

PARISH COUNCIL MEETING 31 JULY 2018

CLLR HEDLEY'S STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO LANDOWNER CONCERNS OVER NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN PROCESSES

Local Green Space ('LGS')

- As Cllr Blakeman has indicated, the Clerk has asked the DALC whether disclosure of the personal details and nomination forms of those that nominated LGS sites is permitted under GDPR. As I suspected, their opinion is that GDPR does apply to data collected prior to its introduction and, since permission was not sought for making the nominator's details publicly known, it would be a data breach to release them. They also advised that, if the landowners want to object to this decision, they should contact the Information Commission. If the Information Commission agrees that the personal data can be released, then they will instruct the Parish Council accordingly.
- As we are prevented from releasing personal details by GDPR, then we could publish the nomination forms with names and addresses redacted, but this will obviously be a fair amount of work. We can hopefully work together with the landowners to share the burden.
- There was an error made in the legend for the IOS map at the Community Consultation Day but I do not agree that the whole process should be repeated because of this. The overall assessment of the sites will take the level of community support into account but it is unlikely to be a deciding factor. Whether or not a site meets the NPPF criteria will be key.
- There has been a regular assumption by the landowners that we are about to designate the nominated sites as LGS. We haven't even completed our assessment of the sites and certainly have not yet proposed any for designation. As the NPPF says, at the stage when the group is considering designation landowners should be consulted. I admit the assessment process has taken too long and we could have had better communication with landowners but we have not reached the stage of considering designation yet.
- There are some errors and frankly somewhat offensive comments made under the heading 'Using LGS to prevent development' in one of the landowner's statements. Members of the Group are individuals and members of the community, who can have their own views. Objecting to a planning application does not automatically give them a vested interest, simply an opinion. Furthermore, I do not consider that, if a member of the NP Group has nominated a site, he or she should be precluded from voting on it, in the same way that, if a member of the PC proposes a motion, he or she can vote on it. However, any member of the NP Group that has a pecuniary or financial interest in a matter, including a possible LGS site, is rightly precluded from taking part in discussions on it or voting on it. It should be noted that I did not personally nominate any site for LGS designation, I was not involved in any assessment of my neighbour's land, and would not be involved in any discussion or decision regarding possible designation of their land as LGS.
- I am sorry that there is a belief by some landowners that there was "skewing" of information supplied on the LGS nomination form. The form was supplied to us by WDBC. There was certainly no intention to mislead.
- I fully agree that an IOS should not automatically become a LGS.
- Our assessment report will look at whether each site meets all the relevant NPPF criteria, including whether it is "an extensive tract of land".

Site Assessments

- Before the Community Consultation Day, we asked landowners (or their agents) what plans they had for developing their sites. In fact, one of the landowner's statements refers to an interview they had with a member of the Neighbourhood Plan Group at the top of page 4. This comment in the NP Group's meeting minutes referred to including their site as a possible development site in the site assessment process, rather than an LGS as is inferred.

- I believe our site assessment process has been robust - we had to objectively review the sites as they stood. We felt it would be misleading to assess a site based on possibilities with respect to access, community facilities etc. that a landowner might be able to provide.
- The results of the Community Consultation Day indicated that the community strongly favoured the development of one site (land to the north of Stowe Lane) over any of the others. We believe this is mainly because access can potentially be obtained directly from the main road, a feature not possible with any other site.
- In terms of site allocation in the NP, we have been advised that this should only be considered for larger scale developments. Smaller scale developments, especially within the settlement boundary, are likely to be considered "windfall".
- The Group has not yet decided whether a development site will be allocated in the NP. However, we believe the viability of the site north of Stowe Lane should be explored as a first step - our assessments have shown the site is capable of accommodating a larger development, it does not have any significant constraints and it seems to have the backing of the community. Remember, we need to always bear in mind the NP will not get past the referendum stage without the support of the community.

In summary, I stand by our process so far in relation to LGS, site assessments, and exploring site allocation. I recognise that landowner communication and involvement could have been better but it is a two-way street. We have public meetings and communicate regularly and interested parties could have approached us at any stage in a more friendly manner. Cllr England is a good example of someone who has done this.

There is clearly a lot of discontent in the landowner community, which I guess is to be expected when financial interests are at stake. However, I am unsettled by the level of ill-feeling and criticism of process, which I have done my utmost to ensure is fair and transparent. Given this and, on the basis that the chief protagonists are my neighbours and my conflict of interest, however properly managed, is likely to be somewhat fuelling their vociferous objections, I feel I have no option other than to offer my resignation as project leader of the NP Group. I worry that continued antagonism risks jeopardising the whole NP and the considerable work we have done so far.