a working regional policy for one thing, especially since leaving the EU. So, we allow the free market near total control of our housing policy. Should we now acknowledge at Government level that the South East is pretty well full up and shouldn't they try to move jobs and people out of the congested parts of the country, to locations where there is more space? Well at least try a bit harder than they seem to be at the moment?

But whilst we can put the blame on successive governments, there is a much larger issue, when I was about 14 years old the planet population had recently gone over 2 billion. This was a shock/horror moment for the world, it was considered impossible for the world to accommodate and feed such a number. We saw famine in many places loss of habitat and species extinction, half the world population were Chinese and something had to be done. This resulted in the Chinese government introducing the single child family the only one to officially do that. Britain was lucky, at the time we had a stable population, about 50 million, we were okay and a bit smug about it to. The planets human population today is over 8 billion and is forecast to be over 10 billion by 2080. We now accept we have caused climate change; we see the rain forests are still reducing as are the ice caps. The main cause is not really what we do or how we live, there are simply too many of us.

So, what went wrong? Economics came into play that's what, our politicians not for the first or last time took the easy option. Britain was finding it hard to pay our way in the world, we had suffered the effects of the second world war, both in terms of destruction, but also in the loss of most of our empire and the money it bought us. The world was a different place, we, like others wanted a different future and never again return to world warfare. We also had to pay for all the tanks, bombs, ships and food the Americans had sold us and that involved selling much of the America we then owned.

So, what to do, cut our cloth according to what we could afford? Or find an alternative, as the former would likely be a vote loser, that alternative selected was get more people! Forget the global population size, let China have a single child family system, ignore the worlds concerns. More people paying tax would help, in particular when paying their National Insurance contributions, which funded the pensions of the retired. We have always been playing catch up on that one, we never had a pension fund when the pension system was introduced, we relied, and still do, on the working to pay the retirees pensions.

This policy has not been changed since that time; we still encourage people to come to our country. It has changed somewhat since Brexit, when many Europeans working here left. Many had come here to work in places like the NHS, in care or in technically qualified jobs its industry, they arrive in their cars and could very easily jump back in them and leave. They never intended to stay, although some of them did and have stayed on. The issue of the fruit pickers that came annually is well remembered especially with fruit farmers.

This loss of skilled Europeans did not result in a population reduction! Companies began to advertise internationally for more workers to come and they were actively supported by the then government. The same government that was pandering to the concerns of people regarding over population, by concentrating focus on illegal immigration and maintaining they would stop it. The fact that the level of illegal immigration was, and still is, very low in comparison with the amount of encouraged legal immigration was ignored. The system now is such that we are bringing people into the country who want to settle here with their families and they pay handsomely for the pleasure. One chap who I worked with and mentored replaced a Spanish engineer who left in disappointment after Brexit, was a Tamil, he came with his wife and two small children. He estimated the total cost was about £25,000. Getting a few more of those people in the country brings in serious money to the exchequer., and helps pay our pensions.

The result of these policies is that Britain now has just under 70 million people who need houses in some areas but not in others. The South East is a magnet for people, as jobs are here. But what do people actually want in terms of housing. The answer is of course lots of different things, some of which is understandably age related. When we were first married, a flat in a city was great, lot of shops pubs, restaurants, music, fun. Then more space was considered, I was qualified and now earning more than my wife, so a house away from the immediate centre. Then we started a family and my wife wanted to more out of the Greater London area to where we were both born, she wanted to bring up the children in a rural or at least semi-rural setting. When we move again it may well be to a location closer to shops and amenities maybe we may want to go back to a flat? I'm sure we are not alone and it surely must be important to offer that choice to the people of our country. It's not a one size fits all and we need local people to decide what their areas should be like. It's called Democracy after all. I don't want every place to be like everywhere else. But that's what the current situation is driving us toward.

The right of local people to have a real input into their lives is diminishing. The power is shifting towards economic expedience, local Councils are, and have been for some time, starved of funds from central government, they find it harder and harder

to provide the current level of services, or have to end them completely. There is economic pressure on Councils to get more people, who then pay more Council Tax. This often only helps pay for the short fall they have in their finances and often does little to improve things.

They are having to provide much larger budgets to fight unwanted developments. The current system allows a developer who finds his proposals rejected by the local Councils planning department, to appeal to the Planning Inspectorate, which then passes judgement. The likelihood of the decision makers having local knowledge of the area of proposed development is slim. Money also comes into play, should a developer have the necessary funds they can appoint seriously expensive professionals to fight their case. It can be self-propelling, once a few successes are achieved the profits can be huge and more funds for further victories.

The current Local Government reorganisations will take local accountability further out of reach of locals. Tandridge District Council will cease to exist and the vast majority of the 43 local Councillors will disappear. The new East Surrey Council will only have 72 Councillors in total but will include Elmbridge, Epsom and Ewell, Mole Valley, Reigate and Banstead and Tandridge. So far fewer councillors will know our village or perhaps even of its existence. Hundreds of years on local accountability gone. This is not helpful nor is it progress, it will push people further away from politicians at a time when their standing is probably at an all-time low. Many local politicians work extremely hard for the communities they represent and live in. In fact, they are the last remnants of the start of our current political system, in which many voters actually knew their local MP. Albeit, that only an elite group of men could vote and the majority of the population including women were considered too stupid and uneducated to vote. Well, I don't think anyone wants to go back to those days, but the fact is this was how our current system was set up to work. Yes, we had political parties in those days, but also many independents and the parties were nothing like they are today. We now mostly vote for a party not a person, it's the party that puts forward a manifesto that it's elected MPs are supposed to follow. We mostly don't know our MPs personally. It's also a fact that most people's vote has no influence on the outcome of the general election and the choice of a government. This is due to only about 100 constituencies ever changing from one party to another. That means in 550 constituencies voting is virtually meaningless. Perhaps it is this that contributes to the disillusionment and disassociation that many people have with politics today.

We need to understand the bigger picture and try to change things as best we can, we may not be able to do much about it, but we still can have a real impact on local affairs, well for now anyway.

We need to do all we can to put a halt to **any** Green Belt loss in South Godstone, Pale Park is horrendous, but building an extra 200 houses in our village will also create massive issues and we cannot let this happen without a fight. We will regret it if we don't do our very best. It will also be a green light for developers to use to get further developments pushed through, they, like Park Pale developers are waiting for that green light.

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