

# Girdlestone News

*Update from the Girdlestone  
Action Group January 2010*

## **VILLAGE MEETING CALLED FOR 4 FEBRUARY SCDC TO DECIDE ON GIRDLESTONE IN MARCH**

The Girdlestone Action Group (GAG) has called a village meeting for 4 February at Melton Primary School, 7.30pm. Following the deferral of the planning application for the Girdlestone site at the council meeting of 12 November, GAG asked architects Ash Sakula to produce an alternative proposal for the site. Councillors, Council officers, the developer and landowners have been invited to the village meeting to see the proposals. GAG and MPC have been asking for nearly two years for the Council to take a lead on preparing a design brief for Girdlestone, the adjacent CEL and

station forecourt sites. SCDC has refused to do this. It transpires that the CEL owners' representatives have been in discussion with SCDC about development of the site for two years, but SCDC forgot to tell anyone about this. We hope now that Ash Sakula's suggestions may prompt a rethink by the Council and persuade it to show some leadership. We hope that the Council, landowners and developers may decide to work together and with the community to get the best for the village and this site. Councillors at November's SCDC planning meeting were concerned about the inappropriate scale of

the development, and also asked that any future revised application should include consultation with the community. Despite assurances of consultation, a new application was publicised in the *EADT* on 14 January without any prior notice. Our task now is to show all concerned that there are acceptable alternatives and to get the revised application thrown out so that acceptable plans can be tabled. We want the council to fulfil its duty of ensuring that the community is consulted this time. So, please turn up to the village meeting, hear what Ash Sakula has to say, and make your views known to the Council and developers!

### **Ridley's conduct challenged**

The astonishing conduct by SCDC Head of Planning Philip Ridley at November's planning meeting has been challenged in writing by local resident Claus Fortmann. And it now transpires that, against Council policy, the notes of the clerk to the meeting were destroyed before the much abbreviated minutes of the meeting were issued. Why?

### **Lego saves the day!**

Planners looked on in fury as, with a flourish, Jim Bidwell unveiled a scale model showing the Girdlestone development towering over Avocet House. Councillors said that a model should have been supplied by the developer (GAG had asked case officer Chamberlain for this). Thanks to Claus and Sam for their Lego skills.



## SCDC – the developers' friend?

It is not only GAG that is concerned about the conduct of the planning function at Suffolk Coastal.

Save Our Rural Roads this week put in a complaint to the Ombudsman regarding the conduct of Ridley and SCDC chief executive, Stephen Baker, in relation to Gressingham Foods. This follows a complaint from SORR, upheld by the Ombudsman in 2009 regarding maladministration by SCDC over development at Debach airfield. SORR, like GAG, had to resort to legal action to have any chance of getting SCDC to do its job properly. SORR is concerned about failure to register planning complaints at SCDC, foot dragging that allows use of the four year development rule, retrospective planning consents, and overwhelming failure to balance developer and community interests.

What is going on in SCDC planning? Will we find out soon? SCDC's Scrutiny Committee has set up a working party to consider concerns about the planning function following concerns raised by some more switched-on Councillors. GAG and SORR have asked to make representations to the working group. Will there be a whitewash? SCDC's reputation is on the line – better it cleans up its own act now. GAG and SORR won't go away. Watch this space.

## GAG lawyers raise more concerns

GAG's lawyer wrote to the council (21 December) warning that we consider the Environmental screening unlawful. We asked that they now require Riduna to submit an environmental statement for the revised application. We also questioned the lawfulness of Ridley's conduct at the meeting, in particular his refusal to answer Councillors' requests to provide reasons for refusing the application, and his speaking

extensively on Riduna's behalf.

We offered to delay legal proceedings pending a meeting with the Council and preparation of a design brief. No response yet from SCDC.

Councillors had also requested that SCDC consult with the community. Yet again no response. It looks like tax payers have to get the Council to the court doors before we can get a sensible response.

## Council to decide in March Write now and please be there!

SCDC are to consider a revised application from Riduna at their March meeting. The footprint and design are the same as the previous application; Riduna has dropped the buildings from three to two stories. Nine elected councillors will discuss and then vote on this application. GAG, MPC and the developer have three minutes each to make their case. Our local councillors can speak for slightly longer. Officer Chamberlain presents his case first. He is supported by Head of Planning (Philip Ridley).

The meeting is chaired by an elected Councillor – either Ivan Jowers or his deputy. A *competent* chairman will ensure balanced appraisal of the

application.

It is really important to have a large public presence at the meeting – it makes a huge difference and we know the Council has been taken aback by the level of opposition from Melton residents, and by residents of adjacent parishes, to this proposal. Please be there if you can.

**If you object to the revised plans, write by 8 February! You can email [d.c.admin@suffolkcoastal.gov.uk](mailto:d.c.admin@suffolkcoastal.gov.uk) or post to SCDC, Planning Services, Melton Hill, Woodbridge, IP12 1AU quoting C09/0584. Clearly state whether you object to the proposal.**

## CEL site for development

In a surprise move, Gerald Kay, acting for CEL site owners, tabled a late objection to Riduna's application. Mr Kay has been talking with the Council for nearly two years – SCDC forgot to tell anyone about it. If Girdlestone goes ahead CEL access will be unusable. Access will be across Riduna land - but likely at a price. Council officers say this is irrelevant to considering the application. We wonder why?

## Fighting Fund

**The Fighting Fund is spent on legal fees, newsletters, banners and hiring rooms. Donors have contributed a good sum so far and with the lawyer's huge help we have got the original proposal down from four to two stories, reduced the footprint, and saved most of the trees - but good legal advice is far from cheap. If you can, please send a cheque to Bob Sambrook, Treasurer, Girdlestone Action Group, Jarvis Cottage, Foxburrow Farm Lane, Suffolk IP12 1NZ (cheque made out to GAG).**