

SOUTH OF FOLDERS LANE ACTION GROUP

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OPEN LETTER

Councillor Jonathan Ash-Edwards
Leader
Mid Sussex District Council
Oaklands
Oaklands Road
Haywards Heath
RH16 1SS

4 May 2022

Dear Mr Ash-Edwards

As you are aware we oppose the allocation of SA12 & SA13 for housing development in the Site Allocation DPD.

There are many reasons for our opposition, but we want to raise the one which is causing us the biggest distress – the important ecological value of SA13 and the devastating and irreversible damage that building on this site will cause.

SA13 is not simply a barren field devoid of natural resources. It is a thriving biosphere, a safe haven for many red list birds, reptiles and mammals and a ready-made carbon sink helping to protect against climate change.

As Leader of the Council can you explain your reasoning? When asked by the press recently MSDC representatives have simply talked about “due process” and the housing targets. Yet we know that MSDC can exceed the required housing target without including these sites in the DPD, and we cannot understand why you are pressing ahead with your plans to destroy this unique nature haven despite its high ecological value.

On one hand you (MSDC) are promoting the fact that you have joined the Blue Campaign to support rewilding in the district, and Objective 8 of your new Sustainable Economy Strategy is to “improve, manage and promote biodiversity and nature recovery” . On the other, you have spent thousands of pounds on legal and consultants fees to fight Burgess Hill town council, local MPs, the South Downs National Park Authority and local residents who want to protect this site. Hundreds of those local residents, Mid Sussex constituents, donated their own money so that we could try to protect this highly valued rewilded nature haven from development. MSDC’s stance turns any claims to support the Blue Campaign into meaningless greenwash.

SA13 is not just vital to preserve wildlife and combat nature's decline but also as a carbon sink. The fertile soil has lain undisturbed for decades. It has locked tonnes of carbon dioxide into the earth. By developing this area you will be releasing more carbon into the atmosphere. How can this possibly be sustainable, and how can you square this with MSDC's claims to be working towards net zero?

We know that the Environmental Act, which is likely to come into law by 2023, requires developments to produce a minimum biodiversity net gain of 10%. This simply cannot be achieved at SA13. How can a 300-house estate ever improve on the decades of natural rewilding, juvenile oak woodlands, ponds teeming with great crested newts, fertile soils and dense scrubland providing valued habitat for threatened wildlife?

The only way that developers could achieve a net gain is if they flatten this beautiful nature haven and destroy all life there before they start measuring. You know this happens all the time all over the country. Are you happy for it to happen in your patch and on your watch?

We can only think that you have supported this development until now because you have not visited this site personally to understand why it should not be destroyed. We know from a recent FOI request that no councillors, not even the members of the Site Allocations Working Group, have visited the site in person.

We would therefore like to invite you to visit and see for yourself what it is that you could save if you were minded to do so. We're sure if you visited SA13 you would see why it is 'special' and must be saved as a unique natural resource for the district.

We understand the pressure MSDC is under to deliver new homes but we also need to think about our future. We must ensure that these new housing developments won't cause more harm than good. You understand this – it's why you are questioning the new housing targets. We are told that the government supports a brownfield first policy. So why is this damaging greenfield site still being considered?

Could we also draw your attention to our petition which over 2000 people have signed to save this site from development? It might be helpful for you to read people's comments about this issue.

www.change.org/SaveMidSussexNatureHaven

We look forward to meeting with you so you can see with your own eyes this special place and understand our very real concerns.

Yours sincerely

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