

Torbay Council meeting 15th November 2018

Public Question/statement Paignton Neighbourhood Plan

My name is David Watts. I'm a resident of Paignton and the elected Chairman of the Paignton Neighbourhood Forum. I'm also a National Neighbourhood Planning Champion.

The journey we have travelled since 2011 has been truly remarkable. Even though all 3 Neighbourhood Plans continue to be 'Frontrunners' nationally it has not been a speedy process. There are now over 2,000 Forums producing Neighbourhood Plans across the country and more than 400 have already passed referendum stage. The average time from start to finish is just over 2 years. In our case it has taken more than 7 years.

In part the delay has been due to size and complexity, but that's not the whole story. Our Forum continues to have the largest number of registered community members than any other in the country - and is still growing. We have always seen the most important objective to be ensuring the plan produced truly reflects the views of our community.

As remarked by the Examiner in her report *'Having examined the documents and considered the focus of the Neighbourhood Plan I conclude that the consultation process was robust, well conducted and recorded (p15) ... and the themes of the plan have developed as a result of community consultation carried out and the policies of the plan respond to those themes (p24 11.10)*

Not in the agenda papers tonight is the statement she made at the Exploratory Meeting held in public at Paignton Library on 10 May 2018, a copy of which is on the Council's website. The Examiner commented:

"Having read the plan and the supporting documents I would like to congratulate the Neighbourhood Forum and the community for producing a plan that seeks to push the boundaries and introduce many innovations that other plans I have examined have not. I am very aware of the amount of time, determination and hard work it takes to get a neighbourhood plan to the examination stage. It's not for the faint hearted"

This acknowledgement is important to the Forum because the journey has been very far from easy.

At times we have been seen as Nimby's with no interest in supporting Paignton moving forward. Nothing could be further from the truth. The commitment from our community to securing truly balanced and sustainable development has been made clear from the start.

On other occasions we have been seen as some kind of threat because of questions we have legitimately raised. Again nothing could be further from the truth. Over the last 7 years the Forum has developed many skills from collecting and analysing information, navigating complex legislation, and how best to make use of limited resources to ensure community engagement so that the plan proposals truly reflect local needs, have community support and take fully into account all material considerations.

We have now reached the post Examination stage where it is quite normal for Examiner's to recommend modifications to a neighbourhood plan to help ensure they meet the Basic Conditions tests involved. Our plan has been no different. Apart from 4 policies out of 27 we have accepted the Examiner's suggestions and of the remaining 4 we have arrived at alternatives with officers that retain the intent of the originally submitted proposals whilst also meeting the Basic Condition requirements.

Our 7 year journey has brought us into many areas of genuine contention. Again this is nothing unusual and is a situation that will continue. For example, the revised National Planning Policy Framework has been challenged under Judicial Review on the grounds that it has not been subjected to Strategic Environmental Assessment. Concurrently, consultation has recently been commenced by the Government that seeks views on the proposal to ignore the evidence from the Office of National Statistics that housing requirements nationally are lower than previously thought. More locally, research has recently been published for the whole of Devon, including Torbay, that shows there is already an over provision in place to meet general housing needs.

The point is, these are matters for the Local Plan to address in the Review that is required to be completed by 10 December 2020. They are not matters for tonight.

For tonight I am able to confirm the Paignton Neighbourhood Forum supports the final list of modifications proposed in the Decision Statement at Appendix 2 as jointly arrived at over the past 5 months.

Before ending, I wish to place on public record my personal thanks to every one of our Forum members for the dedication, perseverance and very transparent and inclusive way they have approached the task when dealing with quite difficult situations over the past 7 years.

The Forum supports the recommendations set out in the covering report before you this evening.
