

Dear Lisa/Planning Committee

I am deeply disappointed at having to write another letter to object to the proposed development at Men A Vaur, Church Road. Having studied the plans, including the PEA, I would like to make the following points:

1. **Garden Grabbing** – The former ‘Decentralization Minister,’ **Greg Clarke** sums it up, thusly:

‘For years the wishes of local people have been ignored as the character of neighbourhoods and gardens have been destroyed, robbing communities of vital green space.

It is ridiculous that gardens have until now been classified in the same group as derelict factories and disused railway sidings, forcing councils and communities to sit by and watch their neighbourhoods get swallowed up in a concrete jungle.

Today I am changing the classification of garden land so councils and communities no longer have their decisions constantly overruled, but have the power to work with industry to shape future development that is appropriate for their area.’

And, **Dr Simon Thornton Wood**, Director of Science and Learning at the Royal Horticultural Society said:

‘We welcome any measure that protects the vital resource we know gardens to be. Gardens like parks, are the green lungs of cities, improving air quality, controlling air temperature and flood risk and providing a haven for wildlife. Beyond these very practical benefits of gardens we know that gardening is great for physical and mental health. That’s why we would like planning measures to go further than protecting existing gardens, to guarantee high quality green space and gardening opportunities in all new building developments, wherever they are.’

Additionally, **Richard Bashford** - Project Manager, RSPB said:

Gardens are mini nature reserves on our doorsteps and vital habitats for all sorts of wildlife. Many much loved species rely on green spaces like gardens, such as the song thrush and house sparrow, both of which have suffered massive declines in the last few years. House sparrow numbers have plummeted by over 60 per cent and we have lost almost 75 per cent of song thrushes. If more garden space is turned into buildings they will likely decline further and the wonder that children experience on the doorstep will dwindle.

We hope that the new measures will protect the habitats of species that have become synonymous with English gardens and demonstrate a rich eco system in our own back yards such as frogs, toads and bumble bees.

The garden at Men A Vaur is not a ‘backfield’ site, but rather a haven (or oasis) for wildlife and a vital green space of critical importance to those that live in the immediate vicinity, and as such, the proposed development fulfils all the criteria that is associated with classic garden grabbing. Indeed, one cannot underestimate the impact that the loss of such a space would have on the health and wellbeing of those living close by.

2. **Impact on Nature Conservation (Landscaping)** – The current plans for the development of the garden at Men A Vaur would have a devastating effect on the conservation of nature (and biodiversity) at this site as the footprint of the proposed build takes up approximately 50% of the garden space (including wheelchair friendly boardwalk) and the remaining ‘greenery’ would be ‘landscaped to benefit wildlife’. According to the PEA, a rapid assessment and walkover survey was made to determine ‘wildlife mitigation measures’. How can such a brief survey

accurately account for and document the flora and fauna that exists in a garden such as this? Especially those species that are difficult to see/find (such as White-toothed Shrew – I have seen these entering and exiting the garden on many occasions) and those that occur in the evening or after dark (such as bats – regularly seen hawking over the garden). The proposed wildlife mitigation measures are totally inadequate and appear to be more of a box-ticking exercise rather than a genuine attempt at mitigating or restoring a biodiverse habitat. These measures include: a **bird box** – only suitable for a very narrow range of species and wholly unsuitable for most birds (I have been an ornithologist for 35+ years), yet the habitat that is there currently, is suitable to a much wider range of species. A **bat box** – this in no way will replace the habitat that currently exists (the bats use this garden as a ‘feeding station,’ not just place to roost. And a **Bee Brick** – a brick will not compensate for a loss of habitat, unless the habitat happens to be less than 1ft square! As far as the **Landscaping to Benefit Wildlife** goes, I would question the details of this, and credentials of the landscaper (whoever that might be) as I believe this could [potentially] be open to (mis)interpretation and abuse.

3. **Impact on Trees/Loss of Tress** – The verdancy of the garden at Men A Vaur is its greatest feature/asset. The loss of any of the trees would be a travesty, but it appears that (apart from the Elms at the rear) few are safe under the new plans. Soft-felling is cutting a tree down (period), but it is done in a way that essentially allows any animal (eg a roosting bat) to escape to ‘safety.’ The loss of trees at this site would be devastating to the people that live close by and similarly for the local wildlife that use them to breed in, roost in, feed in/on and as a bridge or stepping stone in an environmental corridor that runs from Lower Moors to the Chaplaincy, to Men A Vaur to Rams Valley and Buzza, and beyond. These areas are vitally important and cannot be replaced.
4. **Noise and Disturbance** – A very high percentile of the properties adjacent to the garden at Men A Vaur are lived-in 24/7 365. There can’t be many of us that haven’t suffered from noise and disturbance emanating directly from the garden/house at Men A Vaur. I’m talking here about ‘more than reasonable amount’ – I cannot see how another property in the garden is going to improve matters, yet the reverse maybe only a matter of time.
5. **Over Development** – This area was meant to be a garden and now a potential victim of garden grabbing. The proposed size of the build (with a footprint of c. 50%) in relation to the garden and adjacent buildings is exactly the sort of build that ought to be classified in such terms. The density of dwellings here is already very high; another here must constitute over development.
6. **Waste** – For as long as I can remember, there has been a problem with drains/sewage system between Branksea Close and Men A Vaur. If the system is not coping now, another build is not going to help.
7. **Road Access** – The Access ‘road’ to Branksea Close (it’s more like wide path) is quite narrow, even at its widest part near the main road. Whenever a vehicle is parked in the latter part, it makes ingress and egress very difficult, and almost impossible if you have a bicycle or pushchair. The proposed access route to the new build is through Branksea Close – this could create a great deal of access problems particularly when building materials etc are being unloaded – this could seriously affect the ability of the emergency services to access the Close.

Sincerely,

Ashley Fisher

Branksea Close