

FAO: Andrew Dawe, BSc(Hons) MSc MPhil MRTPI
Appeal by: Abacus Projects Limited and Deeley Freed Limited
Ref : APP/X1165/W/20/3245011
Address: Land to the South of White Rock adjacent to Brixham Road, AKA Inglewood

Dear Sir,

Introduction:

I have taken the unusual and unprecedented decision to speak in this inquiry recognising one of the key issues before the Inspector is the need to balance between:

- The Government's policy of: (i.) significantly boosting the supply of housing;

While also committing to:

- (ii.) empowering local people through the Neighbourhood Plan process, ensuring they have a say in the development of their area.

Having studied the Brixham Peninsula Neighbourhood Plan, I am aware the local community allocated more housing than expected of them within their local area and balanced this positive approach to development with landscape protection policies which sought to retain the special character of the area.

I will confine my remarks to two specific points namely the negative impact on landscape and the need to respect neighbourhood plans.

Landscape

In relation to these landscape protection policies, I have been informed that this development runs contrary to the Policy E2 regarding Settlement Boundaries and Policy E3 regarding Settlement Gaps.

I understand that these policies are the principle landscape protection policies in the plan and specifically that they seek to retain the separate identity of the separate areas which together make up the Brixham Peninsula.

In addition to the appeal site, it is readily apparent that the open vista across the site towards the Dart Valley and the AONB is a material factor in physically separating the Town of Paignton with the Brixham Peninsula settlement of Galmpton. As well as providing a rich environment for biodiversity including the Horseshoe bat and the Cirl Bunting, it adds the natural beauty of our landscape and adds to the beauty and tranquillity of our AONBs.

As has already been stated by many others these plans have a detrimental impact on nature, the landscape and the settlement gap.

Neighbourhood Plans

I am aware from my own experience as the Member of Parliament for Totnes and South Devon of the importance of community engagement and by consequence the value of Neighbourhood Plans in developing a local area.

It is worth noting that the Secretary of State for Housing Robert Jenrick, said when visiting the area in 2019 that the Government seeks to ‘build houses in the right places, and to be built in a manner that is beneficial to the environment and that we want to ensure that local people are in the driving seat about choosing where, how and when homes are built.’

It is important to understand that the very design of neighbourhood plans have been orientated around “creating a localist system that’s plan based” on local resident’s desires and that they be properly respected by local authorities and developers.

I am sure that when my colleague made his remarks, he understood the need and importance of preserving the High Quality of the Dart Valley AONB as one of the finest riverine landscapes in the country.

Torbay Authority is one of the only areas across England to have a 100% coverage of neighbourhood plans.

As outlined by the Government the purpose of these plans is to give “communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape development and growth in their local areas. They are able (or should be) to choose where they want new homes, shops and offices to be built, have their say on what those buildings should look like and what infrastructure should be provided.”

The Government has repeatedly stated that neighbourhood plans should be “a powerful tool” for local communities to operate when it comes to site allocation and design.

Mr Inspector, if this appeal is allowed, given the proposed development’s material conflict with this neighbourhood plan then I question what message this will send to every community across the country which has created and implemented a Neighbourhood Plan.

The view will undoubtedly be that local community’s voices can be downtrodden, ignored or simply bullied into submission by developers with deeper pockets.

Conclusion

I have said little to nothing regarding the negative impact of these plans will place upon infrastructure, local resources and facilities and the increase in air pollution but I know others will be keen to express upon these points.

At present the Government is currently reviewing the Planning for the Future Whitepaper consultation findings. It is worth noting that Housing and Planning Debate of 8 October 2020 saw nearly every contribution from Members of Parliament across the political spectrum reaffirm the importance and necessity for local resident’s to be engaged in the development process. Future legislation will surely reflect this outlook.

In conclusion I oppose these plans in their entirety and for the sake of the local community, the environment, and neighbourhood plans I hope you will deny this appeal.

Thank you.