

Godstone Parish Council

(incorporating the Villages of Godstone, South Godstone and Blindley Heath)

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Godstone Parish Council position on the TLAG suggestion of a Statement of Common Ground (SOCG).

Tandridge Lane Action Group (TLAG) recently proposed that Parish Councils and Village Associations who might be affected by the proposed garden community in South Godstone sign a statement of common ground (SOCG), making it clear that the local plan is unsound and there is no need for a Garden community anywhere in Tandridge District. On the face of it this might appear a reasonable idea, however Godstone Parish council (GPC), following discussion at a full council meeting, have decided not to sign such a statement. Since GPC have already received some criticism for this decision we feel it both necessary and important to explain why we took the decision not to sign the proposed TLAG Statement of Common Ground.

It is less than 2 months until the inspector will hear from people and organisations who not only made Regulation 19 submissions but are also registered to appear at the hearings. The date for any submissions is long since passed and the only way to get a SOCG heard will be if it is raised under an already registered participant.

About two years ago GPC suggested to all Tandridge Parish councils that there might be benefit in working together to fight the Local plan. There was little interest, however a meeting was held with 3 parish councils but little or no subsequent progress was made.

GPC then agreed, after discussion, that the only option for us was to go it alone and to that end we sought a legal team to work on our behalf and to help produce our Reg 19 submission. We have fully briefed our legal team and to introduce a new approach at this late stage is likely to cause confusion with the inspector and may damage our case.

GPC have been consistent in our approach towards all Developers in that we have refused to allow them to make formal presentations to the Parish council as this might imply we are supporting their proposals. TLAG's initial approach to GPC was to ask us to sign up to a SOCG with TLAG and the Developers Forum (A consortium of many developers wishing to have the Local Plan rejected to make the way forward easier for a huge increase in housing numbers). This was clearly against our principles therefore we immediately rejected such an approach.

GPC have also been consistent about our approach to the Garden Community in that we see no need or justification for a GC anywhere in Tandridge District. On the other hand TLAG have taken the line that a GC should not be built in South Godstone but may be acceptable in another Location, although their position seems to have recently moved to one closer to that of GPC's. The Inspector has made it clear that he will not discuss or entertain submissions of any other site during this Public inspection hearing. The Developers are therefore lining up to get the local plan to be found unsound so that if and when a new local plan has to be produced they will put forward their favoured sites and increased housing numbers.

It has been suggested that GPC's unwillingness to sign a SOCG could be seen that we are out of touch and that we DO support a Garden community in South Godstone. This is clearly untrue as GPC's legal team are currently registered to speak on all 8 MIQ's (Draft Matters, Issues and Questions) which probably makes GPC the lead Local Plan opponent.

TLAG, on the other hand, are only scheduled to speak on one issue that of the South Godstone Garden Community. There is in fact only one organisation scheduled to speak in favour of the local plan at the inspection which is TDC themselves. All other speakers are speaking against the local plan including the developers.

At this time GPC have not seen any wording for a SOCG or have any information on which organisations have signed up to such a document.

To summarise GPC have voted unanimously not to sign a SOCG with TLAG but others may wish to take a different view.