



FOR THE COMMUNITY STADIUM FOR THE COMMUNITY GOOD

**Press Conference Launch
Monday 5 June 2006 – Pelham House, Lewes.**

BRIEFING NOTES

This afternoon, I am proud to announce the formation of a new political party, The Seagulls Party.

The new party is registered with the Electoral Commission and intends to field candidates at future elections. Other objectives include political campaigning in support of the proposed Community Stadium at Falmer.

The history of the Falmer Stadium project to date –

It is important to understand what has happened over the past 7+ years.

After extensive consultations between Brighton & Hove Albion and Brighton & Hove Council, and after a detailed sequential survey on 16 possible sites, in 1999 the City Council affirmed Falmer as the preferred site – subject to consideration of a Planning Application.

In May 1999, a City-wide Referendum was held. In the Referendum, on a turn out of 38%, far in excess of other local Council elections around the country – 68% supported Falmer as the site. 45,000 voters said Yes to Falmer.

The main Planning Application was lodged with Brighton & Hove Council in October 2001. The City Council approved the application in June 2002, by 11-1.

However in August that year, the application was called in for a Public Inquiry. The application for the Coach Park, which fell under Lewes District Council's planning jurisdiction, was lodged shortly afterwards.

A Public Inquiry was held during 2003 – later being re-opened in February 2005 to consider the suitability of other alternative sites. The Falmer opponents had continually harped on that there were other sites - so the re-opened Inquiry gave them the ideal opportunity for their evidence about these sites to be heard.

The re-opened Inquiry lasted from February to May 2005. 9 alternative sites were considered – Waterhall, Brighton Station, The Greyhound Stadium, Withdean Stadium, Sheepcote Valley, Toad's Hole Valley, Shoreham Harbour, Shoreham Airport & Upper Beeding Cement Works.

In addition, opponents added a whole plethora of other sites – but were completely unable to provide any supporting evidence to suggest why they would be suitable.

During the Inquiry process, the Inspector specifically asked whether there were any other sites that should be considered seriously. LDC had the opportunity to identify other sites at that stage, but could not and did not do so.

Instead Lewes District Council promoted Sheepcote Valley & Toad's Hole Valley, presenting a large amount of evidence to try to support their claims.

The Inspector though found them both wanting. In fact none of the sites ... **"presented feasible, practical and realistic alternatives"**.

The Public Inquiry lasted 62 days in total and it is important to note that LDC was fully represented at each and every stage of the inquiry process. They had plenty of opportunity at both stages of the Inquiry to identify other sites but did not do so – and the whole exercise has cost the LDC ratepayers a lot of money. Not just the cost of consultants, lawyers and barristers – but also the officer time that they have wasted on it.

At no time has LDC ever properly consulted its residents over its stance on this issue.

The DPM issued his decision letter on 27 October 2005 – a YES to Falmer, some 4 years after the original application had been submitted.

With a 6 week period available in which to lodge an application for a Judicial Review – LDC, in typical fashion with absolutely no public consultation whatsoever, took it upon themselves to challenge the decision in the High Court – thereby causing a further one year delay to the project.

The Falmer For All campaign immediately hit the streets and over 5,000 LDC residents signed a petition against the Council's action – in less than 7 days.

But LDC ploughed on and pursued their claim. The excuse they use is that there are other sites, which is strange when you consider that they were unable to identify these when they were given the opportunity at the Public Inquiry.

How come they have suddenly materialised?

Having been reviewed by the foremost legal body of the Government, the Treasury Solicitor, only one of the 16 issues raised by LDC was deemed to be worthy of correction. To facilitate this, the Treasury Solicitor has offered to 'Submit to Judgement' in the High Court and allow the planning permission granted by the Deputy Prime Minister to be quashed. They have sent LDC a draft Consent Order.

Both the Football Club and Brighton & Hove City Council have confirmed their agreement to it. It awaits the agreement of LDC.

It is apposite to quote from the House of Lords judgement in the case of Tesco Stores Limited v The Secretary of State for the Environment: **"If there is one principle of planning law more firmly settled than any other, it is that matters of planning judgement are within the exclusive province of the Secretary of State"**.

We therefore call on LDC to accept the Consent Order at their Cabinet meeting tomorrow, so that this matter is determined once and for all.

We also call on LDC to accept the new decision of the Secretary of State, whichever way it goes.

A second challenge would only add weight to the view that the District Council is trying to delay the decision, in the hope that Brighton & Hove Albion goes bust in the meantime.

And now to the latest shameful action by LDC – we refer to the Spring issue of Lewes District Council's District Link magazine – copies of which are available. This magazine was circulated to all Council ratepayers.

The front cover shows two walkers standing in the summer sun, reading a map. Despite the caption 'Our Local Countryside', actually they are not in the Lewes area at all – but in Wealden District near Wilmington. You can tell that from Firle Beacon in the background.

Now turn to Page 6 and we see the identical two walkers in the same pose. Their image has been cut from the cover and very cleverly pasted over a photo of the Falmer area. Curiously, their image now conceals not only the stadium site, but most of the ugly sprawl of the University buildings alongside the A27 as well – very convenient for a picture labelled "Downland around Falmer".

And don't be fooled by the photo on Page 8 either. It's not at Falmer but at Ditchling Beacon – separated from the stadium by nearly 3 miles, a University campus, a 6 lane trunk road and a railway line.

This whole article appears to be a deliberate attempt to mislead – a deception.

So in conclusion, it is difficult to see how LDC's actions relate to that part of the Council's constitution which states "the Council's principal aim is to serve the public, who expect a high standard of integrity and service from the Council".

Given :

The obfuscation and continued obduracy of the Council;

The lack of any public mandate whatsoever for Lewes District Council's continued legal action;

The Council's deliberate deception in order to defend the indefensible;

There is a significant question mark over Lewes District Council's integrity to hold office.

We therefore decided to form The Seagulls Party.

And make no mistake, we are very very serious in our aims.

If you are looking for a precedent, you need look no further than The Valley Party which 15 years ago attracted over 14,000 votes in favour of a local stadium, when it fought elections in south east London.

You may be interested to know that the average number of people who voted for each elected Councillor in the 2003 Lewes Council Elections was about 720.

We will be ready and we will win.