

Campaign to Save our Rural Roads

Press Release

15 February 2008

Campaigners urge district council and Debach to 'listen and act'

Residents of rural Suffolk were urged at a public meeting last night to make their voices heard in support of the Save our Rural Roads (SORR) campaign by signing a petition for action to the district council and recording their concerns in writing for a joint complaint to the Ombudsman.

More than 150 local people attended the meeting at Bedfield Village Hall (7pm, 14 February) and those attending were urged to sign a petition to be presented to Suffolk Coastal District Council (SCDC) ahead of its planning meeting in March to discuss enforcement action against Debach for breaches of planning permission at its warehouse site near Woodbridge over the last twenty years.

Those attending were also urged to register their personal dissatisfaction with the lack of enforcement of the planning laws by SCDC, to be jointly presented to the local government Ombudsman as a complaint against the council for their lack of action against these breaches for the last twenty years.

Keith Gipp, chairman of the Save our Rural Roads campaign group, said: "Suffolk Coastal District Council owes it to residents in the area to do everything within its power to remedy the situation it has been ignoring for many years.

"The fact is that Debach are acting unlawfully in breach of their planning permission, and the hundreds of residents affected feel this must be tackled now, before it is too late. We want the district council to take enforcement action, and for the Ombudsman to take note and investigate the district council's failure to satisfactorily resolve to situation, even when we drew it to their attention four years ago.

"Suffolk County Council's highways chiefs have acknowledged our efforts, and in autumn 2007 formed a Transport Policy Development Panel to see what could be done to look more closely at the issue of unnecessary HGVs on unsuitable rural roads, which SORR plays a part in."

At the last SORR public meeting on 22 August 2007, Philip Ridley, Head of Planning Services at SCDC, informed a meeting of around 230 local people that SCDC could not say whether it would refuse a planning application by Debach in an attempt to resolve its breaches of planning rules, to turn four acres of agricultural land adjacent to the site into vehicle parking, HGV turning and storage areas to facilitate the container depot as well as grant permission for storage of non-agricultural materials it had been wrongly storing for years.

However, the application was withdrawn by Debach in January 2008 when it heard that planning officers would recommend refusal of the application after local resident and highway concerns were raised by consultees Suffolk County Council.

Stephen Baker, chief executive of SCDC, said in a letter to SORR that the correct position was, in 1981 planning consent only gave permission for *two* of the buildings on the site to be used for

storage of *agricultural produce*.

So, the current use of four buildings as well as external areas for the storage of plastic beads from overseas unrelated to agriculture remains in breach of planning permissions on the site.

This is the latest development in an extraordinary saga involving local residents' complaints about the level of HGV traffic generated by unlawful operations at the site. In response to formal complaints made as long ago as 2004, SCDC started enforcement procedures in November 2006, seeking the cessation of use of agricultural land for open storage that more than doubled the Debach 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 halted this action on the basis that a compromise had been reached with Debach to submit a planning application for permissions to be sought.

The August 2007 SORR meeting allowed Mr Ridley of SCDC to explain the latest situation to local residents. 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, ahead of the council's decision.

SORR requested at this meeting that as local consultees that SCDC refuse the Debach planning application, a view later supported by Suffolk County Council Highways as consultees to the planning application. In addition, SORR requested that the withdrawn enforcement notice be reinstated with additional enforcement for the type of materials stored and not just the cessation of outside storage, but the use of two not four buildings on site as the 1981 agreement entered into by the site owner was to use only part of site for storage of agricultural products. This agreement was in effect a promise not to do what the owner is now doing – using all of the site for materials including non-agricultural produces (i.e. plastic beads from overseas).

Immediate action needs to be taken, as any further delay by the district council 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 (if non-lawful activities continue for more than ten years without concerns being raised then they become lawful).

Notes to editors:

- 1) SORR represents the concerns of 15 parish councils about 40-tonne lorry traffic on local roads. It has long been active trying to reduce unnecessary HGV traffic in the area. The group is not against large vehicles using country roads when it is essential for the wellbeing of the local rural economy.
- 2) The 15 Parish Councils represented are: Clopton, Coddendam, Bredfield, Charsfield, Grundisburgh & Culpho, Hasketon, Hemingstone, Little Bealings, Otley, Witnesham & Swiland, Wickham Market. Village Meetings of Burgh & Debach.

For more information about the Save our Rural Roads campaign visit www.sorr.org.uk or contact Keith Gipp, Chairman, Tel: 01473 737535 jill.gipp@tiscali.co.uk or Tony Fryatt, Secretary, Tel: 01473 737218 anthony.fryatt@tiscali.co.uk

Press release issued on behalf of the Save our Rural Roads (SORR) campaign by Melanie Willis at Geronimo Communications.