

Prestbury Parish Council



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Mr. Stephen Gleave,
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Monday, August 2nd, 2011

Dear Stephen,

INVITED COMMENTS ON WOODFORD DESIGN ENQUIRY DRAFT REPORT

Thank you for your e-mail of July 27th 2011 and your invitation to comment on your Woodford Design Enquiry Draft Report. My comments, as a participant who attended every session, are provided in the same order in which the report is written:

1. Introduction

There is an up-beat statement in paragraph three of the introduction. It is:

“It is planning and localism in action. This is the direction that the government want to see planning moving, with local people having an opportunity for a more thoughtful and in depth contribution to the planning of their area”. (Page 4)

It should be noted that, whilst the government is pursuing a localism agenda which pertains to many issues and includes proposals to pass more powers to Town & Parish Councils, their agenda in relation to planning is moving in the opposite direction as evidenced by the Draft National Planning Policy Framework currently out for consultation by the Department for Communities & Local Government. This proposes to take many powers away from the local level and instructs principal authorities to adopt a default position of ‘yes’ to all planning applications. There is a loss of emphasis on brownfield regeneration, changes to Green Belt policy, a requirement for planning authorities to allocate at least 20% additional sites for housing over and above the existing five year supply, a weakening of the ‘town centre first’ policy and the abolition of the exceptions which allows small scale affordable housing to be built in rural settlements (which will add pressure for market housing and reduce the supply of affordable housing). This is in addition to the endorsement in the Localism Bill for a fast-track planning procedure for major infrastructure projects and an amendment to the Bill, currently in the House of Lords, that will allow businesses to draw up Neighbourhood Plans -even in parished areas. In other words, opportunities for local people and Parish Councils to influence planning decisions will be reduced. If you would like further information on this, please do not hesitate to contact me. However, I hope I have said enough to persuade you that your optimistic statement in relation to planning is inaccurate and should be changed.

2. Organisational structure and agreed objectives

Approach

I question whether you intended, in respect of this particular exercise, to highlight your company's approach to "*urban design quality*" as you do in point no. three on page 6, bearing in mind the rural setting of the Woodford Aerodrome site?

3. Six hats Thinking and Philosophy of Enquiry

In view of your recognition of the need to impart "*considerable amounts of information*" to the design enquiry participants, it is surprising that no briefing information was sent out in advance. I recall some considerable time being spent during the first session on helping a number of participants to understand what Green Belt is and its relevance to the site. There was, quite rightly, a presentation on the Stockport Local Development Framework Core Strategy. But it was expecting a lot for people with no previous experience of these issues to take them all on board at one telling. The event was obviously going to have to venture into planning policy territory. It would have been really helpful if a planning resume had been distributed first.

4. Day by day progress

Day 2 – Vision, issues & questions

You report that Kevin McGeogh, Senior Strategy Manager, Sustainable Development, for the Homes & Communities Agency, thought the approach adopted for the Woodford Design Enquiry was a good example of localism and would make a good case study they could use at a national level (p. 18). I am therefore copying him into this response.

Vision through images

I believe there is a misleading statement and/or understanding of the participants' opinions as expressed through this exercise. The report says:

"The groups quickly identified the images that they didn't think appropriate for Woodford. Typically these included very contemporary and 'urban' buildings and places, where the scale and intensity of development didn't fit with the village scale described in the earlier session". (P.19).

It should be remembered that only 40 images were available for participants to rate. None of them showed a typical old village conservation area, eg. similar to the adjoining parish of Prestbury. Whilst it is fully appreciated it would not be possible to replicate villages which are centuries old, it would be possible to create acceptable, attractive pastiches of them. (There are, for instance, a couple of small recent developments within the Prestbury Conservation Area, off the main street, which offer modest accommodation in properties that copy the general style of the original old buildings). The point being that the centres of pretty villages of this kind have quite a high density.

This type of option was not offered. If it had been, in view of other statements which were made on many occasions where various participants indicated a desire for a village feel to any housing development on the Woodford site, I feel confident it would have made it onto the ‘favourites’ boards. Consequently, I would make the point that the evidence does not exist for the statement made about scale and intensity.

Day 4 – Masterplan ideas & review

The Four Scenarios/ Options

There is a mis-reporting of the recommendations which emerged from Group 2, which I served on. The sixth bullet point erroneously says:

- *“Perhaps very little housing at very low density?”* (p.33).

It is not difficult to remember what was said in this group for this exercise because, as is accurately reported, there were only three of us in it. None of us spoke about the possibility of *“little housing of low density”* at any point and nor was that remark made as part of the feedback. (It may have been by another group but it was not by ours). This line should be removed.

Areas of convergence & divergence

In view of the reluctance of participants to be drawn on housing numbers (probably due to a lack of experience in dealing with such matters) I am totally perplexed by the conclusion:

“The range of housing for example seemed to settle between 400 and 600 homes”
(p.45)

If this statement is going to remain in the report then it needs to be properly justified.

The Way Forward

There is a typographical mistake in bullet point no. 25 near the top of page 47 (it is actually the fourth bullet down on that page). The word should be *“full”* not *“fall”*, ie. the call was for a *“full environmental assessment”*.

5. The blog day-by-day

Day One: Monday 13th June 2011

There is another typo, this time in Becky Mather’s blog of day one. In paragraph four, the word after *“responses”* should be *“there”* not *“the”* (p.50).

Day Two: Tuesday 14th June 2011

I would draw your attention, in Gareth Sumner’s blog, to his account of the ‘Visionary thinking’ exercise and his reporting of the requirement that the site should be *“village-like”* (p.53). This chimes with the point I made in response to Chapter 4 on page 2 of this letter.

continued ...

Appendix 2

In the list of attendees, all six Poynton LAP representatives, all four SMBC councillors, all six health representatives and the reps. from Poynton High School, Adlington Golf Club, the Chamber of Commerce (two) and Cycle Wilmslow listed at the top of page 67 are repeated again starting near the bottom of page 67 and running over to page 68. In addition, on p. 68, Councillor Macrae, the Prosperity Portfolio Holder at Cheshire East Council is incorrectly listed as having attended. I know Councillor Macrae and can confirm that unless he turned up for the last half hour on Tuesday evening - which was the only time I was not present - when I had to attend a Prestbury Parish Council meeting, he was not an attendee.

I would draw your attention to the list of 'Local people who registered an interest' on p. 68. You will note my name is correctly included there. The fact of the matter is that, had I not attended the exhibition at Woodford Community Centre and asked a lot of searching questions, I would not have known about and been invited to attend the design enquiry. Prestbury Parish has a boundary with the Woodford Aerodrome site and should have automatically been invited – as were other adjoining Councils – but we were overlooked.

Over-arching comments

Exercises such as this should not be set up until key environmental data is available as participants need to understand, especially if being asked to draw lines on maps, if there are areas of environmental constraint. Briefing information should always be sent out in advance and lists should be available from the outset of what information is and is not available. Most round table discussions should be professionally facilitated when a large number of the participants are unused to taking part in this type of exercise (only one session was here). Principal authority councillors should be encouraged to observe and learn and not try to dominate the proceedings. Finally, I have tried several times, without success, to access the resource box information which your e-mail said was available on your website. As I have been unable to see it, I cannot comment on it. However, I trust that the comments I have made are of some value.

Yours sincerely,

**COUNCILLOR LILLIAN BURNS
PRESTBURY PARISH COUNCIL**