Shepway District Council – Resumed Public Hearings for 5th & 6th March 2013

Justification for revision of designation of Romney Marsh from existing definition as a, ‘Character Area’ to that of, ‘The Romney Marsh Heritage Area.’

The Romney Marshes Heritage Area is bounded by the course of the Royal Military Canal, from Pett to Hythe.

1. RMHA has to be identified as an active segment of an overall coastal regenerative strategy to be viewed in relation to and complimentary with that coastline and immediate hinterland located within Rother and East Sussex.
2. Romney Marsh is identified as being an area of relative economic deprivation in the South East Plan.
3. RMHA contains: A. One of the largest man-made landscapes in the UK. B. One of the largest shingle expanses on Earth which is a site of international importance for Nature Conservation, (SSSI, SAC European Designations and RSPB Dungeness). C. Four of the seven original ‘Cinque Ports’ within the medieval ‘Cinque Ports Confederation’, located either immediately adjacent to, or within its bounds, (Hythe, New Romney and the Antient Towns of Rye and Winchelsea).
4. While ‘1066 Country’ commemorates a single battle, the Romney Marsh Heritage Area celebrates successive eras: Roman, Saxon, Norman, Angevin, Plantagenet, Tudor, Stuart, Hanoverian, Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, to the present Windsors. Rome created a port at Lymne and the ruins of their massive, Fort of the Saxon Shore, is today but a masonry tumble down the former cliffs. By the reign of Edward the Confessor, in the late 11th century, Romney and Hythe were vital centres of coastal defence and were united into a
‘Confederation’ with Dover and Hastings. Following 1066, the Norman Kings recognised that they occupied a pivotal position within the first, ‘British Empire’, which included much of modern France until the Angevin ‘Anarchy’, in the closing decades of the 12th century. The Cinque Ports Confederation, remained suppliers of fighting ships for the Crown and effectively created the first true ‘Royal Navy’, which remained their responsibility until it was formally placed under the Crown by Henry VIII.

5. Objectives: Promotion of the local economy through, heritage tourism, leisure, agriculture and local industries. Heritage is a major industry which supports many of the great houses of England, which have enjoyed a renaissance due to a wide recognition of their architectural and cultural value. Romney Marsh has huge unrecognised heritage potential which remains latent, awaiting discovery. It will be noted that it has long been a favourite retirement venue for Londoners. Good communications exist by road, rail, air and sea afford visitors easy access from London and Continental Europe.

The ancient origins of Plantagenet House, in New Romney, remained unknown until the writer undertook the necessary research, revealing it to be a rare example of a small medieval vernacular dwelling.

6. Method: ‘Badging’ or ‘Branding’ the area as, ‘The Romney Marshes Heritage Area’, alike to that applied to the neighbouring, ‘1066 Country’. The ‘Romney Marshes Heritage Area’ will be contiguous with this. Creation of a touring ‘Map’. Creation of a centrally located Visitor’s Centre. Internet promotion fully coordinated with similar ventures on the part of Rother, E Sussex CC, KCC and Visit Kent. The long term effect to be that of the creation of a ‘patchwork quilt’ of areas of interest embracing the coastline from Hastings to Whitstable, from ‘1066 Country’ to ‘White Cliffs Country’ and beyond. Research into the history and archaeology of
the area should be promoted. For example, the author is presently promoting a Geophysics Project, to be undertaken by the University of Southampton, Department of Archaeology, headed by archaeologist, Becky Peacock, to reveal the true location of the lost medieval parish church of St Martins, New Romney. Site managers, St Martins Field Charity, (New Romney), are interested in the scheme and have invited him to table a Presentation for their Management Committee, early in 2013.

7. Summary: From Roman Military Base against the Saxons, to becoming a Saxon Naval bastion against the Normans, from providing Norman and Plantagenet kings with battle fleets, thus enabling Edward 111’s victories at Crecy and Poitiers, then four centuries later, to Smugglers supplying wool to clothe Napoleon’s shivering legions, Romney Marsh has a story to tell and much to offer to locals and visitors alike. Romantic Medieval Castles, Roman Ruins, Martello Towers, an as yet unexplored WW2 labyrinth of bunkers and defences, an aeronautical museum at Brenzette, the historic RSPB Bird Reserve, the brooding Nuclear Power Station and the, ‘other worldly’ shingle expanses of Dungeness, the rolling sandy mountains at Camber and more besides. The’ 5th Continent’, of Victorian Romantic writing. A place of Ghosts and Galleons. So much to see and explore. The Romney Marsh Heritage Area.
20th February 2013-03-21

I am attending the 'Resumed Hearing' to propose that Romney Marsh be re-defined as, 'The Romney Marsh Heritage Area - The Invasion Coast'. Currently shown as a 'Character Area', I think that my definition adds necessary distinction to the coastline and marshes and makes sense in relation to adjoining coastal areas, in E Sussex - '1066 Country' and in Kent, 'White Cliffs Country' respectively. I think that the entire south to east coastline could be similarly divided into distinct zones, all the way to Rochester. You have 'Dickens Country', King Henry's Forts at Deal and Walmer, 'Turner Country' at Margate, Sandwich, the historic dockyards of Medway 'The Cradle of the Royal Navy' or some such.... Then we have the 'Crown Jewel' of the South East - Canterbury Cathedral - the birthplace of Christianity in England. It all adds interest and directs the attention of visitors and tour operators alike. I am on item 7 of the Agenda.

What with the final demise of the 'South East Plan' and likely malaise in planning that may result, I think that at least defining Romney Marsh in documents is one of the ways forward.

The 'Nuclear Waste Site', or 'Death Dump' is back on the menu as are huge - but basically unobtrusive - Solar Farms and aggressively obtrusive 400 foot high wind turbines - 12 at least to come. Amusingly, a 'pressure group' has arisen at Snave to stop four of these machines adding to their rural idyll. Same folk who seemed quite passive when it came to London-Ashford Airport launching 737s over the most populated areas down here, on a 24 hour operating basis...

best

Malcolm Dyer.