



SAVE THE ARCHERY GROUND

## Ninety Percent of Candidates Ignore Call for Openness

St Leonards on Sea, April 29, 2010 ... Save the Archery Ground campaign group is asking all local candidates if they will “promise to work for a new, fair, transparent and responsive system for dealing with planning applications?”

Of the 55 candidates asked a simple: YES or NO? to this question, the overwhelming majority has no answer. At the time of going to press some six candidates out of 55 had replied to the personally addressed letter.

“The way Hastings Borough Council currently interprets planning law puts local residents at significant disadvantage,” Martin Bloomfield, chair of STAG said.

Candidate for Maze Hill, Chris Dodwell, said, **“If elected I would consider it my prime duty to shift the planning process away from automatic presumptions in favour of the developer and towards the objective stated in the Local Development Framework. I will still be working towards that even if not elected.”**

“All the tools of the planning system are put in the hands of developers,” Mr Bloomfield said.

“They spend months, sometimes years (four years in the case of the Archery Ground) quietly working with unelected council planning officers before members of the public are aware of what is going on.

“What is even more troubling is that the Council takes no responsibility for ensuring that electors are informed. It just issues developers with guidelines on holding public consultations. In our experience, these are woefully inadequate.”

**Others councillors, such as candidate Joy Waite, said, 'I was uncertain whether or not I would be viewed as unduly influencing other councillors if I spoke out against the scheme and would lay myself open to the Standards Board (...as I have a property, in the area). I have taken advice on this one, and although it is a risk I am prepared to accept it.'**

See the Save the Archery Ground website for a full list of candidates and whether yours has responded. <http://www.savethearcheryground.org/election.html>

**Ted Bacon, Candidate for Maze Hill responding to STAG's letter said, "I am 100% behind STAG's concerns and I would go further and say this is an issue for the whole town and not just for the local residents of the Maze Hill Ward."**

"The Council says local people will have 'a greater say in what development is acceptable and what is not' (Local Development Framework). But in many instances these are just empty words," Martin Bloomfield said. "Even the way individual councillors vote on the planning committee is not recorded, as a matter of policy. Consequently, there is no audit trail, no historic record and a severe restriction on challenging (or defending) individual actions in the case of controversy.

"Official policies to preserve and enhance conservation areas are upheld or ignored with a confusing lack of consistency. Specifically, in Burtons' St Leonards there appears to be no cohesive, sustainable vision about what the future should be.

"Since we began our campaign to save the Archery Ground, other groups fighting developments across the town have joined us. Electors are angry and frustrated at being denied any meaningful way of protecting their environment.

"Bad planning damages lives. We believe Hastings deserves better, with an end to a system that favours developers over residents and puts profit before principle."

(ends)

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Notes to Ed:

STAG has called for Gladedale to withdraw its current planning application for the Archery Ground and submit new proposals, after an eleventh-hour request by council planners for major changes to the scheme. Officers want the largest of the proposed tower blocks at the north of the site "reorientated", changes to public open spaces and landscaping and new surface treatments on all "visible" buildings. Gladedale wants to redraw the plans piecemeal, in a series of "amendments" to the existing proposals which will effectively limit any public consultation. STAG says this is not acceptable. We have asked for support from the leaders of the three main political parties. Watch this space for developments.