

STATEMENT FROM MARGARET HEFFERNAN – SOMER VALLEY ENTERPRISE ZONE

My name is Margaret Heffernan. I'm a professor at the School of Management at the University of Bath, I've run 2 businesses in the UK and 3 in the US and published 6 business books. I say this not to big myself up but to suggest I have some experience and understanding of business. I've also been a parish councillor for Farrington Gurney for over 5 years.

In the business world, there is a mantra, cited often: Build it and they will come. It's not a strategy, it is a warning: because it isn't true. Entrepreneurs and organizations who build new stuff thinking that the sheer wonder of it will attract customers and wild success, they mostly fail. Too many listening, too little insight and understanding, and a dream turns into a nightmare.

I quote it because that, to me, is the strategy behind the SVEZ. It might or might not have a hotel. It might or might not have a food outlet – which might or might not be fast food. Maybe offices, maybe not. Maybe tech, probably not. Somehow, the strategy goes, it'll all be alright. Once we've built it, companies will come. We might need to pay them big incentives....

But there is no single attracting factor, no unique selling point at the heart of the project. Why would a business want to come to the SVEZ? Asked at scrutiny, nobody had a good answer.

Farrington Gurney is squeezed between the A37 and A362. Last night I spent in London with my sister in Hackney. It was quieter there than in our village.

But what concerns my neighbours is what **will** come: yet more construction traffic, pollution (in an age where pollution kills more people than smoking) and if it ever does lure customers, a bunch of LOVAL businesses - already successful in their community -- undermined by fast food and the cheap prices that only big businesses can afford. Whether that is an economic net gain – losing existing businesses to gain new ones?? – remains to be seen.

Huge amounts of time and money have gone into developing this project and still it has come to nothing compelling or critical. I agree with Angharad that the so-called consultation has been poor: eroding public trust where it should have built it. At a time when public funds are sorely needed -for schools, hospitals, the arts and public safety – I can't believe that so poor a project takes priority. Let's not throw our good money after bad.