

a new nature blog

I write about politics, nature – the environment. Some posts are serious, some not. These are my views, I don't do any promotional stuff and these views are not being expressed for anyone who employs me.

Rochester byelection Labour Candidate linked to Lodge Hill Developers

Posted on [November 19, 2014](#)



Lodge Hill Brownfield Land? (c) Miles King

While both the UKIP and Tory candidates for the Rochester and Strood byelection have [changed their minds](#) in dramatic fashion, I was curious to know more about why Labour is supporting the development of a new town of 5000 houses on Lodge Hill SSSI.

I noticed a reference in the press to the Labour candidate Naushabah Khan working in public relations. I looked a little further and found that she was an account manager at [Curtin & Co](#), who specialise in doing PR work for housing developers. Imagine my surprise when I looked up who Curtin's clients were – they include [Land Securities](#), who are the developers at Lodge Hill.

Khan was forced to defend [Labour's housing policies](#) (such as they are) from her own firm, who had been commissioned to [carry out a survey of public views](#) on Labour's policies of, for example, taking land off developers who have land-banked it. It's not clear who commissioned Curtin to carry out the survey (which was actually carried out in February) but presumably it was a housing developer.

Curtin don't currently have the contract for doing PR and "community engagement" on Lodge Hill for Land Securities. This contract is, at the moment, with [PPS under Andy Martin](#). Martin has a long standing involvement in local politics with the Liberal Democrats. The Lib Dems on Medway Council support the Tories on the Lodge Hill development. Curtin has recently taken on former Cambridgeshire County Council leader [Martin Curtis](#) as a Director of their "community politics" team.

PPS [has just been taken over](#) by Porta Communications and Merged with Newgate Communications. Porta and Newgate were both created by David Wright, who founded Citigate communications. Citi is a top Lobbying firm owned by Lord Chadlington, John Selwyn Gummer's brother, who I have written about [before](#). Small world, eh? Citi are also long standing advisers to Land Securities.

Curtin ousted PPS as the PR Agency Land Securities are using for their 15000 house Ebbsfleet development, just down the road from Lodge Hill. PPS has a long history and expertise in the use of subterfuge, or dirty tricks, to get developments through planning. [Take a look](#).

Khan has evidently done a good job promoting the development of Lodge Hill to the constituents of Rochester and Strood, while standing as the Labour candidate. She may have made some headway by claiming that the site [is 80% brownfield](#) – this is a convenient mistake, given Labour’s policy to [increase the focus of development on brownfield sites](#). The Planning Inspector who rejected Medway’s core strategy concluded it was [closer to 15% brownfield](#), than the 53% Land Securities claimed. In any case, it’s irrelevant how much brownfield the site is, as it’s an SSSI. Something Khan has been keen to avoid talking about.

After the byelection tomorrow, when it seems very likely that UKIP will win, the Government will have to decide whether to call in the Lodge Hill planning application to be subject to a Public Inquiry. We can expect Land Securities to be lobbying furiously behind the scenes (with some suitably worded articles in the media placed by their PR consultants) to make sure that the hard-won planning permission is not called in. Land Securities will no doubt be looking very carefully at their current consultants PPS, and considering whether they want a new bunch to take over, at this critical juncture. Perhaps they’ll decide to take on Curtin and Co.

It can sometimes be very difficult to differentiate politics and business can’t it, whichever party you look at.

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Weird: UKIP is now the main political party defending Lodge Hill from development.
In "deregulation"

Rochester byelection; Both UKIP and Tory candidates convert to defence of Lodge Hill
In "Labour"

Victory at Lodge Hill raises questions about brownfield first and sale of public land
In "biodiversity"



About Miles King

UK Conservation Expert, writing about nature, politics, life. All views are my own and I don't write on behalf of anybody else.

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4 Responses to *Rochester byelection Labour Candidate linked to Lodge Hill Developers*



David Dunlop says:

November 19, 2014 at 12:49 pm

“Politics

n. A strife of interests masquerading as a contest of principles. The conduct of public affairs for private advantage.”


“The Devil’s Dictionary”, 1911, by Ambrose Bierce (1842-1914?)

Overly cynical, perhaps, but sometimes it must be hard to hold one to one’s principles if one had them when one set out on a career in politics.

[Reply](#)



Miles King says:

 November 19, 2014 at 12:54 pm

Thanks Dave. Perhaps I could have a weekly “Ambrose Bierce quotation” spot, as he has so many excellent ones.

Yes or perhaps what prospective politicians see as principles may be somewhat different to the general public.

[Reply](#)



between the lines says:

November 19, 2014 at 9:49 pm

That’s not ‘cynical’, simply realistic. The problems come from the habits we are taught from childhood of always trying to cover up interest and pretend to be whited sepulchres in order to gain social acceptability. Almost everybody in our culture does it, and our political parties have taken this organised hypocrisy to a high art with enormous profit for the top performers.

Many thanks for unearthing this particular topical example, Miles. Deliciously stinky!

PS I’m sure I don’t need to point out that the whole thing about Brownfields/Greenfields (sic) is nonsense, a complete false dichotomy and that many ‘brownfield’ sites are, in fact, far more valuable biodiversity-wise than a lot of the ecologically barren agro-industrial monocultures that are modern ‘greenfields’.

[Reply](#)



Miles King says:

November 19, 2014 at 10:22 pm

thanks very much for your comment between the lines.

I’ve been meaning to write something about the brownfield/greenfield dichotomy so thanks for the reminder.

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