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Carol Price/Representation - Planning Hearing 30 May  
Environment, Climate Change etc.

Statement of points to be conveyed/discussed:

## 1. ENVIRONMENT

**Environment/Food security.** The world, as a whole, is running out of sufficient arable land to feed people with. In the last 40 years alone we have lost a third of *the whole planet's* arable soil, while human populations keep exploding in size.

The Environment Secretary Michael Gove himself recently said that "while country's can survive war, famine, even Brexit, no country can survive the loss of its (arable) soil." There is very little, in short, more vital to human survival than retaining enough arable land to grow food on for future generations. And the more the population grows the more of it we will need to hold on to.

Currently we are importing 40% of our food, instead of growing it ourselves. On top of the damage done to the environment from transporting food here from hundreds or thousands of miles away, instead of just driving it down the road to people from our local fields, as the lost arable land crisis gets bigger, countries will not have so much food to export to other countries like us, and will need to prioritise their own populations first when it comes to who gets the food they grow.

These are all inescapable facts. And in the light of them, why on earth is this government and our local council sanctioning the wholesale destruction of our arable farmland for development. on top of the vast swathes of arable farmland in the area that has already been destroyed in the same way? It is sheer and utter madness.

Just to be clear. Thanet has some of the most productive and highest quality farmland in the country. It is a vital national resource, not just a local one. Arable land takes a long time to evolve. It takes 500 years, in fact, to produce just 2 cm of arable soil. And once you have concreted it over you will never get it back.

This proposed widespread destruction of Thanet's farmland for housing becomes all the more lacking in sense and justification when one considers how much of our arable farmland has already been destroyed for development. Thanet is already 27% developed, compared to 6% in surrounding areas, and thus much more destruction of our farmland would be totally disproportionate, compared to other areas, and will destroy the nature of our area forever, as well as lose the nation a vital resource.

**Environment/Brown field alternatives.** Thanet does not have to sacrifice its farmland for housing. For both local councillors, and my own MP (Roger Gale) have made it clear to me that there are sufficient brown field sites in Thanet available to accommodate most of the new housing required for this area. This includes disused MOD land at Manston and many other smaller but alternative sites in the area, which in turn would prevent more extensive damage to our environment, countryside and farmland.

However, they also say that the reason these sites are not being more actively researched, sourced or put forward as alternatives is because developers do not want them. They want nice, vast, pretty swathes of countryside and farmland instead, which they can more widely carpet over with wall to wall housing and concrete and make most money from.

It thus seems to be developers, not politicians or inspectors or even existing residents, who have most say over where housing goes and at what cost to surrounding communities and environments. Despite these being communities they do not know or have any respect for. Neither do they seem to have much belief in the seemingly 'independent' nature of planning decisions. A significant number of our local residents have been told by developers that we are "completely wasting our time" objecting to anything they want to build and where, "because even if a decision goes against us we will simply go back to the government and they will make you let us build what we want". Charming. And so democratic.

**Environment/loss of wildlife habitat and biodiversity.** The destruction of farmland for development also entails the widespread destruction of many wildlife habitats. My own local ST1/2 sites are the home of woodpeckers and skylarks - a now seriously endangered species - and a wide and rich other variety of birds, mammals, plants, trees and insects. They are also hunting ground for bats at night. At a time when we are losing countless species, and levels of essential bio-diversity, every day due to human activity and over-development, any more wilful destruction of the above is simply unconscionable. The CPRE have also made it known what a devastating impact development would have on these areas, environmentally.

**Environment/educational benefit/affect on mental and physical health.** Countless studies have shown that access to open countryside, as in our own ST1/2 sites, are a vital factor in preserving mental and physical health. The ST1/2 sites in our Westgate area act as the lungs for our community, having had most of the rest of the open space and farmland in our area wiped out by previous development. Countless generations of children have walked across these fields to school, listening to skylarks and connecting to their environment and learning about nature, in a way sadly too few children get a chance to do now. They are the last bit of countryside we have got left and are utterly precious to us as a community.

The point should also be made that most newer residents surrounding the ST1/2 sites in Westgate only bought their houses there so that they and their families could at last escape the urban landscapes they came from, and live among countryside.

**Environment/climate change.** Farmland has a vital role to play in locking carbon into the soil. It has recently been proven that arable soil locks in even more carbon than trees. In warmer weather, which is predicted in our future, open arable soil and crops also have a significant impact on keeping temperatures lower - whereas concrete, in the form of development, just further intensifies heat and thus makes temperatures even higher.

## **2. LOSS OF MORE INDIVIDUAL VILLAGE IDENTITIES**

For hundreds of years, if not longer, the ST1 and 2 sites have preserved the more individual identities of the villages and communities of Westgate and Garlinge, through separating them with farmland. Building on these sites would therefore cause the total destruction of these village identities and fuse both Westgate and Garlinge into just one big, impersonal urban sprawl. Places with no sense of real community or heart, and where no one has any really sense of belonging.

## **3. FLOODING & THE ST1 AND 2 SITES**

**Flooding.** Details will now be supplied of floods generated from the ST1/2 sites in Westgate in 1973, proving these sites to be an already established flood risk.



Archive picture above of Victoria Avenue floods 1973 - two fatalities

**Please note:** Planners have currently categorised the ST1/2 farmland sites in Westgate "highly unlikely to flood! "(!), when the reality is very different - see above - as they have already been responsible for a fatal flooding event, as pictured, in 1973, in which two people died. Additional to how immensely disrespectful it is to those who lost relatives in this flood to call it an area "unlikely to flood", as an actual eyewitness to this event as a child, I can detail exactly what happened, and also why there is an even more heightened risk of serious flooding should the ST1/2 sites be built on.

**Background to 1973 Flooding event:** Usually the arable soil on the ST1/2 sites acts as a *protective* measure against flooding of the lower areas and streets (Belmont Road and Victoria Avenue), as there is nothing more porous or absorbent of water than openly ploughed arable soil, or crops with dense root structures that also act like giant sponges - e.g. wheat, potatoes.

However, in the year of the floods there were - more unusually - onions grown in the ST1/2 sites. Not only are these crops with far less extensive root structures, to absorb water, but the soil was far more finally tilled, meaning it eventually became a far more flattened and hardened surface less able to absorb water. So when a more serious bout of rainfall occurred, the water surged down from the ST2 site into the ST1 site, which then acted as a funnel - due to its sloping topography - cascading water down into Victoria Avenue and Belmont Road below.

The reason this above point is significant is that it highlights how any less porous surface - such as those created by **development, building work and concreting over absorbent soil** - would severely increase the build up of water again, in any period of flash flooding, and thus harm to residents in the streets below. Especially with the added strains of hundreds or thousands more households on this land above cascading their own water or sewage waste down into an already over-pressurised system below.

Please note that Southern Water are already having to come and unblock main street water/sewerage drains in Victoria Avenue on a more regular basis, as they are simply not built to cope with the amount of water/sewerage waste they are already getting from existing residents. So any further pressure on this system from even more residents further up the line could be disastrous.

Also note that Southern Water itself says it doesn't have the infrastructure to cope with the amount of homes proposed for these sites. In terms of water supply, water waste removal and drainage and sewage waste removal.

When one adds the final factor of less predictable periods of sudden and heavy rainfall forecast with climate change, building on the ST1/2 sites would seem particularly irresponsible, given the heightened flooding risks it would pose to all residents in the area. Also be aware that since only crops with denser root structures - i.e. wheat, potatoes, rape - have been planted on the ST1 and ST2 sites, or they have been left openly ploughed, and thus most absorbent to water, no more flooding events have occurred.

#### **4. SINKHOLES AND THE ST1 AND 2 SITES**

My family have lived in Victoria Avenue for over 50 years, and thus gleaned much about the past history of the land beyond it (ST1 and 2 sites). Not just while they have lived here, but in talking to others who lived here decades more before them. It was the view of these past residents that a main reason these sites were not built on before - and we are talking as much as a century back before now - is that they were prone to sinkholes from underground cave networks and past chalk mining. I thus feel it is highly important to document this, in terms of the risks it could pose to any future developers disturbing these sites, or any future residents living on them.

Having put on record - as other residents have - the risks inherent in the ST1/2 sites from flooding and sinkholes then anyone seeking to buy a house on these sites, if developed, must be fully informed of them beforehand. If not, and these risks become a reality, this would then

potentially open the way for any developer of these sites to be sued for withholding this information. These kinds of risk may also severely affect the ability of householders on ST1 and 2 sites to get adequate insurance. Existing residents may also sue developers for any future flooding they are exposed to, as a direct result of their building on the ST1 and 2 sites.

## 5. PAST DEVELOPMENT PRECEDENTS

Please look at the images below. These are the ST1 and 2 sites. A rich source of the nation's food, teeming with birds, plants, insects, wildlife and biodiversity and the lungs and treasured asset of our surrounding Westgate community. As well as open space vital for our mental and physical wellbeing.



Now look at the following images...



Here below we have the hideous Westwood Cross development, for which much prime Thanet farmland and open countryside, pretty similar to the ST1 and ST2 sites, was previously sacrificed. For a place that now looks like this. Barely a tree, bird, or form of wildlife left. What person capable of bringing anything of value to our community would really want to live or raise their children in an environment like this?....



More than anything these pictures illustrate the terrifying reality of what happens to our whole community and environment when developers get hold of farmland to build on.

To sum up, the Local Plan in its current form offers nothing but environmental destruction and misery to our whole area, making it an increasingly less pleasant place to live. As well as a loss of food growing land vital to our nation's future. It must be completely rethought, making sure brown field sites of all kinds are fully exhausted for housing instead, and our environment and food growing resources preserved for future generations. If we do not act more responsibly now, future generations will never forgive us.