Dear Jo

**Roots Allotments Abbots Leigh, North Somerset**

We have discussed the issue of the Roots development in Abbots Leigh on a number of occasions but I wanted to update you on my increasing anxieties about what I believe is a developing case of environmental vandalism dressed up in ‘green’ wrapping.

I visited the Roots allotment site on Saturday with a number of local residents.  I was very disappointed to see the destruction of a lovely rural meadow in such beautiful surroundings.  Adjacent to the Monarchs Way footpath, the meadow is now covered in tatty vehicles, an old horsebox, a shipping container on a trailer, solar panels, cctvs, signs, picnic benches, a portaloo and other visual clutter.

You said in your earlier email to me that:

“A certificate of lawful development granted does not certify other operations, uses or developments being undertaken on the site, but this does not necessarily mean that planning permission will be required for any other works carried out by Roots.

There are permitted development (PD) rights for agricultural land, but the unit must be used for the purpose of trade or business. Roots claim that they qualify for this, but we have no information from them to confirm this.  Therefore our current view is that agricultural PD works do not apply.”

From my visit on Saturday it would appear that Roots have carried out far more development than just using this site for allotments and yet they still seem to be able to continue without being stopped.  These allotments are plainly intended for leisure use. There has been a lot of work that is incremental development including:

•  covering a large proportion of the site with cardboard and then imported vast quantities of municipal waste compost, indeed another 120 tonnes had been delivered that morning, bringing the total to 660 tonnes.

•  installation of an irrigation system via underground pipework to serve about 18 water troughs so far,

•  CCTV,

•  trenches excavated to lay service cables for solar panels’

•  plastic matting to create a track to a parking area,

•  picnic benches,

•  movable storage units that are plainly intended to become permanent fixtures, including a shipping container on a trailer with a scaffolding access ramp, an old horse box intended to become a storage unit which they plan to cover with graffiti or “street art” and a portaloo.

While many of these examples may be considered de minimis in isolation, they add up to a substantial deviation from the stated aims of the project. It is difficult to come to any other conclusion than that Roots are pursuing this path as a deliberate policy designed to minimise crossing any single threshold that will result in Council action. It is becoming increasingly clear to me that they will continue incremental development, the site simply won't cope without parking which Roots will clearly try to install and then seek retrospective planning or rely on no enforcement. How else will people come from Bristol to use the allotments?

The impact on wildlife has been recorded and I am pleased that Avon and Somerset Police have stopped them from working in certain areas because they were disturbing nesting red listed skylarks.  I have little doubt that, given what they have already done, there were skylark nests destroyed in the process.  Roots are trying to avoid doing full ecological impact assessments by relying on permitted development rights, but these do not apply here.

I am told that the residents have sought extensive legal advice including:

•  appeal caselaw as to why the development is not permitted as the allotments are too small to qualify for agricultural permitted development rights

•  that many of these works are development

•  that an industrial-scale allotment site in this greenbelt location is against the planning policy framework

The residents have passed all this advice on to your planning team, and they are extremely frustrated and angry as to why this advice has not been fully acknowledged and been responded to.

This is not just a small group of people objecting, residents have also started a public petition against this development asking North Somerset Council to exercise all powers that they have to stop this development which now has over 3,000 signatures, and a Facebook group with nearly 1,000 members.

I understand that your planning team have repeatedly asked Roots for further information over the last few months which Roots have not provided.  You have recently told residents that Roots have been again asked for further information. If Roots have not provided this in the past and no action taken, why would they do so in the future?

I enclose a copy of a letter I have written to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to clarify the policy for industrial scale allotments to be installed in the Green Belt, accompanied by inevitable car parking and associated development, without planning permission, and that they require that until this position is clarified the Roots development should be stopped immediately to prevent further irreversible harm.

With all best wishes,

LIAM