



PRESS RELEASE

24 Aug 2023

Claygate fights back

Residents fight back against “Done Deal” agreement to build M&S outlet in local car park

Local Traders feel threatened - new pressure group is formed to ensure their survival

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It has not been many weeks since the residents of Claygate were surprised to hear the news, completely out of the blue, that Elmbridge Borough Council (“EBC”) were about to sign a deal with Kilo Property Developments (“Kilo”) to build a large M&S supermarket on Torrington Lodge Car Park (“TLCP”) in the centre of Claygate Village - a stone’s throw from The Parade of independent shops, a vital hub for the local community.

Positioned by Lib Dem Leader of the Council, Cllr Bruce McDonald as “Great News for Claygate”, the shock announcement broke somewhat surprisingly via a Facebook post on 20 June. The previous day EBC had put a post on their News page with a statement from Cllr Simon Waugh, Portfolio Holder for Commercial Strategy about their proposals for the car park site. Villagers learned overnight the announcement followed two years of secret discussions and negotiations. They also discovered that another Claygate Lib Dem Councillor, Mike Rollings - Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources, had presented and supported the plans through EBC Cabinet for approval by the Council back in November 2022.

Until June this year few Claygate residents were aware of the Council’s plans or indeed any details of the discussions that had been on-going since 2021 with all Council Committee papers and Minutes relating to the redevelopment of the car park declared exempt information and still remaining confidential.

Nonetheless Claygate was presented with this “Great News”, of an “Anchor Store” which would bring “increased footfall”, all facts apparently known to EBC, but without any consultation of either traders or residents or any evidence supporting this claim. Subsequently, M&S have stated they would not refer to this as an anchor store and that they do not collect data on footfall.

Residents and traders alike are significantly shocked and angered by the complete lack of any consultation or engagement with the local community by the Council about their plans to build a large supermarket in the Village, despite Cllr McDonald's claims that "Placemaking" (an approach to planning that relies strongly on community engagement) is "at the heart of our Vision 2030".

Instead, the Claygate community appear to have been sidelined and presented with a "fait accompli". The contract with Kilo for the development is ready to be signed any day. And this from a Council which claims: "We will always be open and authentic in our communications with residents, transparent in our decision making and listen to the views of our community."

"SAVE OUR VILLAGE"

Once the news broke, Claygate Parish Council ("CPC") (who revealed that they too had been kept in the dark by EBC) organised a Public Meeting on 21st July 2023. It was attended by around 250 residents and local traders several of whom were fearful for their livelihoods. The local village hall was packed.

Virtually all those attending were against the TLCP development as presented on a show of hands.

The CPC stated that they had carried out a verbal survey of "all" the local traders and that results suggested that nine were in favour of the development, with around 12 "mixed" views and only three against. However, it became very clear at the meeting that this was absolutely not the case with many shop owners standing up in the meeting and stating that they had not been asked for their views or indeed been visited. CPC have since tried to qualify their statements, saying that this was a "straw poll" at a "moment in time".

Two CPC councillors also stated at this meeting that EBC executive officers had categorically told them that once the proposed development was submitted as a Planning Application it would be a "done deal." Residents' objections would not be sufficient to prevent the planning application being approved by the Council as it would inevitably be "robust" and compliant with all the relevant planning considerations.

All 250 people were shocked and disappointed when hearing this especially when told by CPC that the next steps would be the Planning Application by Kilo. As a result, a group of residents and traders who were exceptionally angry, convened a meeting of the Claygate Village Association ("CVA") and set up a sub-committee called **Claygate can do Better ("CCDB")** to galvanise local concerns and to urge EBC to reconsider

all the options for redeveloping the site and to involve the local community before coming to a decision or signing any contracts.

The **Claygate can do Better** team has now met several times, and its first task was to carry out a robust, written survey of all the local businesses in the Parade. Results of the survey on the CCDB website showed:

- c.43% response rate from local traders with the written survey
- Zero had had any formal consultation with EBC or CPC, an astonishing finding given the proposed M&S store 100 yards from the Parade
- A big majority of 15 against the M&S store with only 1 for it, with 4 neutral as they did not feel they had enough information
- Massive concerns and highly negative ratings around increased traffic, pollution, negative impact on the look and feel of the Village and extremely low expectations of any increased footfall

The **Claygate can do Better** team has set up a website and more than 600 residents have already signed up to receive news and updates showing the strength of feeling about this development and the complete lack of engagement by EBC.

Following a further meeting of the Claygate Parish Council on the 10th August 2023, the CCDB was pleased that the CPC had listened to the mood of the community and had itself then called for EBC not to sign the Development Funding Agreement (“DFA”) with Kilo.

Local resident Adrian de la Touche, who leads CCDB, together with Steve Wells, a former Claygate Ward Councillor said :

“We do not believe that Claygate Village residents are against change or the redevelopment of TLCP, but do expect to be consulted to ensure we retain the unique character of our Village. We are a Village, not a Town, something Elmbridge Borough Council and Kilo appear to be missing in order to stop undertaking the relevant reviews before a DFA is signed.

We want Elmbridge Borough Council to involve the local community in their plans for Torrington Lodge Car Park, not to sign the DFA and to carry out an independent Retail Impact Assessment and Full Options Review before any decision on the future use of the car park is made.”

Note to editors: See over .../

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Claygate Village Association (Charity No 284181) has been dedicated to the primary principles of enhancing the village nature of Claygate for over 65 Years.

For further information see Claygate Village Association website <https://www.claygatevillageassociation.org/>

or contact: Adrian de la Touche (07976 831121) or Steve Wells (07860 700331)

