

**Statement of Representations by
Christopher Peter Lewcock on behalf of the Bulverhythe Protectors**

I have a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Urban and Regional Planning, a Diploma in Development Studies and an MPhil in Land Economy. I worked for a total of eleven years in English Local Authority Planning Departments. I have also worked as a lecturer in the Built Environment at the University of Greenwich.

The Localism Act 2011 (the Act) imposes on a local planning authority the duty to cooperate. This is explained further in relevant Central Government Guidance published 6 March 2014 (the Guidance 2014). They are required "... *to engage constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis...*"(the Act) ... "*to maximise the effectiveness of Local Plan ... preparation in the context of strategic cross boundary matters*"(the Guidance 2014). The duty to cooperate is imposed on the Council preparing their Plan but is equally true in respect of strategic matters of any neighbouring local planning authority.

I would submit that Rother District, due to a lack of constructive engagement by Hastings Borough Council, may be unable to comply with this duty to cooperate. My particular concern is with the handling of the Strategic Gap between Bexhill and Hastings. In its Submission Rother District sets out the extent of cooperation on the Hastings urban fringe (paras 4.56 et seq).

"Rother and Hastings Councils put forward a joint approach to development in Hastings and Bexhill to advance their shared future prosperity through the respective Core Strategies. This included the establishment of the Countryside Park as well as mutually agreed transport infrastructure improvements, with the now constructed Link Road as the first priority.

...

Hastings Borough Council has supported the Countryside Park definition; both Councils, together with East Sussex County Council, are represented on the Park's Board.

...

In addition to the above, in view of the close social and physical relationship between Rother and Hastings, a joint Playing Pitch Strategy was commissioned jointly to assess the supply and demand for playing pitches for both Districts, with the consultants' report published in October 2016. This has informed the allocation of sites for this use in Bexhill in the DaSA".

Hastings Council owns the Bexhill Road playing fields within Hastings Borough Boundary and more extensively in Rother District. Hastings Cabinet has supported proposals for a Sports Centre, including a new football stadium, and housing to be built on the playing fields (see attachment). These plans were withdrawn by the prospective developers. However, Hastings Cabinet and Council has subsequently prepared, had approved in principle Central Government funding and continues to progress proposals to develop that part of the playing field within Hastings Borough for housing. A print out of the Cabinet report is attached. In neither of Hastings' Cabinet reports are the strategic planning implications of the proposals for Hastings or Rother assessed.

The proposals are manifestly contrary to the protection of the Strategic Gap and other cross-border strategic policies already adopted by Hastings and Rother and now set out in more detail in the Rother DaSA. In summary: the proposed housing and other large-scale built structures would visually

impact on the open outlook of the gap; the development for housing would result in a very significant loss of playing fields, identified in the agreed 2016 document referred to above as having a vital shared value for Hastings and Bexhill; in order to obtain necessary relief drainage on this Zone 3 flood land major alterations would be required in the Combe Haven catchment area in Rother District; these changes would in turn result in adverse impacts on the SSSI and other wildlife interests; significant additional traffic generation would result on roads leading into Rother; there would be other knock-on impacts on surgeries etc. As Para 4.21 of the Rother Submission notes “*Hastings ... development and associated infrastructure proposals close to the administrative boundary may well amount to a strategic matter, depending on the scale and extent of impacts.*” If Hastings succeeds in granting itself permission for and then developing the land within its boundary that is likely to increase pressure for release of other rather similar land in Rother.

Two brief comments for the DaSA have been made on the Strategic Gap by Hastings’ Head of Policy Planning. She has written in to support the protection of the Countryside Park. In a rather mixed message, she has also expressed disappointment that wind turbines will not be supported in the Park. No reference is made to Hastings own strategic policies nor to the major implications arising from the Boroughs’ current development proposals.

The Guidance states that “... *effective cooperation is likely to require sustained joint working with concrete actions and outcomes. It is unlikely to be met by an exchange of correspondence, conversations or consultations between authorities alone ... Where Local Plans are not being taken forward in the same broad time frame, the respective local planning authorities should try to enter into formal agreements, **signed by their elected members, demonstrating their long term commitment to a jointly agreed strategy on cross boundary matters. Inspectors will expect to see these agreements at the examination.** A key element of the examination will be to ensure that there is sufficient certainty through the agreements that an effective strategy will be in place for strategic matters when the relevant Local Plans area adopted.*” [My emphasis]

In the light of the above I consider that Rother District has not submitted “*robust evidence*” in its Submission to demonstrate that Hastings Borough Council is constructively engaged in an effective ongoing basis on the securing of the Strategic Gap and related policies. Indeed, Hastings’ actions appear more likely to undermine the purposes of the Plan. It isn't at all clear that Hastings Borough will in practise cooperate with Rother's strategy as regards policies relating to the Combe Haven Countryside Park.