

Mr. Dan Hudson,  
Development Strategy Manager,  
South Lakeland District Council,  
South Lakeland House,  
Lowther Street,  
Kendal,  
Cumbria  
LA9 4DL

11th March 2011

Dear Mr Hudson,

**SOUTH LAKELAND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK  
LAND ALLOCATIONS - CONSULTATION ON EMERGING  
OPTIONS;  
LESSONS TO BE LEARNT FROM BIGGINS ROAD, KIRKBY  
LONSDALE**

With reference to your consultation about proposed sites for new houses in South Lakeland I felt it would be worthwhile highlighting the fiasco of Russell Armers' development of Biggins Road, Kirkby Lonsdale as a model of what should NOT be done in future.

Below is a list of the errors that have occurred with relation to this development and recommendations of how things should be done differently in the future. As someone facing 2-3 years of noise, fumes, mud, dust and disruption during the course of the building work happening 10 metres from my front door I feel I am in a position to give a detailed description of the project.

**1. The site on Biggins Road was a playing field**

In order to go ahead with this development, special needs children from Cedar House School, Kirkby Lonsdale were thrown off a playing field they had been using for years. A request by Cedar House School to buy the field was rejected.

**Recommendation:** Do not allow houses to be built on playing fields, especially those used by the most disadvantaged members of society.

**2. The development has caused a loss of jobs**

As a result of losing their playing field, Cedar House School will move away from Kirkby Lonsdale to High Bentham, with the consequence that the town (and county) will lose many jobs. Amongst other qualities, Kirkby Lonsdale's reputation is based on the excellence of its state schools and its provision for special needs children at Cedar House School and Underley School. This has been undermined by SLDC's approval of the scheme.

**Recommendation:** Look at the consequences for local employment that may occur as a result of planning decisions.

### **3. The whole issue of access to the site has been a disaster**

Biggins Road is a narrow, walled road that was shut to through traffic ten years ago on the grounds of schoolchildren's safety. Since the road's closure, pupil numbers at Queen Elizabeth School have increased by 30%. The road is used by hundreds of Queen Elizabeth School pupils every day walking to and from school in the morning, at lunchtime and at the end of school. There are already problems of schoolchildren being forced up against the walls by traffic at busy times, especially at the pinchpoint, at the junction of Biggins Road with Kendal Road. This pinchpoint cannot be widened as it lies between a listed building and a gas sub-station. Visibility for traffic is very poor at this junction. Building 34 houses on the site is likely to add 68 extra cars to this narrow road, many of them travelling against the flow of school traffic at 0800-0900 hrs. In addition there will be many more service vehicles.

Notwithstanding all the above, a Traffic Engineer from Cumbria Highways, who made only two site visits, neither of which was at the busy times mentioned above, decided that there was no problem with approving access to the site along Biggins Road. Upon the word of one (semi-illiterate) Traffic Engineer, who failed to turn up at times of day to see the genuine traffic problems along this road, a development of 34 houses, worth a total of £8-10 million, has gone ahead.

Access to the proposed site via Biggins Road was opposed by Queen Elizabeth School, St Mary's School, Cedar House School, Tim Farron MP and residents. The Town Council said they could not approve of the development unless Biggins Road was opened up again to through traffic, clearly an impossibility as it had been shut on safety grounds after years of campaigning. It was clear to everyone in Kirkby Lonsdale that if the developers wanted to build on the Biggins Road site they should have done so with access from the Booths roundabout on the A65 and not put the lives of schoolchildren at risk.

**Recommendations:** Use better qualified Traffic Engineers to investigate any proposed site by listening very carefully to what local residents and regular users of the proposed access roads have to say about existing traffic problems. Carry out far more detailed studies of traffic flow at all times of day and consider carefully the implications to the wider area of adding extra traffic to narrow roads. Put the safety of children above the convenience of developers. Examine whether the housing development will tend to encourage or discourage more trips on foot or bicycle. Look carefully at what transport infrastructure should be built by the developer as a condition for being allowed to develop a site.

#### **4. There is no access on foot from the site to local amenities**

The local supermarket (Booths) and the doctors' surgery both lie within a few metres of the site. It will not be possible to access either of these on foot from the development. Residents will be faced with a very circuitous walk of almost 1/2 mile to get to these amenities which lie within a few feet of their front doors.

**Recommendations:** Ensure that safe and attractive access on foot (and where possible by bicycle) to all local amenities from any new housing estate is made a pre-condition of any development.

#### **5. The development adds traffic problems and brings no solutions**

Looking at the bigger picture, one of the real problems associated with the growth of Queen Elizabeth School in the past 15 years has been a vast increase in traffic. One obvious solution would be to encourage pupils to be dropped at Booths and then to walk to school on a purpose-built path across the Biggins Road development, alleviating the traffic problems at both entrances to the school. This should have been a pre-condition for this development to proceed. No such path will be built. As a result of the extra 68 cars on the estate, Biggins Road will become much busier (more dangerous) with traffic. Parents on the new estate with children at St Mary's Primary School may choose to drive their children to school as the Biggins Road / Kendal Road junction will be ever more dangerous for pedestrians.

Inadequate parking provision will lead to conflicts between the school and estate residents as the latter park in places normally used by school staff and pupils.

**Recommendations:** As with (3) and (4) above, SLDC should take a much bigger view of the knock-on effects in the wider area of any development. Look to see how a development can be a force for good if it addresses existing problems and becomes part of the solution and not just another exacerbating factor of the problems themselves.

#### **6. Inadequate public area**

The proposed public area is on a steeply banked portion of the site in close proximity to the A65. This will not provide a realistic or safe amenity for disabled or elderly people or for children.

**Recommendations:** Ensure that the developer provides for the needs of the residents and does not just try to cram as many houses as possible onto the site with no regard for shared facilities.

#### **7. The consultation process was an insult to local democracy**

Absolutely no account whatsoever was taken of the objections made by the local schools, local residents and the local Member of Parliament, Tim Farron. The concerns raised and the conditions demanded by the Town Council were brushed aside and their words twisted to suit the Planning Committee / developers' interests. The residents who objected were not given details of the Planning Committee meeting where the issue was to be discussed and decided and only found out about it by chance. Objectors were not allowed to show photos illustrating in detail the present traffic problems. By contrast the developer was able to project a picture showing an empty Biggins Road for the duration of the meeting. No SLDC councillor lives in Kirkby Lonsdale.

**Recommendations:** Consult, listen, consult again, amend plans to arrive at the best solution for all concerned. Do not bulldoze through objections and impose a plan that is opposed by the vast majority of the community.

#### **8. The developers cut down a mature tree that should have been left**

A mature silver birch some 50-60 years old which was in the plans to stay, softening somewhat the sea of concrete engulfing the former playing field was cut down because it was 'in the way'. Why was this allowed? Who approved the plans then allowed the developers to destroy one of the few natural attractions left on this grey expanse?

**Recommendations:** Do not cut down mature trees if these are scheduled to be saved. It takes two generations to replace them.

**9. The great 'smash and grab' swindle**

So Russell Armer cash in on the good name of Kirkby Lonsdale, sell houses worth £8-10 million and in so doing: threaten the safety of schoolchildren, lose Kirkby Lonsdale jobs, add massively to existing traffic and parking problems, create a ghetto with no access on foot to the adjacent supermarket and doctors' surgery, block views and light of existing properties along Biggins Road, destroy forever one of the few remaining green spaces near to the centre of Kirkby Lonsdale and all of this is given approval by SLDC Planning Committee.

**Recommendations:** Look very carefully what was done here and ensure it is never done again like this, anywhere in South Lakeland. Consult, listen, negotiate and arrive at a solution acceptable to the whole community. Everything should be done to avoid giving the appearance of a cosy collusion between developers and council, excluding the local community from the process.

Yours sincerely

Nick Cotton