

## **LOUD and the “Big Plan” - 15<sup>th</sup> Feb 2010 – presentation to Leighton Linlade Town Council Development Committee**

Thank you for this opportunity to say a few words about our organisation LOUD, our views on the Big Plan and what we stand for.

LOUD (Leighton Linlade Opposes Unsustainable Development) formed several years ago consists of a Committee of 8 – 10 people and an action group of several hundred members. Members are from all over Leighton Buzzard, from Linlade and also from the surrounding villages.

We are not aligned to any political party and we are entirely self-funded. We maintain a website [www.LB-LOUD.co.uk](http://www.LB-LOUD.co.uk) that informs the public of what we stand for, provides latest news and from which, we receive many enquiries and emails with people’s concerns and views.

Over the last few years we have held several public meetings, raised a petition to parliament of over 10,500 signatures and held a sizeable public protest march.

We are ordinary residents and we absolutely recognise the need for more affordable and social housing. Many of us have children who are finding it harder and harder to afford to live in this area. We believe, however, that this is an issue, less of availability of suitable accommodation (in recent years there have been many empty apartments and houses around the town) but more an issue of funding to increase the stock of council or housing association homes.

We are strongly opposed to any further mass housing proposals around the town. We oppose the proposals of Bloor Homes and Paul Newman Homes in Linlade and we oppose the proposals of Arnold White / Willis Dawson to the North and East of Leighton Buzzard.

We are not opposed to development per se. We recognise that we cannot stand in the way of progress and that it is healthy for a community to grow in a balanced and coordinated way - relative to growth in local employment, to growth in local population and to changes in local demographics.

However, we believe that over the last decade in particular, that is not what has been happening. The town has had a huge amount of growth – Billington Park, Sandhills and now Pages Priory, in addition to numerous

large developments of apartment blocks in the centre of the town and various other in-fill developments. This growth has not brought with it any further local employment and has been allowed, without an increase in the necessary additional infrastructure and public services, let alone any significant increase in the social and recreational facilities that a population our size might expect to enjoy. New residents have been mainly people who commute to places of work outside the area. The effect on the town has been evident to all. Increased traffic congestion both on the town's road system and at the railway station; increased air pollution as a consequence of this traffic; greater demand on our local education, social services and health services; an increase in the frequency of flooding – to list just a few examples.

We believe the majority of people in the town are of the opinion that we now need a period of consolidation. We understand central government's case for extra housing. We have differing opinions on the validity of their claim that the country needs an additional 3 million homes. We voice the view of the residents of our town, that Leighton-Linslade has already contributed more than its fair share of the burden and that further growth can not be achieved in a sustainable way. To re-iterate, we are not against any development, we are against unsustainable development!

LOUD generally agrees with the aspirations of the Town Council's "Big Plan", but believes that those services and infrastructure improvements are already owed to us for the massive growth already undertaken and for developments currently under construction. Long awaited improvements should not be on condition of accepting further mass housing dumped on our precious greenbelt – whether this be 6000, 4400 or 2500 houses.

Furthermore, from the frequent emails we receive and the discussions we have had with the public, we believe that this view is held by the majority of people in the town. It is not naïve to say no to any more growth – people in central government (and for that matter in Central Beds Council) do not live here and do not have a perception of how further mass development will gridlock this town and destroy forever its unique sense of community and the heart and character of what is still just about a small Bedfordshire market town. People do not want this town to become yet another soul-less Greater London dormitory town and are angry at how planners are ruining the town by forcing an unsustainable rate of growth.

Many people we speak to express the view that there is a hidden agenda, that the proposed extra housing is already a "done deal", and that the

consultation process carried out by Luton and South Beds Joint Committee has been a complete sham. They feel their views have been disregarded and they express a feeling of powerlessness to influence what they believe are decisions already made. LOUD's letters to the Joint Committee and to all the town's and Central Bedfordshire's councillors have either been largely ignored or have received replies which fail to answer the detailed questions asked. People do not feel that local democracy is working.

The record of planners in this town in recent years is not felt by most people to be very good. Housing density in Billington Park and Sandhills was way too high. The roads are too narrow, car parking is inadequate. The bus services which were supposed to reduce the impact of the feared extra traffic in the town centre have failed, as predicted, to make any difference. These estates have been built with inadequate local facilities – no local shops, no local pub or community centre, no local schools. So, when planners tell people that if we accept even more mass housing we will get improved infrastructure and services, and when the developers' plans show all sorts of wonderful facilities, why should we believe them? Where is the community hospital / health centre that we've been reading about in the newspapers year after year? Where is the college? Other towns of our size have much more than Leighton-Linslade.

So, to summarise – LOUD absolutely wants the improvements to the town that the town council has outlined in the Big Plan but absolutely not at the cost of yet more housing. We believe this is the clear view of the majority of people who live in this town and we urge the town council to support local people and adopt this as a clear unambiguous policy – and push back against Central Beds and central government.

Thanks for listening.

