

[REDACTED]
Yatton
North Somerset
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22nd April 2016

Cllr E Ap Rees
North Somerset Council
Walliscote Grove Road
Weston-super-Mare
BS23 1UJ

Dear Cllr Ap Rees

I write to you in your capacity as the Deputy Leader of the North Somerset Council and Executive Lead for Planning, Housing, Highways and Transport amongst your portfolios .

I should be grateful for your personal response as the issues which I raise below either clearly fall within your personal Executive responsibility remit or are a consequence of the personal position you have taken at P&R committee meetings. They are not issues which fall within the responsibility of your Officers.

I attended the Planning and Regulatory Committee meeting on 13th April and also the meetings of the Committee throughout this year. I have several issues which arise from these meetings and I should be grateful for your response:

1. Bleadon Hill Planning Application 15/P/0983/O

I was very interested in your statement during the discussion about the Bleadon Hill application at the P&R Committee meeting on 13th April . You stated very clearly that you supported deferment of consideration of this planning application as there were highways concerns, no places in local schools and there was a need to address local issues before granting approval. If that is the case in the respect of this application for 50 houses, how can you justify the P&R Committee's previous approval of two applications for Yatton for 370 houses in addition to the permission already granted for 150 houses (Bloor 1). A total of 520 houses which is substantially more than the 50 houses proposed from Bleadon Hill and consequently must surely have a significantly greater impact on highways issues and local infrastructure.

I do appreciate that there is a concession requiring "place- making" considerations to be conducted between the respective applicants and NSC officials with regard to the Yatton developments, but this is merely lip service

after outline planning approval has been granted. I have to ask how can you justify your personal position as stated at the April meeting of the P&R Committee in respect of the Bleadon application when you have already made such a devastating decision in respect of the Yatton planning applications?

Your own NSC Officers acknowledged at the recent "consultation" event in respect of the Sites and Allocations Plan that there is limited action that can be taken in respect of Highways issues in Yatton. So why are Highways issues allowed to be taken forward for further consideration in respect of the Bleadon application but seemingly dismissed in respect of the major applications for development in Yatton?

I ask you to explain your apparent inconsistency in approach to these applications. Is it because Bleadon falls closer to your own ward?

If not, I should be grateful if you would explain the rationale that has determined your views on these applications. You clearly advocated the approval of the Hallam Land and Bloor Homes planning applications for Yatton at the March meeting of the P&R Committee but chose to support deferral of the Bleadon Hill application at the April meeting of the P&R Committee. This indicates an inconsistency in your approach and I should be grateful if you would explain why you have felt able to adopt such a different stance at the April meeting of the P&R Committee compared to your stance at the March meeting of the P&R Committee?

2. Vision

Cllr Leimdorfer raised the question at previous P&R Committee meetings about the absence of a sense of vision with regard to the major expansion of housing apparently needed within NSC. How are you going to address this? Yatton seems to have been sacrificed without any sense of vision whatsoever. The applications approved to date by NSC total 520 new homes representing an increase of 17% in the number of households compared to the 2011 census data. This excludes the other known developments such as the Oxford Instruments site. So what are you as the Executive Lead for Planning at NSC going to do about this?

3. Infrastructure expansion to match housing expansion

I appreciate that part of your response will be that NSC have had the expanded housing target imposed upon you - but this is not material. As a Council, you surely need to ensure that infrastructure provision matches population growth. If you do not address this issue who will choose to live in these new homes? And more importantly the inevitable consequence is more traffic - so again an issue which falls within your remit. Surely, you need to ensure that the process going forward is structured to ensure that infrastructure matches with housing need. How are you going to address this?

4. B3133

With all of the developments approved for Yatton, Churchill and Congresbury,

the B3133 is clearly going to be significantly effected. I know you stated at the P&R Committee that you expected all cars going to and from the Pudding Lane development would use the A38. I seriously doubt if that will be the case. As Executive Lead for Highways I should be grateful if you would explain how the B3133 is going to be able to cope with the collective impact of the developments now approved for such a major expansion in housing supply on sites accessed via the B3133. I am aware that the B3133/A370 serves a strategic function within NSC in the event of motorway closures.

4. Action or more Non Action

I am dubious about the resilience and capability NSC to address the daunting issues of infrastructure and highways. I appreciate that NSC launched a challenge in conjunction with local MPs last year to the housing target set by the Planning Inspector who reviewed CS 13 but why did you as Executive Lead for Planning apparently then allow your Planning Officers to "sit on their hands"?

As a consequence of this apparent paralysis within the NSC Planning Dept we are faced with developers being allowed to swamp our green fields with new houses as the means to solve the catch-up process to identify a 5 year housing supply. I have to assume that the lack of action by your planning officials throughout 2015 was approved by you as the Executive Lead. Should you not have anticipated the worst case scenario and allowed the Sites and Allocations Plan consultation etc to go forward rather than sitting under a cloud of uncertainty?

The delay means that the current consultation exercise is simply ticking a box. In the case of the Yatton major developments and the Pudding Pie Lane, Churchill, and Cobthorne Way Congresbury developments, NSC have approved the applications before the completion of the Sites and Allocations Plan consultation is concluded. So does the consultation process have any meaning?

As we stand you and NSC are being continuously challenged by developers who find it easy to make a case that you do not have a resilient 5 year housing supply. It seems to me that this is now partly of your own making as you chose to take no action at all with regard to the progression of the NSC Core Strategy throughout the majority of 2015. I appreciate that the UoB legal challenge was a major issue, but surely you did not need to just say let's wait on what the SofS decides. Could you not have been more proactive to defend the overall principles of the Core Strategy?

All that seems to be happening now is that NSC is willing to sacrifice the Service Village to protect the Green Belt as you have been found to be lacking in terms of the 5 year supply of housing. So at what stage as Cllr Leimdorfer asked does the sense of vision come back into NSC thinking?

6. Is Yatton NSC's 5th Town?

Does NSC see Yatton as NSC's 5th town. You need to be honest about this

and if so, you need to launch a town planning master plan - not just a "place making" process. At the 2011 census the Yatton population was 9,273 with an average population per household of 2.5. The definition of a town used to be a population of 10,000. So this indicates that Yatton sadly now warrants town status as a consequence of the actions taken by NSC. So with your Planning and Housing Executive responsibilities you personally need to determine the action to be taken to generate the infrastructure needed to support a town.

As you have converted Yatton to a town, you need to plan how you are going to deal with the consequences. What is your process for dealing with this?

7. Consideration of cumulative impact

I would suggest that as Executive Lead for Planning you need to ensure that individual planning applications are not assessed in isolation, but there is measured and practical long term consideration of the consequences. The present knee jerk culture is simply not acceptable. If further applications come forward for Yatton are you going to take account of the scale of development already approved for what was previously designated as a service village?

I hope you will be able to provide a constructive and positive response to the issues which I have raised.

Yours sincerely,

Vivienne Tomkinson

The Rt Hon Dr Liam Fox MP
Cllr Jill Iles
Cllr Judith Hadley
Cllr T Leimdorfer
Mr Richard Kent, Head of Development Mgt