

GORDON MARSDEN MP
Labour Member of Parliament for Blackpool South

Westminster Office
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA
Tel: 020 7219 1262
Fax: 020 7219 5859

Constituency Office
304 Highfield Road
Blackpool FY4 3JX
Tel: 01253 344143
Fax: 01253 344940

Email: gordonmarsdenmp@parliament.uk

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Dear Resident

The Housing Controversy over Marton Moss: An Update

We have previously corresponded about the opposition to proposals for major house-building on Marton Moss. **These are concerns which as your MP I fully share.** Since I last wrote in June significant developments have taken place, some just in the last few days. That's why I'm writing now with a further update.

1) Council's new proposals would permit major building on Moss

In mid-July the council's ruling Conservative cabinet approved a revised core strategy for the whole of Blackpool, including Marton Moss. Despite some changes **it still set out proposals to approve some 2,700 new homes** for areas between Yeadon Way, Progress Way and School Road, including the Moss House road area, **over the next 10-15 years.**

Most worrying perhaps was the admission in the council's strategy that it would be misleading to claim the developed Moss lands would not change in character... **'they would become more suburban than semi-rural.'**

In view of this I wrote to the Council Leader, Peter Callow, with a series of comments and questions about the core strategy. These included questions about what I estimated were flawed figures on housing need, the lack of a proper inner area strategy, and the lack of any requirement for green 'issues' to be included in any housing approach, as well as the threat of suburban sprawl on Blackpool's green edge. **I am still waiting for his response.**

2) Kensington still maintain their application to build

In the meantime Kensington Developments, who are looking for approval from the council to build hundreds of houses on the Moss House road site, have withdrawn their planning appeal on the first application. This means the public enquiry on the proposals, scheduled for September 23rd, will not now take place. I among others was planning to speak opposing their proposals for house building on Moss House Road.

By withdrawing their appeal Kensington have blocked the opportunity for a public enquiry where people could express their views on this issue. But they still have a second application in for development of a housing estate in the Moss which will now have to be considered by the council.

I have already expressed my opposition to Kensington's second application as well. I joined the Save the Moss campaign when they handed in a petition against it from over 700 residents recently to the Town Hall.

3) Kensington and the Council. New Questions to be Answered

It has now emerged that Kensington withdrew their appeal following continued discussions with the Town Hall about their second application, which they believed would enable the problems about their proposals to be resolved. Town Hall officials have admitted they expect further revisions to the plans in the next few days.

It's not surprising therefore that concerns about a sequence of events which could see the council approving Kensington's second application have been raised. The changes to the Local Plan envisaged in the new core strategy which the council's cabinet has backed, could arguably **make it much easier for Kensington to push their application through.**

In addition to this the Blackpool Gazette revealed last week that the local Conservative Association accepted a £5000 cash donation from Kensingtons just months after they unveiled their plans to build on Marton Moss.

All these developments have inevitably raised questions about the council's intentions for Marton Moss and how impartial they can be seen in making decisions about it.

4) Need for People's Views to be Heard

The council has now published its revised core strategy. **But there has still been no attempt systematically to obtain the views of people living on or near the Moss** - this despite requests from myself and others for them to do so by way of questionnaire, comprehensive consultation or referendum. What we do know from the recent petition, the nearly 400 residents who contacted me in the spring with their views on the issue, and the 150 who attended the Highfield School meeting in April – at which I and others spoke – **is that most people were overwhelmingly against over-development on the Moss.**

5) Alternative Approaches to Prevent Moss Over Development

Council spokesmen have said they are being obliged to back major developments on the Moss because of government housing targets. **This is simply not the case.** The council is solely responsible for the detailed planning of where new homes should go. **The Government has consistently said its preferred option is for brownfield not greenfield development,** a point reinforced by the Prime Minister in Parliamentary Question Time this summer. Indeed, the Government's proposal to 'call in' the original planning enquiry on Kensington's original application underlines those concerns.

The council has already been promised £35m by the Government for a pilot scheme for renovation of redundant commercial and hotel properties in central Blackpool. **There needs to be a much bolder approach, with detailed proposals to use imaginatively the substantial derelict brownfield sites in and around the town centre for decent, affordable housing. That's why I have already raised these issues in Parliament and have written to the Government agencies in question asking for talks to explore these possibilities further.**

We know how passionately people feel about the issue, concerns about the Moss's water-table, the overload on roads, infrastructure and services and the threat to a unique environment. **I shall continue to oppose over-development. I will press these urgent questions with the council's leadership.** We need detailed explanations of the Kensington saga, as well as alternative visions for a sustainable Moss and the whole of Blackpool. I believe people have a right to know from me as your MP where I stand on these issues and indeed from anyone occupying or seeking public office.

Yours sincerely,



Gordon Marsden. Member of Parliament for Blackpool South

PS: You can see a summary of my letter to the Leader of the Council questioning the core strategy along with other updates on my website, <http://www.gordonmarsden.co.uk>
The Save the Moss campaign's website is <http://www.saveourmoss.com>