

Empingham Parish Council

By e-mail 25 July 2021

Dear Mr Andrews

The Local Plan has become a standing item on the agenda for meetings of Empingham Parish Council (EPC). At the July 2021 meeting a number of issues were discussed that I would like to draw to your attention.

The postponement of the RCC special meeting to discuss whether to proceed with the existing Local Plan was noted with dismay. Holding an extraordinary meeting, not in the Council diary, in school holidays was always going to result in one or more absentees. The resignation of one Conservative councillor on a Council of twenty seven members should not have necessitated postponement. Naked political gerrymandering in our view. The longer there is uncertainty the more likely opportunistic planning applications will be submitted.

The lawyer who skewered RCC over the Spinney Hill development using five year housing supply arguments, predicted some three years ago that relying on one very large site (SGB) for the five year housing land supply requirement as early as 2025, was most likely to result in similar results to Spinney Hill. His prediction seems to be coming true. The possible development at SGB is no nearer delivery than it was two years ago. The sooner RCC withdraw the Local Plan, as submitted, and find a solution to development at the SGB site that commands more consensual approval the better.

Some of your comments at the Parish Forum also worried EPC. Firstly RCC refusal of HIF makes SGB not viable. You are reported as saying that Homes England are minded to replicate HIF via a direct payment to the MOD, but the respective Government agencies want to be first assured that Rutland County Council backs the submitted Local Plan. Apart from the legality and difficulty of such virement at central Government level, how can they be reassured when the Council can no longer rely on a one party majority. There is also the very important debate to be had at planning application stage when the political balance will be tested again. In any event how can county councillors rely on such flimsy assurances in the absence

of written confirmation. Is the site viable or not ? Is a grant or subsidy of £29.4m available or not ?

Secondly your officers reported that they would be recommending that the Plan be put to Examination In Public as submitted. Of course officers are entitled, even expected, to make recommendations, but only after all the arguments for and against have been reported on. Most of the very few public reports on SGB to date have been very one sided with a list of arguments leading inexorably to just one conclusion. EPC trusts you will fulfill your earlier assertions about transparency and that all arguments will be opened up to full Council discussion

In order for our ward councillors to be able to properly represent us at the special meeting to endorse, or otherwise, the Local Plan as submitted, they will need up to date information on infrastructure that has to be provided for, or as a consequence of the development at SGB. The *raison d'être* for the special meeting is the lack of infrastructure grant. The infrastructure information in the library of documents is badly out of date, very broad brush in many areas, and arguably totally deficient in others. One of our parish councillors asked for such information to be updated only to be told that the information is commercially sensitive. This is not acceptable. What can be commercially sensitive about the possible development of the site when prospective developers have not been approached about the site and the site does not have planning permission ?

The Leader promised on numerous occasions that any development would be infrastructure led. As a parish council EPC objected to the Local Plan on a number of matters , one of the more important being infrastructure requirements in the area of transport and traffic. The planning officer simply kicked this issue into the long grass by saying that any planning application would be accompanied by a full transport and traffic assessment. As to a "rat run" to the A1 north, as Ketton will be to the A1 south, our county councillors need that information now. The relevant information in the library of documents is woeful. The mitigation measure proposed for Empingham is a junction improvement off the A606. This is ridiculed locally and the trip generation calculations were substantially challenged by an independent expert traffic consultant. There is no proposal to alleviate a "rat run" south through Ketton.

Traffic and transport issues are an example of why infrastructure information is essential to our ward councillors to contribute to the forthcoming debate. Other infrastructure information is equally important.

It is also essential for them to be able to assess the financial risks to which RCC may be exposed to. A number of local authorities are beginning to question whether forward funding of infrastructure in the belief, or hope, it will be reimbursed at some time in the future, often long in the future, by developer contributions when sites are developed out, is not a risk local authorities should take. We live in very uncertain times, with a housing market shored up by Government subsidies, and many developers moving out of simple development as we now know it.

EPC suggests that to ensure transparency before the debate caused by the lack of infrastructure grant, the public and county councillors should be provided with a simple table setting out

**1 What infrastructure will be provided for and as a consequence of SGB**

**2 When will that infrastructure be provided**

**3 What will be the estimated costs**

**4 Who and/or how will fund it.**

At this juncture reasonable and reasoned estimates will of course have to be made for many infrastructure items. Nevertheless without such vital information how can Rutland councillors be expected to contribute meaningfully to the special meeting. Development at SGB is the very heart of the Local Plan for which endorsement is sought. We were all assured by the Leader some three years ago that infrastructure would be first and last in his requirements of SGB development, an update of that reassurance is fundamental to your debate. Refusal to supply such information can only lead to the conclusion that in the intervening years the Leader has backtracked.

EPC will circulate this information request to other parish councils, and ask our two ward councillors to endorse it and follow it up. Denying such essential information would not resonate with your earlier assurances on transparency and that “everything will be on the table”.

A copy will also be sent to the programme officer working to the Inspector.

Regards

Vic Pheasant

Chairman Empingham Parish Council