

# Campaign to Save our Rural Roads

Representing the Parish Councils of Clopton, Coddendam, Bredfield, Charsfield, Grundisburgh & Culpho, Hasketon, Hemingstone, Little Bealings, Otley, Winesham & Swilland, Wickham Market. Village Meetings of Burgh & Debach

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## Press Release

24 October 2007

### **Suffolk Coastal District Council Planning Fiasco**

On 22 August 2007, Philip Ridley, Head of Planning Services at SCDC, informed a meeting of over 150 people at Bredfield community centre that SCDC had no power to stop a container storage depot being developed at the old Debach airfield site in rural east Suffolk. He based this conclusion on his view that the owner of the site, Debach Enterprises, had blanket B8 consent to use it for general warehousing and distribution and storage of containers would be allowed under this use category. In addition, he could not say whether SCDC would refuse a new planning application to turn over four acres of agricultural land adjacent to the site into vehicle parking, HGV turning and storage areas ostensibly to facilitate the container depot.

Stephen Baker, chief executive of SCDC, has now made it clear that Mr Ridley's position regarding the planning situation at the Debach site was wrong and that the 1981 planning consent that Mr Ridley was relying on in fact only gave permission for two of the buildings on the site to be used for storage of agricultural produce. Accordingly, the current use of four buildings as well as external areas for storage of plastic beads unrelated to agriculture would be in breach of planning control.

It turns out that this change of heart comes as a result of a legal opinion obtained by the Campaign to Save Our Rural Roads (SORR) and provided to SCDC that said unequivocally that Mr Ridley's view was incorrect. SORR represents the concerns of fifteen parish councils about 40-tonne lorry traffic on local roads, and has long been active in trying to reduce HGV traffic in the area. The strength of this opinion was impressive as only a month before Mr Baker had assured a local MP by letter that Mr Ridley's view was in fact correct.

This is only the latest development in an extraordinary saga involving local residents' complaints about the level of HGV traffic generated by operations at the site. In response to formal complaints made as long ago as 2004, SCDC finally issued an enforcement notice in

November 2006 seeking the cessation of use of agricultural land for open storage that more than doubled the Debach plastic bead storage business.

Debach Enterprises appealed the notice and chose to have the appeal heard at a public enquiry which after several delays was scheduled for July 2007. A month before the date of the enquiry, SCDC withdrew the notice on the basis that a compromise had been reached with Debach Enterprises that would have public benefit and resolve the issue once and for all. The recent planning application was intended to formalise this compromise.

The August Bredfield meeting had been organised by SORR to allow Mr Ridley to explain the situation and hear comments from the residents of local parishes adversely affected by HGV traffic from the site. At the meeting, Mr Ridley was confronted with a copy of a page from Debach Enterprises website that announced the Clopton site would soon enter the container storage business. Mr Ridley was asked to explain how this could be allowed in such a rural area with roads ill-suited to heavy lorry traffic. It was then that Mr Ridley proffered his now discredited assessment of the planning situation at the site and said that nothing could be done.

It is understood that SORR has now requested that SCDC immediately refuse the current Debach planning application as it would only have had relevance if Mr Ridley's erroneous position had been correct. In addition, SORR has requested that the withdrawn enforcement notice be reinstated and that an additional enforcement notice be issued to require the removal of plastic beads and any other non-agricultural produce from the site.

Lastly, SORR demanded that SCDC seek enforcement of a 1981 agreement entered into by the owner of the site undertaking to use only part of site for storage of agricultural products and gave up his rights to use any other part of the site without the express consent of SCDC. This agreement was in effect a promise not to do what the owner has now done.

Aside from Mr Baker's letter, SCDC has not publicly addressed the matter. SORR has indicated that immediate action needs to be taken. Any delay by SCDC could result in the unlawful use of the site by Debach Enterprises becoming lawful under a quirk in planning law if not halted by June 2008. According to SORR, it may already be too late but SCDC owes it to the residents to do everything within its power to remedy the situation until that is ultimately established. The seeds of this fiasco were apparently planted back in the late 1980s and SCDC has for all intents and purposes turned a blind eye on the problem since then.

Keith Gipp,  
Chairman, Campaign to Save Our Rural Roads

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