



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

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26 November 2021

Dear Larissa

Swale Borough Local Plan (October 2021). Issues and Preferred Options (Regulation 18)

As one of the Members of Parliament for the Borough of Swale, I would like to contribute to the Swale Borough Council's *Local Plan Review: Issues and Preferred Options (Regulation 18)*, building on the comments I made in April to *the Local Plan Review (Regulation 19) Pre-submission Consultation*.

During the previous Regulation 19 consultation I heard from many residents concerned that a new and dramatically different plan was being rushed through without proper consultation. As you know, I wrote asking SBC to think again. I'm therefore pleased that the Council has decided to do exactly that and is now taking the time to seek the views of residents. I also recognise the importance of having a plan in place, and support the Council's overall ambition to prepare a new Local Plan to avoid speculative and unplanned development.

I would like to stress some planning principles that I hope the Council will take on board as you prepare the *Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan February 2022 (Regulation 19)*:

- To focus on brownfield sites over greenfield sites wherever possible, and to prioritise any new brownfield sites that come forward from the new Call for Sites.
- Promote space efficiency, including making use of space above shops and other single-storey buildings in town centres. This will help to protect as much countryside as possible when building new homes. The Council must plan to match any new development with the necessary infrastructure to support it. This includes schools, GPs, sports and community facilities and crucially transport.

- As I pointed out in April, I am concerned about the dependence of the Council's plan on Brenley Corner. While I have been campaigning for funding to upgrade Brenley Corner since I was first elected in 2015 and secured initial design funding in RIS2, we do not know yet whether we will get the funding to carry out the necessary work in RIS3.
- All new developments should aim to enhance the local area, in terms of facilities and infrastructure, but also fulfilling our aspiration to restore our natural environment and leave it in a better state than we found it. Existing residents should not be negatively impacted.
- It would be good to see a greater focus on retirement housing and housing for people who need care. This enables older people and those of working age with disabilities to live independently in accommodation that meets their needs and frees up much needed family homes.
- Finally, it is essential that the historic and rural characteristics of Faversham town, its surrounding villages and countryside are conserved. Faversham is a very special town and we cherish its history and its character.

While I recognise the need for new homes in and around Faversham I am extremely concerned at the scale of development envisaged in some of the proposals, particularly options 3 and 4 which propose Faversham takes 35% and 45.5% of development respectively, plus 10.5% in rural areas in both cases. In these options, Swale Borough Council is proposing an unforgivable scale of development around the historic market town of Faversham. Added to this, there's enormous encroachment into the surrounding countryside and high quality agricultural land.

The proposals appear to justify this on a grounds of 'rebalancing' which I wholeheartedly reject, and goes contrary to the approaches seen across the country where larger towns often support the lions' share of development.

I do appreciate the pressure you are under, and that the Council is expected to strike a balance between protecting the countryside and providing housing. As I have said before, I receive letters from constituents struggling to rent or buy homes they can afford, and letters expressing concerns about the level of development taking place. I know that the Council is finding the current housing need particularly challenging to meet. I think it is important to note that due to the housing crisis all the major political parties stood on election manifestos at the last General Election committed to building more homes to address this.

That said, I want you to know that as one of the local MPs I regularly make the case to colleagues in Government that we should not take on more than our fair share of development. This has already had an impact. Following lobbying by Kent MPs the Government decided to leave in place the Local Housing Need method created in 2017 and is now looking again at planning reforms. I will keep making the case to Ministers to achieve a fair distribution of housing numbers.

I hope the Council will use the opportunity of this latest consultation to listen to residents across the borough and deliver a Local Plan that provides sustainable homes for tomorrow while addressing infrastructure needs today.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Helen Whately', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Helen Whately MP
Member of Parliament for Faversham and Mid Kent

I write a regular newsletter to keep people up-to-date with what I'm doing for Faversham and Mid Kent. If you're interested in my campaigns on local and national issues, please sign up at: <https://www.helenwhately.org.uk/newsletters>