

On behalf of the Group I have been asked to register our strong objection to the Borough Council's allocation proposal on BETH1 for 15 houses which is at complete variance to the DPD submission we made to the Council January 2009, with a further submission emphasising our views in June 2009. It appears to be an arbitrary allocation made to appease the Inspector while totally disregarding the evidence based work done by this group over many hundreds of manhours

The Bethersden Housing Consultative Group was formed in response to a request by Ashford Borough Council for engagement with local residents over the development of the Tenterden and the Rural Sites DPD, within which Bethersden has been identified as a Tier 3 settlement. The Group has enjoyed considerable local support. The initial information meeting, to which invitations were issued to every resident of the village, attracted over 90 attendees. A core group of between 15 and 26 people has met regularly (on about 20 occasions in 2 years) to consider the merits of potential local sites, taking an evidence-based and objective approach to its considerations.

The Consultative Group supports the proposal in the Tenterden and the Rural Sites DPD for limited development of no more than 5 dwellings to the southern and western area of site **BETH2** - land to the rear of the George public house - on condition that the majority of the site is protected and improved as a recreation and amenity space.

However the Group does not support the proposal in the Tenterden and Rural Sites DPD for development of 15 houses on **BETH1**, land east of Forge Hill and adjacent to the A28. This is for the following reasons:

Contrary to the statement in the DPD, this site does not lie within easy walking distance from the centre of the village. Indeed, it is less accessible than the alternative site, originally BETH 06 (on Mill Road, on the top western side), which was proposed to Ashford Borough Council by the Consultative Group during the community workshops in the village. There is a steep climb from BETH1 to the village centre, which would be difficult for older and/or handicapped people and pram pushing. Site 06 is on the same level as the village centre.

BETH1 is adjacent to the A28, a dangerous and noisy road and not a direction in which the village Consultative Group would like the village to develop.

The Group is unhappy with the proposal for 15 units to be developed in one location, due to the significant impact this would have on the shape, feel and potential urbanisation of the village, and with a resultant increase in traffic where Forge Hill meets the A28, a junction which is already dangerous.

There is local knowledge and experience of flooding risk in that area of the village. This is already a problem locally, and residents are concerned that the various authorities concerned do not take any responsibility for helping to resolve the existing flooding problem. The Group is consequently extremely concerned about the possibility that this may be exacerbated by further development in this vulnerable location.

There would be an impact on existing residents living adjacent to BETH1 (again, not a problem on the preferred site proposed by the Group).

The preferred site (06 in our submission) is in the same ownership as BETH1 and to our knowledge the landowner would also prefer this site be allocated for development for similar reasons to our own.

Finally, the Group would like to express their disappointment that despite their hard work, ongoing commitment and serious efforts to engage with Ashford Borough Council, their views and proposals have not been taken into account by the Council in the draft DPD. Contrary to Ashford Borough Council's self-appraisal in the DPD, the Group does not feel this is an example of innovative practice on the part of the Council, but that it has been a tokenistic process, enabling Ashford Borough Council to claim that they have engaged with the local community, without actually doing so in any meaningful way. The Group does not feel that this is a good example of the democratic process in action and wishes to express their dismay in the strongest possible terms.