



Forge Field has been saved from development four years after plans were submitted

CAMPAIGNERS have declared a 'triumph for democracy' in Penshurst as the High Court quashed a planning [application](#) yesterday that has caused a rift in the village for four years.

Planning permission to build on the greenfield land was overturned by the High Court, which rejected [applications](#) made by Sevenoaks District Council and West Kent Housing Association to develop six affordable housing on the greenfield site, saying they must be reconsidered.

Robert Rees, who was involved in the Forge Field Society campaign from the start, said that the case was more complicated than a case of 'not in my back yard' objections, and the upset had stemmed from a lack of discussion with the community, and a refusal to consider other areas to build on.

Mr Rees, 53, said: "[It](#) is not really a matter to be celebrated but I am quite relieved. We found out last night and I did have a hope that it would go this way, because when something is wrong, hopefully justice will prevail. You just never know with these things."

He said that a lack of communication between the Penshurst Estate, who own the land and offered it for use, and the parish council, had caused tensions in the village.

"What caused people in the village to get upset as much as planning permission

was because we were deliberately not contacted by the council or anyone else: there was no attempt to try and talk about alternatives.

“These things always cause problems: it is sad because actually the Estate and the village have always had extremely good relations. The village and its people has been recipient of a lot of benevolence from the Estate. This is a very specific area where there has been a falling out and shouldn’t colour relations in the community.

“There is a lot of discussion of British values at the moment and I think one of the values has to be that when three quarters of a village vote against something that is listened to.”

Mr Rees, who has lived in Penshurst for 22 years, said: “There is a subtext to this which is not only about the way that things were done in private as much as possible by the council: they have spent huge amounts of public money on fighting this, and they spent a huge amount of money, and our time, protecting the first planning application, which they didn’t even bother to defend.”

He said that the community who hoped to save their rural landscape were not the only people affected by the wrangling: “Had they sat down with the community in Penshurst and discussed where to put these houses it would have helped. By now because Forge Field has been held up as the only possible place, people have been waiting for housing for four years.

“I think almost everyone wants this housing to be provided. That has not been the cause of the objections.”

There are no plans for celebrations on Forge Field and Mr Rees said that although he was pleased about the result of the case, he did not feel it would be a permanent [solution](#).

“I hope this hiatus will give an opportunity for people to talk properly about alternative ways of dealing with it,” he said. “But I fear it will be the same. Community relations in this village always have been good and this is a single fly in the ointment. I hope his gives the authorities a push to think again about the way they communicate with villagers.”

Mr Justice Lindblom said: "This is one of those cases in which the decision was one that no reasonable local planning authority could have made."

Mark Leader, development [director](#) of West Kent Housing Association, said: "We will have to review the situation in the light of the decision but as we have not yet seen the full judgement we are unable to comment further at this stage. We will continue to work with partners, including the local authority and the residents and parish council of Penshurst who do want and need these homes, to see what our next steps should be."

Sevenoaks District Council are yet to respond to requests for a comment.

Read more: <http://www.courier.co.uk/Picturesque-Penshurst-field-saved-High-Court/story-21232005-detail/story.html#ixzz34WYDBxaJ>

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