

Paragraph 5.5.46 – the masterplan pretence at flexibility but creating facts on the ground that cannot readily be undone.

We are introduced to the notion of a “master plan” as a democratic instrument but with clearly defined ambitions embedded in the Local Plan (TOA and Policy AO1) for a radical and unjustified series of developments – housing, commercial space, bypass, conversion of cul-de-sacs into through-roads, some 5,000 more vehicle movements generated locally (but rising to 22,500 when the existing Bearing Fruits allocations of 1,330 are added into the equation between the three AQMAs), and inevitable much increased pollution. The inclusion of this prejudicial and cynical device, appears to try for additional housing allocations without any supporting evidence of need or opportunity beyond some very sloppy thinking and total lack of analytical evidence-based or balance strategic thinking. It looks and feels like a Councillor’s plaything rather than a balanced or well-judged application of strategic thinking. The point has not been missed locally that Members of the Local Plan Panel (LPP) have repeatedly demonised Conservative Councillors of which we have two. I believe that prejudice has severely coloured the vision of the LPP and local residents are the ones who must suffer from their hubris.

I have spent more hours than can be healthy listening to Swale Borough Council (SBC) Committee Meetings, reading Minutes and (once SBC Councillors and Officers came out of the woodwork) some Zoom Meetings between SBC Councillors, Officials and Parish Councils. There has been consistent and unreasoned demonisation of “the previous administration” at key decision-making moments in the Local Plan journey since 2020, which is when the results from the Regulation 18 (“Looking Ahead”) Consultation were largely abandoned (*stated publicly and with some pride by the Chairman of the Local Plan Panel on 19th January 2021*).