

Press Release

Revealed: St Helens Council's 77 meetings with housing developers and their £5k payment from Peel Holdings

St Helens Council has held 77 meetings with housing developers looking to build on land in the borough in the last three years, campaigners have learnt.

And they have discovered the council was paid £5000 by property giant Peel Holdings for "advice" ahead of a planning application to build a huge warehouse on green belt land in Haydock.

The information has been uncovered by campaigners hoping to save green belt land in St Helens, which the council wants to hand to developers.

Using Freedom of Information requests, the groups have learnt that council representatives have held 77 meetings with housing developers in just three years. No minutes were taken at any of the meetings and there is no public record of what was discussed.

In stark contrast to its extensive meetings with housing developers, the council has refused to meet residents who are concerned at the development plans put forward for St Helens borough.

St Helens Council has also met property giant Peel Holdings six times in six months. The firm wants to build warehousing in St Helens. Those who have met Peel Holdings include the leader of the council Barrie Grunewald and chief executive Mike Palin.

Peel, who own vast swathes of land in the North West, want to build a warehouse on green belt land in Haydock, close to Haydock Park Racecourse. This is a separate development to the already-approved plan to build a warehouse at Florida Farm in Haydock.

The firm paid St Helens Council £5000 for "advice" ahead of making a formal application to build the warehouse. The application is currently being considered by St Helens Council and will go before the planning committee soon.

Peel plan to use the warehouse to bring imported goods from Liverpool Docks (which they also own) to the warehouse in Haydock.

Campaigners say the plan would destroy green belt land and cause traffic chaos at the M6 junction at Haydock. The plans have also been opposed by MPs in neighbouring Wigan.

Paul Parkinson, chairman of Residents Against the Development of Florida Farm, said "Many people will be surprised to learn Peel Holdings has paid the council a sum of money ahead of a planning application.

"The relationship between the two parties is becoming ever more involved. We would like to see much greater transparency around this and want the council to be absolutely clear

about its agenda. Unfortunately they have not kept any minutes from these meetings or a public record of what was discussed.”

In Rainford, St Helens Council wants to release seven sites from the green belt to be used for an industrial unit and at least 1,140 houses.

James Wright, chair of Rainford Action Group, said: “It’s quite extraordinary that St Helens Council has held 77 meetings with housing developers in three years. They must have very little time left to do anything else. No wonder they needed to pay more than £200,000 to external companies to help them put their Local Plan together.

“It speaks volumes that the council can find so much time to meet so many housing developers but has refused to meet residents.

“They’re clearly determined to build as much new housing as they can in the borough regardless of need, environmental concerns or the objections of local people. We’re more than equally determined to stop them destroying our green belt.”

Ends