



Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP
Secretary of State for Communities
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

4th June 2010

Eastbourne LDF Core Spatial Development Strategy

Dear Secretary of State,

I am writing to you on behalf of the residents of Sovereign Harbour in Eastbourne to request that you use the resources of your department to investigate:

- i. The manner in which Eastbourne Borough Council conducted the public consultation into its Local Development Framework Core Spatial Development Strategy.
- ii. The report that was produced as a result.
- iii. The validity of the conclusions that were reached.

As required by the previous Government's South East Plan, Eastbourne Borough Council recently published its LDF Core Spatial Development Strategy Report after a long period of public consultation. It became very obvious early in the process that the council's officers were actively promoting one of the four options (Option 2), and this option included further residential development at Sovereign Harbour. The data used to support the consultation were out of date and inaccurate, and skewed to enhance the sustainability index of the preferred location; even so, despite the questionable evidence, this area was still second to bottom of the Borough wards.

The report, when published, unsurprisingly recommended Option 2, but the evidence used to support it was flimsy and biased. Much reference was made to PPS12, which was used to justify the conclusion, but the requirements of PPS12 were not met. It acknowledges that there was strong opposition in the Sovereign area, and then excludes all of these responses when drawing the conclusions. It makes the statement, "Discounting the responses received at the 'Neighbourhood 14 – Sovereign' consultation event significantly reduces the level of opposition to Option 2, making it the most supported and least opposed option by the rest of the Borough".

Sovereign Harbour is on a coastal flood plain and is subject to the requirements of PPS25. As the land on which the new homes would be built would require change of use, any application would need to meet the sequential test of PPS25. However, no mention of this is made in the report, nor is there any reference to PPS25 in general.

The report acknowledges that Sovereign Harbour has none of the necessary social infrastructure and recommends that this could now be provided through 'housing led development'. It fails, however, to acknowledge that 3,700 homes have already been completed, none of the remaining Sovereign Harbour development land is zoned for residential development. (See attachment.)

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If implemented, this strategy will destroy any remaining opportunity to salvage the sustainability of the Sovereign Harbour community. The public involvement was a classic example of 'tick the box' consultation and, although badly flawed, the strategy has been accepted by the Borough Council's Cabinet Committee.

The objective of the LDF is to create mixed use sustainable communities; it seems Eastbourne Borough Council has failed to grasp the significance, and has totally ignored the damage that its strategy would cause to Sovereign Harbour's fragile sustainability.

It is ironic that a Borough Council so vehemently opposed the previous Government's housing targets has hidden behind them to justify its support for the further exploitation of Sovereign Harbour.

We have discussed our concerns with the council's Chief Executive, the Head of Planning and the author of the report, but our concerns were not adequately addressed. I would be grateful if you could inform me what further challenge can be made, and how your department can be of assistance.

I look forward to your response.

Yours faithfully,

Jan Weeks
Chairman
Sovereign Harbour Residents Association

Attachment: Background to the Development of Sovereign Harbour

Cfi: Stephen Lloyd MP
Cllr. David Tutt, Leader, Eastbourne Borough Council
Robert Cottrill, Chief Executive, Eastbourne Borough Council

Background to the Development of Sovereign Harbour

The development of Sovereign Harbour required two Acts of Parliament - The Eastbourne Harbour Acts of 1980 and 1988. In order to fund the development, the landowner (then Tarmac Ltd, now Carillion plc) was given planning consent for an out-of-town retail park on part of the land, which was completed in 1997.

The homes in Sovereign Harbour were built, over a twenty year period, around the largest sheltered marina in Northern Europe, as part of what was designed to be a 'work-life' environment; the ultimate sustainable community.

The original concept was for a development of 1,500 homes, integrated with a business park that would bring hundreds of high quality jobs to the town. The Waterfront area was to be dedicated to leisure, with high quality shops and restaurants that would become a 'Visitor Centre' that would enhance the town's tourist industry. At the inception, it was marketed as 'The Jewel in Eastbourne's Crown; the reality bears little resemblance to the concept. Despite having completed the retail park, and vastly exceeded the original housing plan, Carillion now insists that it has made no profit from the development, and its completion can only be accomplished from the profits of even further residential development.

The development as it now stands comprises some 3,700 homes. There is no community centre, no public open space, no playing fields, no games areas, no local shops, no pub, no library and only two small, poorly located, children's play areas. Although a Health Centre is now planned, the local Medical Practice ministers to the needs of over 4,000 patients from a four bedroom family home, on temporary planning consent. The only school is a 'one year entry' primary school, built on an actively gassing landfill site, which is inadequate for the needs of the community.

The Waterfront area has been partly developed, but Carillion has ambitions to use the remaining land there for further residential development. None of the land designated for employment has been developed and Carillion has made six attempts to obtain planning consent for further residential development on it. All were refused after massive public protest.