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20th July, 2011

Councillor David Molyneux,
Town Hall,
Library Street,
Wigan WN1 1YN

Dear Dave,

LDF Core Strategy – housing consultation

Thank you very much for your letter dated 18th July, acknowledging mine of 16th July and advising that you were arranging to pass my 'comments' on 'to the senior officer dealing with the strategy.' Your promptness stands in contrast with the failure of Mr Worden to respond to my letter of 30th May and Gillian Bishop, or anybody else, to reply to my unrelated letter of 29th June. (My request for your assistance in regard to the latter remains outstanding.)

Mr Worden was in a huddle with the four of us who were present at yesterday's Cabinet meeting – as it happens, after we had been politely ejected by Ms Bishop, at the end of the published business. Ms Bishop, in fact, has no reason to know my face; however, the same is not true of Mr Worden. Yet, he chose to say nothing to us on the subject of the consultation methodology, other than to confirm to Councillor Grundy the limited nature of the proposed mailing. I was left shaking my head in disbelief, as he made his smiling escape.

Turning back, now, to my letter of 16th July, I must apologise for the fact that there was an unfortunate, if minor, error in the penultimate paragraph. I am therefore providing an amended original for record purposes; in doing so, I have also adjusted the letterhead, so that my authorship cannot be either doubted or misconstrued.

I should still be grateful if you could reply to the original question. However, if that is not to be, perhaps you could confirm once the amended original, too, has been passed on to your senior colleague for attention and, at the same time, advise me who he or she is and how I may make contact, if appropriate.

I take the opportunity to comment on what Sue Loudon said about the requirement to undertake further consultation being 'bad news for the Council'.

It is, of course, true that many more people are likely to object than support the Council. However, an added reason is that by limiting such consultation as the Council intends to do to the immediate environs of the Standish, Atherton and Lowton locations, along with the Green Belt and other parcels identified, it is forfeiting the opportunity to build a wider consensus.

It is the Council that has defined the number of houses it wishes to build. So, as much as anything, it is the level of its ambition that has been found wanting by Mr Ward; and, the current setback is therefore something of a self-inflicted wound. By undertaking a series of targeted 'Nimby' surveys, the Council now risks inviting third parties to inflict yet further damage. Indeed, it is difficult to foresee a happy ending, when Mr Normington himself indicated, more than once, that there was a 'need to consult widely' to satisfy the Inspector.

Yours sincerely,

Mr. P. Sargeant - Chairman
Lane Head South Residents Group
37 Kenyon Lane
Kenyon, Lowton
Warrington
WA3 1LG

Our reference: SN/MW/NS/24634
Your reference:
Please ask for: Steve Normington
Extension: 89101
Direct line: 01942 489101
Date: 3 August 2012

Dear Mr. Sargeant

Wigan Core Strategy

Councillor David Molyneux has asked me to reply to your recent correspondence to him concerning the Core Strategy.

I shall deal with the points raised in your letters of 20 July, 26 July and 31 July 2012.

1. Publicity for the consultation:

Mr Worden has already stated in his letter to you dated 27 July 2012 that the Council has undertaken all the steps it considers to be necessary and appropriate to publicise the consultation process and to enable the local communities to understand and participate in the exercise. Letters have been sent out directly to those residents who border the option sites, press releases have been issued, site notices have been put up and those already on our extensive LDF database have been contacted.

All of the consultation information is available on the Council's website from 31 July 2012 and made available in the libraries of the borough. Exhibitions and afternoon/evening drop in sessions for three key locations in Atherton, Standish and Golborne/Lowton have been arranged and publicised. A specific report outlining the steps that we have taken to publicise the consultation has been produced and made available on the Council's website. The consultation arrangements extend far beyond the statutory minimum and are more detailed than most other local authorities have put in place at a similar stage of plan preparation.

I am of the view that this level of publicity is appropriate for the consultation exercise and will enable the Council to properly gain the views of local communities on the options it is presenting. I do not consider it to be necessary to publish a special edition of Borough Life just for this consultation exercise.

Please reply to Steve Normington

Wigan Council, Places Directorate: Economy, Waste and Infrastructure, PO Box 100 WN1 3DS.

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E-mail: s.normington@wigan.gov.uk

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2. Cabinet 19 July 2012:

Your letter of 20 July 2012 makes a number of references to the meeting of Cabinet on 19 July 2012 when the Core Strategy options were approved for consultation. Both Mr Worden and I were accompanying Ms Bishop to another meeting straight after the close of Cabinet when Councillor Grundy asked Mr Worden a question. Mr Worden had a brief discussion with Councillor Grundy and answered his question and then left to make his way to another part of the Town Hall for the meeting. It wasn't the time or the place for a detailed discussion and Mr Worden answered Councillor Grundy's single question to his satisfaction. There was no attempt by Mr Thwaite or yourself to join in the conversation, and consequently it is difficult to understand what else you consider Mr Worden should have done.

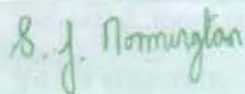
3. The housing numbers:

Your letter of 20 July 2012 suggests that it was within the Council's gift to present a lower housing target than that set out in the submitted Core Strategy. You refer to the 'level of ambition' set by the Council. The evidence presented to the examination to support the housing target figure of 1000 homes per annum to 2026 is robust and based upon demographic data from a number of different sources. It is not a level of ambition, it is factual evidence about the amount of new housing required to meet housing need in the borough to 2026. The Inspector appears to have accepted that this is the appropriate figure otherwise he would have challenged it and not have allowed the Council to go ahead and undertake the option assessments and consultation exercise. If he did not consider the figure to be correct and based upon evidence, he would not have concluded that there is a shortfall in housing land supply. To be clear on this point, the Inspector has accepted the Council's housing needs figure. His query is whether sufficient land is available to accommodate 2500 homes from the accepted amount. This is not an additional number of new homes that the Core Strategy needs to cater for but it does need demonstration that sufficient land is available to meet this requirement.

The Council has acted expediently and efficiently since the letter from the Inspector announcing the suspension was received in May. We are on course to meet the timetable agreed with the Inspector for undertaking the work within the six month window. I am confident that the Inspector will be satisfied that we have carried out the option assessments and consultation exercise thoroughly, fairly and in accordance with the requirements of the Regulations.

I hope that the above information clarifies the position for you.

Yours sincerely



Steve Normington
Director Economy