

Ref H1.20

Dear Sir, *INSPECTOR FOR LDP*

My name is Gerald Creed, I am the owner of land at Farm Rd, Swffryd, which is the reason I am contacting yourself. I was born in Swffryd and lived there until 1996. *BORN 1949.*

My wife and I built a house at Rear Farm Rd on part of the land I am referring to above to enable my wife and children to keep and graze horses. However, over the years to follow this proved impossible due to a number of problems connected with the land. I have listed these below:

- 1) Drug addicts use this land to partake in their addiction practices (used drug paraphernalia being left behind) .
- 2) Alcoholics as the drug addicts, use this land to drink as there are large dips in the land where they can sit and are not visible easily. This results in not only rubbish being left at the site, but also major health and safety concerns due to the broken glass left behind.
- 3) The area often attracts youths on motorbikes to drive around often using excessive speed as it is a large open area with dips for them to drive through imitating a motor cross course.
- 4) As in point 3, cars are often taken onto the land and driven until they are wrecks and then left abandoned, often being burnt out.
- 5) Evidence of fly tipping is often seen as it is such a vast area, contractors see it as a cheap alternative to dump waste materials.
- 6) Due to the issues raised above it has proven impossible to maintain a permanent perimeter fence as it gets vandalised within a couple of weeks of being erected.
- 7) The Gwent Wildlife trust issue? What wildlife? There is not one tree on the site for birds etc so natural wildlife is virtually non-existent.
- 8) Open space access-I was told at a meeting that this would be no problem in reversal if it was used as a development site.

I would like to take this opportunity to stress that this site is in no way a safe site for unattended children to play on.

If a small development of houses was granted for only a small section of the site, I would be willing to donate a section to be used specifically for a safe play area for the children of Swffryd.

Other reasons why I feel such a development would benefit the area of Swffryd and surrounding areas, is most young families have no hope of buying a house. Most young people in Swffryd have no hope for something better in life.

Swffryd is on the boundary of the borough and as often seen and felt in the past, is at the bottom of the list. Please can you consider this application for this site to be reinstated within the LDP and give Swffryd the much needed chance it needs.

Yours Sincerely

Gerald Creed

P.S. could you please
read and take into consideration
the attached letter from ex councillor
Dennis Hughes.

F.A.O THE INSPECTOR,
L.D.P.
B.E.B.E. *EG.*

4th September, 2012.

LDP Proposal by Blaenau Gwent to delete Farm Road Site.

I have today contact Jeanette John at the LDP Examination Office at General Office outlining that I was informed by yourself that the above site was to be deleted.

I questioned whether it was possible for me to submit some considerations regarding this deletion. I am informed that the process does not allow me to do that, but any concern that I may have could pointed out to you and you could submit that concern if you consider it appropriate.

I have therefore produced a short document giving my background in understanding the area, how I became involved in the UDP and LDP process.

I see that the change proposed is a fundamental change to the plan and does not in my opinion convey "sound practice".

At no time during the development process was housing numbers linked to the viability of this site raised.

It appears in order to ensure that the total proposed housing allocation meets with some statistical equation that the site has been removed, I cannot understand the application of this in an area which sits on the lower edge of the borough where travel to work is associated with the economics of other boroughs and hence the housing requirement needs to reflect that demand as well.

Due to the bureaucracy of the situation I am cannot make a contribution and feel I have unfortunately been misled in some areas by officers.

I wish you well in your endeavours.

Den Hughes.

In order to look forward I believe it is important to look back and to gain the benefits that progression has delivered.

I arrived at the Swffryd in the early fifties when the area was established as a housing development area to accommodate the post-war building programme of the then Abertillery Council. It consisted of two terraced streets a school and a chapel of the original community, two completed development areas and the third area that I moved to which was built in three stages and farm fields.

This polarised mountaintop village is the most southern point of Blaenau Gwent and the nearest neighbours is the village of Hafodyrynys in the Caerphilly Borough. The area has developed into a very close and can do community. The completion of the plan in the early sixties with the addition of a small shopping centre, a Community Centre and Social Club created a village community.

A rising birth rate in the 50's and 60's brought with it the call for an additional school and an Infants School was opened in 1971, this resulted in a under capacity possibly due to the time of establishing need, predictions, and delivery delay of final project.

To accommodate the continued under capacity on the Junior Site a Welsh Unit was placed there, this worked very well until a separate unit was established at Abercarn by Gwent County Council prior to reorganisation.

When the Welsh unit was transferred Gwent County established a need to rationalise education provision in the area and planned to establish a Primary School on the Infants Site. The principle was taken forward by Blaenau Gwent and a Primary School which included a new Junior Block and a complete refurbishment of the infant provision was delivered in 2007, at a cost of around £1.5million. During the planning period pupil numbers continued to fall.

A vital factor in going forward was the need to sustain and continue to build a strong community in the area. At the heart of any community are a number of key considerations, - population, education, and recreation. I have been a governor at the school and had witnessed falling roles, I have been involved with the Community Centre, Social Club and witnessed the change in demographics in the village and the effect that it has on community life.

Swffryd is a unique community as many who live outside this community will confirm. In this area as no doubt other areas the change in demographics has brought about a situation where numbers per household have declined. The social policy of allocating younger single people family accommodation has reduced the opportunity for young families. Young people who live in the area., who want to remain in the community are inhibited by the lack of opportunity due to housing shortage, This situation has been further frustrated by the housing register being universally available. I have no personal criticism of these changes but they do have consequences. Traditionally migration, normally younger families, from the area have been to the south and hence another borough

The UDP

In 1999 I was elected a member of the Council continuing until 2012. I attended an informal meeting concerning the then UDP that sought the views of local members in regard to establishing the Plan.

At that meeting I was briefed by the officers about the plan and have since taken a keen interest in this plan as I see it as the vision that forms the principle way forward in directing Socio, Economic and Environmental matters for the Borough and its local communities.

Following that meeting I saw real opportunity for the member to contribute to the way forward and ensuring we have a strong and sustainable local community for years ahead.

In 1999 I nominated the "Farm Road" site for housing development as I considered that it was key to the future socio and economic factors in maintaining a strong community. At the time I believed a local farmer owned the site.

As the plan was developing other environmental factors came to my attention, meetings were arranged to discuss these issues and to take on the concerns of others and to move forward. It was decided that environmental issues could be resolved by placing strict conditions on any future development.

In the 80's and 90's no "real housing allocation policy" was in operation. The top of Gordon Avenue was used to house problem families. In the late 90's the council had adopted a revised housing policy and began to allocate in accordance with the policy. It then became difficult to allocate families to this area due to anti-social issues that still prevailed. The Council then took a view to demolish some flats at the top of the avenue that had proved difficult to fill and were vandalised. When considering highway access issues this site then became the preferred access point.

At that time I believed it was vital that additional housing be allocated to the area to ensure that the real focus of community is maintained for the future. At the heart of the community is the local school who need young families with children in order to maintain numbers, the local businesses need an increased population in order to maintain their viability. The local Community Centre and Social Club need "numbers" in order to be viable and provide services to the community that are key to its well-being and strength.

There was then a possibility that we would be having a railway back in the valley and it would be advantageous if we were to lay the foundations for future improvement that would attract people to Blaenau Gwent.

The UDP was adopted and included the "Farm Road" site. During this period developers have contacted the council and on one occasion met with all three ward members who supported the UDP plan. I understand that plans were drawn up and presented to officers of the council for comment, but no planning application was submitted due to the financial crises that we are all facing.

The LDP

As with the UDP the consultation process was undertaken and once again I played an active part in attending forums, informal and formal meetings. Issues were raised concerning the Farm Road site and centred on the size of the site due to the statistical requirements of housing in the borough, areas of "SINCS" and in particular species of grass.

I met with the Co-ordinator (Linda) on the site who pointed out the issues that had been raised by officers and others regarding SINCS and grasses and the areas concerned.

It was recommended that the area above the old playing field and a strip between "The Croft" and the reduced site be excluded from the new LDP and thereby preserving the integrity of those areas but allowed a reduced site to satisfy the future needs of the local community.

It is my clear understanding that the only other issue that needed addressing was that of visual impact. On the site where we were standing at that time we could look across the valley and the area of Croespenmaen and Penyfan

Locals know that parts of these areas include Industrial Estates and during the development of these estates we could view whole expanses of units being erected.

At the time a condition of their development was that an Environment Plan be established to ensure that planting of mature trees takes place. This plan succeeded, lessening or even eliminating the visual impact that the development first brought about.

A similar plan could be introduced for this development which would enhance the biodiversity of the site and prove that development and conservation can compliment each other.

Since the adoption of the UDP Tai-Calon has taken over the housing stock at Blaenau Gwent and they own the key access point to this site, they also own an area that could accommodate some 30 dwellings at the lower part of the site. The Railway has returned to the valley with two stations within a mile and half.

Melin Housing has built 20 dwellings (4x1bed, 6x2bed, 10x3bed) on the Old School Site resulting in an extra 4 children entering the Primary School..

From a Borough viewpoint I would consider that an housing allocation in the most southern part of Blaenau-Gwent would capitalise on the vast investment that the Welsh Government has made to this area and not only aid the regeneration of the Swffryd Area which is the in one of the most deprived wards in Blaenau-Gwent and is the most deprived area in the Llanhilleth Ward, but it would generate income for the borough

I have viewed the latest submission of the LDP where the recommendation is now to delete the site and refers to issues of focused changes where a reason to change an earlier recommendation is to “update the housing requirement figure in line with Welsh Government population and housing projections”.

I am confused by such statements; particularly when the values of considerable debate has previously taken place and appear discounted. I can appreciate the need to focus on “centres” which the plan does but I also see the requirement of using all the opportunities that present themselves to take the borough and its communities forward. The area was included in the UDP, outstanding issues have been addressed or opportunities to resolve them have been considered.

Development in this area does not call for any financial input from the borough but could reap financial rewards. It would compliment other plans of the borough to regenerate those areas of need.

The recommendation to delete in my opinion is a fundamental change of the plan. It does not convey “sound practice”, these issues were tested under the UDP and accepted then, further issues raised during the LDP process have been addressed or can be covered by strict conditions in addition at no time during this process was any issue of total housing numbers affecting the viability of this site raised. I was content that the site was going to be included in the LDP with a total allocation of 130 and therefore did not need to complete any documentation to raise any issue.

At the point when the LDP was put out for final deposit I posed the question “was it necessary for me to be involved further” still no information at that time of housing numbers, and was informed by the Manager – (Ms. L Healey), that the process was to await feedback, the officers would present the points I had raised and handle the rest of the process.

It appears in order to ensure that the total proposed housing allocation meets with some statistical equation that the site has been removed, I cannot understand the application of this in an area which sits on the lower edge of the borough, where travel to work is associated with the economics of other boroughs and hence the housing requirement needs to reflect that demand as well.

I believe that there has been a enthusiastic mindset, to tick boxes and produce statistical correctness. To delete the site from the LDP would lead to the eventual closure of the school, the further degeneration of the area, and sentencing the area to become a dormitory village.

I urge those who recommend the deletion of this site to rethink their proposals and those who have the ultimate powers of decision to influence Blaenau-Gwent to change their recommendations.

