

Joy Norris

From: Town Clerk <town.clerk@ilminster.gov.uk>
Sent: 18 February 2014 10:15
To: 'Emma Jane'; Andrew Shearman
Subject: FW: ACTION ON RURAL PLANNING CHAOS
Attachments: HEPC LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PAPER FEB 14.doc

Please see the email below and the attachment - do you wish to make this an agenda item at a future meeting?

Joy

Joy Norris
Town Clerk
Ilminster Town Council
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From: Ilminster Town Council [mailto:town.council@ilminster.gov.uk]
Sent: 06 February 2014 09:24
To: town.clerk@ilminster.gov.uk; Deputy Clerk
Subject: FW: ACTION ON RURAL PLANNING CHAOS

Huish Episcopi Parish Council

email:

☎ 014

Rt. Hon. David Cameron MP

Rt. Hon. Eric Pickles MP

Rt. Hon. David Heath MP

Cllr. Ric Pallister

Cllr. Shane Pledger

re: LOCAL DEVELOPMENT – RIGHT PLACE, RIGHT PRICE, RIGHT TIME

Huish Episcopi Parish Council first wishes to make it quite plain that it is certainly not against development in its parish. Nevertheless it feels that its inherent local knowledge is being treated with complete contempt and overruled by distant urban-based Planning Inspectors, both with little or no understanding of rural areas and considering each application in total isolation from all other developments within the parish. The Council is here to serve its community but, as their expertise seems rarely respected, Councillors believe they are just wasting all their valuable time, given so freely, and this is not a democratic way of going about a planning process which is rapidly spiralling out of control.

As a result the Council is considering taking drastic action from 1st June 2014 such as imposing a moratorium on its observations regarding any further applications for development within the parish and referring all decisions to the Area North Planners and Committee. Area North can then bear the responsibility of explaining to the parishioners for example why, yet again despite Parish Council and local objections, development has recently been permitted on appeal in a completely inappropriate area when plenty of suitable land had already been identified. The Council also remains very concerned by the increasing number of proposed solar farms in open rural countryside. The main reasons for this sad state of affairs seem to be as follows:

- **Government guidelines.** These have apparently given “carte blanche” to developers to apply for development of every conceivable plot of land and tied the hands of District Planners in that they may not agree, without penalty, that some rural areas are unacceptable for development as, without the five year district development strategy in place, Inspectors seem unable to reject any application on appeal.
- **Local Community Plan.** With Government encouragement South Somerset District Council recommended the creation of Local Community Plans to guarantee control of parish development to parish councils, which could have entailed lots of hard work in consultation and associated major costs beyond many small parishes. It soon became clear that adopting such a plan would have been utterly futile in resisting unsuitable planning and development matters in this parish.

- **District Local Plan to 2028.** Under this Plan, subsequently rejected by the Inspector and still under revision, Huish Episcopi Parish Council was instructed to accept 405 houses to be built in its parish on behalf of Langport town, which had no further areas in which to expand, and all but 76 of these properties have already been built or have planning approval.

Since the rejection of the SSDC Local Plan to 2028 there has been a mad scramble to lodge a number of large outline planning applications amounting to a grand total of some further 229 dwellings within the parish, or over 300% of the total remaining requirements of the Local Plan, with more than 14 years remaining in the proposed Plan.

- **Parish Development.** Councillors devoted a great deal of time and consultation to identify acceptable areas for growth in the parish, far in excess of the number required and generally on flat land with less impact and intrusion on existing developments. Dwellings recently built within Huish Episcopi continue to be very slow to sell, so the Parish Council is understandably unenthusiastic about adding further land for development before these sites, which have already been agreed in the proposed Local Plan, have been built and occupied and other local issues have been resolved.
- **Affordable housing in Rural Communities.** Proposed development so far is definitely not meeting this rural area's needs. The requirement for "affordable housing" appears paramount but remains undefined in a meaningful way. In the Huish Episcopi/Langport area the average salary is about £20,000 so, even with two salaries, the maximum mortgage is likely to be no more than £150,000. Very few houses have been built recently in this price bracket, even part buy/part own, and consequently many larger houses are still unsold.

There are the issues of work in the area, transportation to and from work, water and sewage disposal including its effect in adding to the local flooding problems, empty properties and planning applications that have been granted but not built yet. Many pensioners would like to downsize to small bungalows but no bungalows have been built on local estates for over 25 years, totally ignoring the Council's request for these to be included in recent developments.

In conclusion Huish Episcopi Parish Council calls on all parties of HM Government and the local authority to halt this senseless free for all planning experiment, which is mostly encouraging developers to take out options with land owners to gain outline planning then sitting on the results to maximise future profit. Instead everyone should concentrate on helping to tackle the real issue – the need for a realistic long-term housing strategy to build decent homes in the right places, for the right prices at the right times.

Yours sincerely

SHIRLEY NICHOLAS (Mrs)
Chairman of the Parish Council

Copies to:
Local Councils
Cllr D Yeomans
Cllr R Mills