



PENMAN INVESTIGATES

...from the fishy to the fraudulent

Greedy peers plan a splash and grab

THEY SEE MONEY IN NEW TOWN - BUT IT'S A FLOOD AREA

ABSOLUTELY contemptible. Not my words, but the words of a Tory MP and what makes them remarkable is that they describe a company run by a Tory peer.

This is a story about a beautiful stretch of the South Downs that a company would like to bury under a 10,000-house new town, making a fortune in the process.

It's got some big hitters on its board. One director is Lord Borwick, aka Jamie Borwick, who made his money from London cabs and is a Conservative peer, another is former Lib Dem MP Matthew Taylor, now Lord Taylor of Goss Moor.

Their company, Mayfield Market Towns, has been lobbying to get permission to build a "genuinely sustainable new community".

Good luck with that - their proposed site isn't near a railway station and is prone to flooding.

Among those who want Mayfield to get lost is the Conservative MP for South Downs, Nick Herbert.

"Mayfield is behaving appallingly in trying to undermine Mid Sussex's district plan, which they effectively hope to get overturned," he told

a public meeting in Hassocks, West Sussex.

"They're not getting their way through the democratic process, so they're trying to subvert it.

"I think that is absolutely contemptible."

Dr Roger Smith of Campaign to Protect Rural England told the packed meeting: "This is about people power, people defending their communities

from predatory speculators who seek to impose a massive and inappropriate development on countryside."

Georgia Wrighton, director of CPRE Sussex said developments "must be allowed to be debated locally, not foisted upon communities by have-a-go developers taking advantage of mixed messages from government."

A group has been formed called Locals Against Mayfield Building Sprawl - that's LAMBS, though they don't have any intention of silence. Spokesman Anthony Watts Williams

said the new town was being proposed on an area of ancient village communities, adding: "The developers can't see any of this from their maps or from their helicopters, they just see the countryside that to them

means big profits." It's not as if this lovely corner of Britain isn't already facing a flood of concrete and bricks - Mid Sussex has already accepted the building of 10,500 homes.

Land speculation is rife and actually encouraged by planning rules. A council might give planning permission for, say, a 1,000-home estate on a greenfield site, or perhaps more likely an unelected planning inspector might give permission after it was refused by the council.

But the developer might then decide that because we're in a recession he won't get the maximum profit, so he delays building.

That means that those houses don't count towards the council's targets and

it must approve another 1,000 being put up somewhere else. And that would make 2,000 rather than 1,000 homes eventually covering greenfield sites. CPRE says 400,000 homes are locked in planning permission like this.

Planning rules are now being revised and, incredibly, one of the people on the panel advising the Government is Lord Taylor.

He insists there's no conflict of interest because he will have no say over the group's final findings. Surely, you might hope, the Government has taken a different view and kicked his lordship off the group?

Er, no. Planning Minister Nick "Bulldozer" Boles says:

"I am satisfied that appropriate steps have been taken to avoid a conflict of interest."

The final lunatic twist is that while Mayfield insists Mid Sussex needs 10,000 homes, there are so many empty ones in Stoke and Liverpool, they're being sold for £1.

Developers
just see the
countryside
that means
big profits



DIRECTOR Former
MP Lord Taylor



CASHFLOW Proposed site under water; locals at the Hassocks meeting (above right); Cameron with Borwick (below right)