**A VILLAGE FIGHTS BACK**

**KEINTON MANDEVILLE v. LAND VALUE ALLIANCES**

**Introduction – our SHOCK story**

This is a briefing paper by SHOCK (Stop Housing Obliterating the Character of Keinton [Mandeville]). The village is opposing an application by Land Value Alliances (LVA) to build an estate of 120 houses on farmland west of the village. The village is unanimous in its opposition. So far, over 450 residents of the village have objected. There have been only 4 supporting comments ,all from non- residents.

**Reform of the UK Planning System- will it arrive in time for Keinton Mandeville ?**

The government has recognised the need to reform the planning system in the UK. Currently it is skewed in favour of development, at the expense of the countryside, agriculture, and rural life and communities. The Queen’s Speech in April this year stated:

*“The planning system will be reformed to give residents more involvement in local government”.*

SHOCK welcomes the proposals in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill now before Parliament. These include:

* involving infrastructure providers (such as water and sewerage utilities) in the planning process (*houses are being approved here even when sewage overflows into our streets and lanes – this occurred again after just one afternoon’s heavy rain (20mm) in August after the heatwave )*
* removing the five year land supply target *“to curb speculative development”* and *“planning by appeal”* [Explanatory Memorandum to the Bill] (*LVA’s very existence is based on targeting vulnerable planning authorities missing their housing targets: those targets were centrally imposed and bear no relationship to real local need)*
* introducing a new infrastructure tax - a percentage of the sale proceeds from each new house - which reflects more closely the real costs a development imposes on local communities (*in place of the mirage of s.106 commitments and untargeted CIF charges, which are usually insufficient or fail to appear)*
* and legislating for a presumption in favour of local and neighbourhood plans and the new less formal “neighbourhood priorities statement”.(*Keinton Mandeville’s Plan is being prepared)*

The application by LVA which, if allowed, will devastate the rural settlement of Keinton Mandeville, could not be a better example of what the Government is trying to stop and illustrates why these changes to our planning system are much needed and long overdue. They deserve to win universal support but may not go far enough. But how many will survive the chaos and U-turns of the present government ?

 ***Please read on for a ‘real life’ example of the irreparable damage which our current flawed system brings with it and why LVA’s proposal must be rejected.***

**About KM**

Rapid expansion (2016 to 2022)

KM is recorded in the Doomsday Book (as Chintune). It has grown organically by linear development along Queen St, the B3153, and, more recently, Church St, as small unmechanised quarries were exhausted, and local cider-making declined. But even by 2011 it boasted only 417 houses. A building spree since 2016 has seen it grow by 92 new-builds to 509, with another 52 dwellings awaiting approval. That 92 built includes a number of social housing or affordable homes.

Infrastructure and facilities

This rapid expansion has taken its toll on the village infrastructure and facilities. The school is full with in-catchment children. Even with the sixth classroom, now at last approved and funded by Somerset CC but still to be built, infant classes will exceed the recommended maximum of 30. The village hall is turning away clubs and social groups because it is fully booked throughout the week and needs extending.. With increasing regularity the sewerage system registers its protest at the overdevelopment by disgorging raw sewage into the historic main street and nearby lanes – and this despite Wessex Water having dispensations from the Environment Agency to discharge into local rivers, the Brue and the Cary – an event which occurs with sad frequency.

Our village character and environment

You may know Keinton Mandeville. If you do, you will readily appreciate the grotesque impact a prominent housing estate on King’s Hill will have on the local environment and ecology. It will destroy the physical and mental benefits of the western walks around the village enjoyed by residents and visitors alike for centuries and the vistas they offer over beautiful Somerset countryside. It will block off the village green spaces to wildlife which inhabits the fields and woods to the west. That wildlife too regards Keinton Mandeville as its recreation. It will threaten a rare SSSI site, not 250 yards away, alter the natural drainage and affect watercourses, introduce significant light pollution, and plant a large carbon footprint on the edge of a village which supports carbon neutrality. And then there is the permanent loss of 25 acres of productive farmland – one reason why the Trustees of the Kingweston Estate also oppose this development. It is a proposal totally without merit.

**The Planning Context**

In its Local Plan (2016-2036) (yet to be adopted) SSDC proposed to designate KM as one of 12 ‘Villages’ with potential for further development. In the case of Keinton Mandeville this judgment is based on outdated information, and is highly questionable. Assuming, however, it remains a ‘rational’ decision (in the public law sense) it would only require KM to grow modestly by 60 houses over the 20 years of the Plan (3 dwellings a year). KM has grown by 92 houses in just the last 5 years, 50 percent more than a rural settlement would be expected by SSDC to contribute over the whole 20 year Plan period. LVA’s estate, in one suburban blob, adds 120 houses! No wonder residents think it will destroy the village environment and overwhelm its fragile services, infrastructure, and wildlife.

**About LVA - “the unacceptable face of capitalism”?**

Much information is available about LVA from its own website-www.lva.co.uk but its structure is an impenetrable web of companies and partnerships and most of its investor members secret. But its methods and profit potential are revealed by the promotion agreement between LVA and the landowners of the King’s Hill site, the Chinnock family. This is publicly available from the Land Registry title to the site, or from SHOCK.

LVA is not a builder or developer. It is an investment vehicle which speculates in land – our countryside and our productive farmland. The financial returns to its syndicate members are eye-watering. If successful at King’s Hill, they would enjoy an annualised rate of return of over 730 percent, assuming LVA “war chest” for professional and legal fees is all spent. LVA will walk away with 20% (£1.25m) if the land achieves its reserve price of £6.25m – the sale proceeds are in reality likely to be substantially higher (as are the profits for the syndicate members)! Its 2 main financiers (‘persons of interest’ in Companies House parlance) are Yogesh Mehta (the owner of Pickfords and Petrochem Middle East,prominent in the Indian ‘Rich List’) and Dame Ann Gloag (the Stagecoach billionairess).

According to its website, LVA has some 30 projects like this on the go, and as many again in the pipeline. Langport, Martock and Merriott are other nearby communities under siege. LVA works by targeting planning authorities which cannot prove a 5 year supply of housing land. If this is the case, a policy ‘free for all’ is effectively created: a presumption in favour of sustainable development arises and planning authorities cannot rely on established policies, however much in the local public interest. SSDC is vulnerable: apart from its imminent demise, and under-resourced state, it is not allowed to count towards its land supply figures approvals held up by Natural England’s embargo on new-builds which might leach more phosphates into the poisoned Somerset Levels. LVA seeks to to bully planning authorities with its financial clout and planning and legal “hired guns” – see the implied threats in the promotion agreement about litigating as far as the Supreme Court to get its way !

 **In conclusion – what do the villagers of Keinton Mandeville think?**

The local community does not want this development, and gets no benefit from it. LVA is motivated only by profit, with no regard for the communities it puts under siege. It offers the bare minimum to those communities, extracted as the price of getting planning permission. **But the benefits we enjoy as residents of KM are priceless to us, irreplaceable once destroyed, and will not be bargained away. No wonder the score is 450 against, 0 for, among residents of the village.**