

Lane Head South Residents' Group - Peter Sargeant, Chairman

37 Kenyon Lane, Kenyon, Lowton, Warrington, WA3 1LG

30th May, 2012

Mr Mike Worden,
Town Planning,
Wigan MBC 'Life Centre',
The Wiend,
Wigan, WN1 3DS

Dear Mr Worden,

Wigan Core Strategy – Additional Consultation

I refer to my conversation with David Kearsley yesterday (29th May), following sight of Mr Ward's communication to you.

I urged David to discuss with his colleagues the need to overcome the difficulties presented by launching a consultation on 12th July, to conclude on 23rd August. This represents the height of the holiday season, as you will be well aware, and opens the Council to inevitable criticism. It simply is not good enough to say that six weeks is the prescribed period and that it represents plenty of time. The volume of material one is now expected to absorb, alone, is sufficient cause for apprehension. We are all busy with other things; local organisations have their own arrangements to make and, in practice, six weeks is not very long at all for serious consideration of LDF documents, especially if you have had no prior warning. In the case of LHSRG, we have not hitherto met in August – although one of my first actions on becoming Chairman, from April, has been to canvass doing so this year. Our July meeting is on 16th July (too soon); our August meeting will be on 20th August (awkwardly late). So we already have a difficulty – but it is my good fortune, if you like, that I have stumbled on the relevant information as quickly as I did.

At the same time, as mentioned to David, I may well be in Spain (on domestic duties, looking after children) in the second half of July; equally, if last year's pattern is followed, I could have charge of the same children in Scotland, early in August. Life is therefore already complicated enough, without the Wigan LDF intruding again. Of course, my circumstances just typify the problems that many interested parties will have. As for the ones you want to reach who still do not know what an LDF is, let alone a Core Strategy, what is to be done about them?

I made some suggestions to David. One is to allow more time. I appreciate this represents a problem for you. However, it may still be possible, provided the first part of the period is adequately trailed and the comments start to roll in soon enough, rather than being bunched up at the end. The alternative is that some people will return from holiday, or other absence, to discover that the consultation has been sprung behind their backs; their responses will then inevitably be last minute and feisty. A second option, therefore, is to start systematically telling people that it is going to happen; just putting the dates on the web – for people to find by chance, or not at all – is simply not adequate. A third, related, option is to ensure that the next Council magazine contains the information.

Of course, it is not for me to tell you what to do! However, I do believe that the Council needs to be creative. There will be other ideas; now is the time to be developing them, especially to reach people who are not on your mailing list. The projected launch is actually not a great deal more than a month away. In my opinion, you should at least be sending out advance notifications to your established contacts by 12th June, indicating that you will provide a web link to the 5th July Cabinet report on the latest proposals as soon as it is published. (It would appear this should occur by around 27th June, to ensure the appropriate legal requirements are met.) If I receive one, I shall start to believe you are making an effort. If I do not, I shall start looking for brickbats.

Yours sincerely,