



PRESS RELEASE

19 July 2007

County Council shows contempt for public consultation

Planning permission has been sought from Surrey County Council, by JJ Franks, a local developer, to extract 770,000 tonnes of sand from the Common Field, Betchworth and to operate a land-fill site between 2012 and 2024.

The developer has spent many months compiling a several hundred page document and yet local residents have only been given two weeks by Surrey County Council to consider and respond to this dramatic incursion into Betchworth Village and the Green Belt despite extensive previous correspondence on the subject with the local environmental group, Campaign Against Mineral Extraction and Landfill (CAMEL).

In a pre-emptive bid the planning application has been submitted over six months ahead of the Mineral Development Plan which is still under review until Spring 2008.

Paul Tanner, Deputy Chairman CAMEL said, "This is yet another example of Surrey County Council paying lip service to a consultation process to meet unrealistic and ill-considered Government targets. It pays no attention to the views of local residents."

The Reigate Road Quarry has been mined for over sixty years during which time over 30 planning applications have been made; many of which have requested extensions and alterations to planning conditions. The quarry site was supposed to have been restored back to its original state over twenty years ago but is larger now than it has ever been due to the absence of adequate backfill activity.

In February 2006, JJ Franks was given a Certificate of Lawfulness of Existing Use or Development (CLEUD) to regularise a skip hire and a waste transfer business which had been operating for over ten years under the noses of Surrey County Council's enforcement officers. Surrey County Council has admitted that it failed to take action when it could have done.

More...

Mr Tanner said, "'Quarry creep' and incrementalism has been a feature of the sand operations for decades and Surrey County Council have by their own admission not dealt with it as they could have done."

"If the developer gets access to the Common Field the community will be powerless to defend itself against similar exploitation."

Even a brief examination of the planning application before the limited time period allowed for review, exposes a number of concerns for CAMEL and the residents of Betchworth and Brockham.

In response to the presence of breeding skylarks in the Common Field, a species under threat, having declined by over 75% from 1972 to 1996, the developer's ecologist proposes to scarify the habitat and carry out a programme of 'human disturbance' to stop nesting!

Claiming consultation with the community and Betchworth Parish Council, what is not stated is that the overwhelming response from both has been adamantly against any further development and a desire for the existing site to be properly restored in accordance with the original planning consents.

The application goes on further to suggest that the impact on residents of the new quarry less than 300 metres from the heart of the village of Betchworth, would be 'unlikely to affect the level of social problems, community stress and conflict within the area'.

Mr Tanner said, 'Clearly, the developer is making the facts fit his application and not the other way round to show his meritless application in a better light. There is vehement opposition to this quarry which will severely affect the lives of residents in Betchworth and Brockham and will put a question mark on the future of nearby Acorns School for more than a generation of schoolchildren.'

On behalf of local residents, CAMEL will be studying the application further and making appropriate comments to Surrey County Council. In the meantime campaigners will be taking further action but CAMEL encourage all those who oppose the further industrialisation of the Green Belt to write, quoting 2007/0526 to:

Ms Pauline Sparrow, Environment and Regulation, Surrey County Council, County Hall, Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey KT1 2DY. Your letter should be copied to our County Councillor, Helyn Clack and your District Councillor and to the Dorking Advertiser. If you live near the Common Field and have not received a letter from Surrey County Council inviting your views please let CAMEL know. You may also want to make your

views known to Lord Hamilton at Betchworth House, Betchworth. The land is owned by his family trusts.

Ends.

For further information:

Nick Caddick: 07970 884003

Notes to editors

Campaign Against Mineral Extraction and Landfill (CAMEL)

CAMEL is an action group formed in November 2004 by residents of Betchworth, Brockham, Buckland and West Reigate to resist plans by Surrey County Council to extract sand from open cast mines at the Common Field, Betchworth (OS Ref: TQ 207 501). It is a voluntary organisation and comprises a range of professionals living and working in the area.

For more information please visit www.camel.org