



# **CANVEY GREENBELT CAMPAIGN**

**Submission on  
Proposed amendments  
to the  
Spatial Strategy  
C/141**

The Core Strategy document often reflects on the residing Canvey Island population, this opens an opportunity for the Council to go to great lengths to paint an unfound picture of Canvey people as being insular. The majority of Canvey “heads of family” originally moved onto the Island to set up home from outside of the area. There have also been many Islanders who have relocated elsewhere in the Borough.

Spatially the urbanisation of Canvey is far densely developed than the rest of the Borough. As the Council previously illustrated in early LDF paper work:  
***“There is some variation between residential roads on Canvey and on the Mainland. Generally, the space around properties on Canvey is smaller as residential densities are typically higher. Rear garden depths in particular are much smaller on Canvey. Properties on Canvey have typically been built as larger developments, which have resulted in a more efficient use of land than on the mainland. Development on the mainland has in many places been on a plot-by-plot basis, which has resulted in a less uniform and more spacious street scene. There is a noticeable difference between street scenes that have developed in this manner and those that are part of more comprehensive developments.”***

Now that the Council have identified the need for 5,000 new homes in the Borough and with many Mainland plots coming forward for development and with it the opportunity to address the inefficiency of the use of Mainland land, the Council choose to reject that opportunity. Preferring instead to further increase the density of the Canvey population.

Having pointed out that there are deprived areas on Canvey Island, the intention to further put pressure on facilities and stretched community budgets by increasing the population cannot be justified as a sustainable vision.

### Distributing Development

When using demographics as a driving force for planning policy it is essential to consider the environmental impact with regard to sustainability especially when considering the enclosed environment of Canvey Island. Statistical studies and results can be use or misused to bring about a conclusion to justify any particular argument. With regards to Canvey Island to take the stance that because it is already heavily populated, even to the extent that deprivation has become a social issue, it is appropriate to keep endorsing the demand on the social resources under the heading of “need for more homes.”

The fact is that the long-term prognosis for the occupation of Canvey Island is the probability that it will have to be eventually given back to the sea. It would be therefore easy to conclude that depopulation of the Island whilst serving its existing communities needs should in fact be the Councils primary objective.

The Planning Authority cannot continue to ignore the potential for a catastrophic event, be it industrially or environmentally orchestrated coming to fruition. The driving force throughout all the authorities planning proposals should always be the safety of its community.

Safeguarding the Metropolitan Green Belt

***“It is however recognised that there are pressures to develop the Green Belt, particularly in relation to housing where there may be occasions when the urban area cannot fulfil the entire requirement for housing land. It is necessary to ensure that these demands are managed to ensure that regeneration objectives can be achieved and that development is directed towards appropriate, identified locations that do not undermine the strategic functions of the Green Belt at either a sub-regional or local level.”***

The policy behind the proposed development areas selected at Canvey Island on flood plain Green Belt will further discourage the regeneration of vacant and derelict land and further discourage employment for local Canvey Island builders who will not be employed by the proposed large National Developer.

The Canvey Island Greenbelt Campaign Group, having now had access to the up to date Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, can for-see that the suggested ***“creation of an intertidal habitat on West Canvey Marsh in the medium term (2035- 2070)”***, and with it the realignment of the sea wall edging up to Canvey Road is a likely and sensible scheme. However to promote, in the 2010 Core Strategy document, the land East of Canvey Road for development in the short term will leave Islanders with a serious lack of open Green Belt amenity space. It is premature to propose any Canvey Island Green Belt land for development prior to the TE2100 proposals having been resolved.

We note that where housing and business development is concerned, there is a consistent reference to “Mainland” and Canvey only. Whereas, when referring to Green Belt issues, references are expanded to include the areas of Benfleet, Hadleigh, Thundersley and also, Canvey. Should this be applied to Housing for instance a 25% split may be seen as palatable, more difficult admittedly, but fairer.

Where Green Belt is concerned there is even references to protect smaller areas of Mainland land, Daws Heath and “New” Thundersley for instance. Canvey however is referred to as having only two areas, west and east, without the luxury of green belt demarcation of any type to suggest where west Canvey starts and east Canvey begins. The Core Strategy highlights and seeks to protect the many plots of greenbelt within mainland areas at Canvey greenbelt’s expense.

It should be remembered though, given the new Government’s commitment to it’s proposed Localism Bill, that over 6,500 Canvey residents felt strongly enough to vote in a Referendum for no further development on the remaining Canvey Island Greenbelt.

***“ The Borough experiences a high level of congestion at peak times”***

The suggestion that local employment opportunities will reduce traffic congestion at peak time is illogical given that job creation is supposedly aimed at those residents of Canvey Island who are not benefiting from being employed. It is this section of the community that who, because of retirement or unemployment do not have to travel at peak times. The reality is therefore employment opportunities will only add to congestion, be it from local movement or those seeking jobs from off the Island, needing to use their private vehicles and especially commercial transportation. The argument that future housing needs and employment needs are required to be aligned is questionable,

given the reliance on out commuting for access to jobs compatibly rewarding enough to sustain growth, is unlikely to change significantly during the planned period of the Core Strategy.

The solitary current major road investment in the area is the £63m A13 interchange. This Governmental investment seeks to improve links between the A13 to London, Kent and the motorway network and also with Chelmsford, Harwich and Stansted with the A12 and A127 to London and Southend. The major problem within the Borough is congestion especially during commuting periods. It would make obvious sense spatially to commit any development to the Western outer perimeter of the Borough. If Green Belt land must be committed to development, as is argued by the Council, the two large development parcels alongside the A130 may be best utilised first, as development there would help direct any increase in traffic volume away from the Borough thus further utilising the road infrastructure investment. We understand that Planning permission has already been lodged against one of these sites by the landowners.

Development of these sites would show an immediate return on the Government's investment and help lessen impact of air pollution from motor vehicles within the Borough. Improved road access could be insisted on via Developer contributions to lessen local impact.

The Core Strategy's preferred development option, now identified as West Canvey, would however further impact the problems faced with accessing Canvey Island via Canvey Way and the Waterside Roundabout.

Baker Associates, employed to produce the sustainability appraisal of the Castle Point Core Strategy, continue to disassociate themselves from the development site selection process, re-iterating the fact that the Council continue to ignore the site which scores most favourable in the Council's own site selection scoring mechanism. Politically this development site is uncomfortable for the Council and the fact that Officers, Councillors and residents action groups colluded to attempt to have this site over-looked may well weaken the defence of this area of Green Belt against development.

Evidence to confirm the political element of this has emerged.

#### PPS 25

The Inspector and Officers will be fully aware that in areas at risk of river or sea flooding, preference should be given to locating new development in Flood Zone 1. If there is no reasonably available site in Flood Zone 1, the flood vulnerability of the proposed development (see Table D.2, Annex D) can be taken into account in locating development in Flood Zone 2 and then Flood Zone 3.

Clearly there are preferable safe zones in the Borough available, as sites have come forward. The Council's proposal to build on West Canvey flood plain and Green Belt is a reckless decision given the Access / Egress potential hazard.

This replacement Spatial Strategy document we, the Canvey Green Belt Campaign Group, consider to be fundamentally flawed. It has failed to identify that the Green Belt and sports field sites of Canvey Island all perform a valuable function in a Zone 3a flood

plain. This function plays a vital roll in the dispersal and flood-water displacement, a necessary requirement contributing to the safety of all occupants within the flood plain zone.

The Council have yet to produce a convincing argument that the risk posed by development on the Green Belt flood plain would not have negative potential impact on the safety of the existing and new occupiers. The Council's primary argument that the need for development of large scale housing requirements in this part of the Borough out weighs the risk of serious flooding is questionable and requires justification. The Council's revised SFRA is more problematical than originally thought, and until all of the complex safety issues can be satisfactorily overcome Canvey Island Green Belt must be allowed to fulfil its fundamental function as an unadulterated Zone 3a flood plain.

The attempt to draw the Planning Inspector's attention to Canvey Island and it's apparent needs may well be the reason for the four towns not being listed alphabetically in the Spatial Strategy update. Canvey Island is assessed first rather than Benfleet. Housing value figures in the Spatial Strategy document show Property values as:- Canvey Island **average house price £202,000 and lower quartile price £155,000** whilst Thundersley, Benfleet and Hadleigh all show precisely the same value, **average £263,000 and lower quartile price £190,000**. Especially given the lower quartile prices, the indication is of a lesser demand for Canvey Island houses.

Furthermore the document goes on to state ***"There is therefore a need for affordable homes for first-time buyers who may wish to remain in Hadleigh"*** and repeats...

*"There is therefore a need for affordable homes for first-time buyers who may wish to remain in Thundersley"*

and repeats...

***"There is therefore a need for affordable homes for first-time buyers who may wish to remain in Benfleet"***

Does the Inspector consider that the Council propose to release, early enough, enough land in these areas to address the equal need for affordable housing in the Benfleet, Hadleigh and Thundersley areas?

The Update version of the Spatial Strategy gives the number of caravans and mobile homes on Canvey Island as making up 2% of homes. This figure may need some clarification as there are 750 units on Kings Park and 1090 caravans / static units on Thorney Bay park. These are dwellings to be added to the many popular bungalows on Canvey Island that should be considered as highly vulnerable given the issues facing the locality. In an incident these residents would require immediate assistance. To add further to the 40,000 (est) population count on the enclosed Island, would further distract and over-stretch the emergency rescue teams.

Hazards.

***"Canvey is located in flood risk zone 3a. However, it is substantially protected by sea defences commonly acknowledged as being some of the best defences in the Country. The Environment Agency has indicated that these will be maintained and improved up to 2100 and beyond."***

***• To the south of Canvey Island are two hazardous installations. There is a third hazardous installation on the border with Canvey in Thurrock District. The Health and Safety Executive identify consultation zones around these installations using PADHI methodology. Within the consultation zones other forms of development are limited in accordance with this methodology. Additionally, the site in Thurrock has an additional buffer zone marked by an 'x-x' line in which development should be limited.***

For these two subjects to warrant only eight lines of text in the Spatial Strategy Update does not reflect the findings of the 2010 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment which shows these ***“best defences in the Country”*** as being in danger of being over topped with climate change factored in, nor the potential impact of the continued long term use of the COMAH sites.

The Examination in Public however served an important lesson in that the representative from Petroplus educated the Officers on the cautious approach of the x-x line. Hopefully the implications of this safety attitude will have had an impression on the Council, and reviews of these distances, relative to the two COMAH sites on Canvey Island, and that will serve some reference towards future development given their long term commitment to continued presence on Canvey Island.

***“The distribution of employment opportunities is skewed towards Canvey, recognising the economic drivers that exist on the Island. There is the potential to secure up to 2,050 jobs on Canvey through regeneration and growth,”***

To imply that so called economic drivers such as the provision of vocational and enterprise centres will put demand on housing needs is more than questionable. It is not easy to come to a conclusion that those who are not economically active already residing on Canvey Island will jump at the opportunity to take up lower paid employment. It is easy however to question why funding is being directed at the industrial sites when other socially required amenities are being allowed to deteriorate.

The sensible way forward in the current financial climate would be to build these employment units prior to housing units, should finance be forthcoming. Given the access to Waterside roundabout and previous un-fulfilled promises of attracting household named businesses to the Island this may well take some years to fulfil. Companies will be fully aware of the problems and potential working time lost in traffic around Canvey Island area and has resulted in their reluctance in relocating to the Island. Roscommon Way will only alleviate some of these issues as an accident on the single lane of Canvey Way regularly gridlocks the whole Borough. To suggest jobs created on Canvey will be allocated only to Canvey residents is implausible.

***“Canvey is well served in terms of community infrastructure with good access to schools, GP services, leisure services, churches and their halls, and youth provision at Waterside Farm and in the town centre. However, it is recognised that many of these facilities are ageing and in need of renewal.”***

Both Waterside Farm Sports Centre and the Paddocks have both recently been allocated funds, outside of Developer contributions, for welcome refits and the existing centrally located Health Centre has enough spare capacity to have recently advertised an invite to residents from all parts of the Island to drop in.

Canvey green space consists of:

Perimeter Marshland.

Sports fields.

SSSI land with restricted access.

RSPB land with restricted access and specialist interest only, no pedestrian or public transport and recognised dangerous access point.

The old Canvey Tip converted to a country park at east Canvey.

The fields around the Dutch Village, one of the very few sites offering nearby, open access to all recreation.

Allotments do not reach plots per population recommended numbers.

There are no formal parks on Canvey Island.

The issue of re-siting a youth football club facilities to make way for the Roscommon Way extension illustrated the lack of free open space on Canvey. The problem only being resolved by releasing 3 acres of public owned sports land, converting this to private use, erecting high fencing and allowing the siting of industrial containers on green belt land at Waterside Farm Sports Fields.

The questions raised by the Planning Inspector appear to have served as a screen for the Council to only clearly disclose their plans once the examination has been completed and they can then go on to produce the Canvey and the Benfleet, Hadleigh and Thundersley Plans.