

# DAVENHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Vicky Stock, 6 Grovemount, Davenham, Northwich, Cheshire CW9 8LY Tel: 07443 579 057  
Clerk email: [clerk@davenhampc.org.uk](mailto:clerk@davenhampc.org.uk)

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2<sup>nd</sup> March 2017

Ms Antoinette Sandbach  
Unit 23 and 25,  
The Verdin Exchange  
High Street  
Winsford  
Cheshire  
CW7 2AN

Dear Antoinette,

## **Re: Neighbourhood Planning**

Further to the excellent letter submitted to yourself by Audlem Parish Council (dated 23 Jan 17), we wish to add the support of Davenham Parish Council to the points raised therein. Our support for Audlem Parish Council is based on the experience of our Neighbourhood Plan Working Group, a group of volunteers fighting a system that is consistently weighted against us, in an area, Cheshire West and Chester, where there is a 5 year housing supply. As those struggling within the current system, we wish to record our disappointment and would welcome your support in trying to improve the situation.

As you are aware, Davenham Parish Council has been on the wrong end of several appeal hearings in recent months, the principle of which goes directly against the ideas of localism and, for communities such as Davenham, the economic arguments are irrelevant when this government consistently refuses to hold developers accountable for:

- delivering jobs locally
- using local sustainable materials
- providing environmentally efficient housing stock
- delivering the type of housing that communities need
- promoting healthy or sustainable living
- executing well designed and sympathetic developments
- and, as you are also aware, even providing safe access and egress to their proposed sites.

Indeed, the only driver for the wanton destruction of many areas of countryside and communities is the economic benefit to developers and landowners who are often located many hundreds of miles away (or outside the UK) and who care little for the people whose lives will be impacted. In reality, it is the local people who see negligible benefit, and often a downturn in their quality of life, as a result of these developments.

The proposed defence, a Neighbourhood Plan, is an exceptionally complex document to collate, draft and finalise, especially when your main contributors are local volunteers who do not necessarily have the legal, planning or technical skills or time to rattle off a suit of documents that is central to the wellbeing of their local community. Within our team, the vast majority are diligent hard working members of the community of whom only one is retired. None of the team has a planning background and we are working in our own time to defend our community.

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It is acknowledged that there are funds available to support communities in developing a Neighbourhood Plan, but it is also true that the costs associated with engaging planning consultants can be prohibitive. Those who are affordable are so overworked that the time penalty can be disproportionate to the impact on local communities. As such, for many communities, the funding option is too little too late.

Furthermore, the challenge of collating a Neighbourhood Plan is exacerbated by the need of local communities to fight the speculative developments that are put forward by developers who are consistently ignoring local needs and wishes. Our latest example concerns Bellway Homes who, when they belatedly spoke to the Parish Council only after they had submitted their application, did not acknowledge the presence of our Neighbourhood Plan when putting forward their submission even though it has gone through Reg 14 consultation. Again, negotiating with developers and fighting proposals that neglect the wishes of the community generally engage the same people and it becomes a circular argument of fighting (and we specifically use this term) to ensure the best for our community in the short term, often at the expense of the long term objective of completing the Neighbourhood Plan.

We are told to embrace the developers and work with them for the benefit of all parties. Yet this requires engagement from all parties and, in our experience, the community of developers whom we have primarily dealt with are, at best, opportunistic. As such, the process of negotiation is a fallacy and the system of section 106 funding can reasonably be described as legalised blackmail under the current application of the scheme. Given this experience, the use of language akin to a battlefield has now become instilled across the country when talking about the planning system. It follows that, if developers and planning authorities are continuously ignoring local communities and the Neighbourhood Planning system is onerous to the point of being pointless, the system is clearly broken.

However, this need not be the case. There are numerous parts of the current system that, if administered in a more sympathetic manner, could benefit communities and encourage progressive development. The principle of working with communities is the right one but significant improvements are required to make this process transparent and, more of a challenge following the abuse of the past years, credible.

These changes include:

- Giving substantially more weight to the needs and wants of local people regardless of the status of the Neighbourhood Plan.
  - Ensuring that the full cost of the supporting infrastructure is met by the developers including, where applicable, new schools, shops, play areas, etc.
  - Developers being responsible for funding new facilities or extensions to new facilities in full, where existing facilities are at capacity (otherwise the capacity of a community to absorb the new development is put at risk).
  - Developers being held accountable for the promises they make at the planning stage and not being allowed to wriggle out of them, eg environmental commitments (both wildlife and housing types), affordable housing etc – another element which undermines the credibility of the planning process.
  - Developers being legally required to compensate local communities when they fail to meet the commitments they make to local communities.
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We would be happy to engage in any process with the objective of creating an improved planning system that works for everyone by providing the necessary infrastructure and meeting local community needs, rather than one that detrimentally impacts communities socially, environmentally or financially. The planning system should be more community friendly and transparent to ensure its credibility before all faith in the system is lost in its entirety.

Yours sincerely

Vicky Stock  
On behalf of Davenham Parish Council

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