

Thank you.

I am Catherine Fritz, the elected Chair of the Paignton Neighbourhood Forum. I, and other officers of the Forum, are volunteers. I speak on behalf of the Forum.

My arguments are based on two important principles: localism and sustainable development.

The Localism Act (2011) was an impressive piece of legislation, leading to the development of Neighbourhood Plans. Many or most of the people observing this inquiry understand the function of Neighbourhood Plans: According to the Government's Planning Advisory Service, neighbourhood planning gives communities the opportunity to direct the development of their areas through creating plans and policies.

Volunteers across Torbay worked diligently for many years to develop three neighbourhood plans - Torquay, Paignton, and Brixham Peninsula - which together encompass all of Torbay. As detailed by Brian Payne, tremendous community consultation and engagement fed into the identification of sites for development and the content of policies to guide development. At public referendum in 2019, each of the plans were overwhelmingly approved by the voters in each area. The plans were "made" in June 2019.

There is no doubt that these Neighbourhood Plans reflect the will of the communities and exist as statutory documents.

The National Planning Policy Framework (revised 2019) recognizes that there is an "adverse impact of allowing development that conflicts with the neighbourhood plan" (in paragraph 14). As previously noted, the proposed development seriously conflicts with the Brixham Peninsula Neighbourhood Plan.

Where the local planning authority does not have at least a three year supply of deliverable housing sites, the NPPF guidelines state that the weight given to the Neighbourhood Plan is reduced and the policies in the NPPF are promoted.

- Note, however, that the principles that underlie the Neighbourhood Plan should nevertheless be considered. These underlying principles – of the irreplaceable value of the landscape and protection of the AONB – are the basis for the remaining objections to the development proposal.

The NPPF notion of "sustainable development" is important. Not all development is sustainable. Paragraph 7 provides a summary definition: "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

Consider the needs of the present. Regardless of the standard calculation, what evidence is there that this housing is needed?

- Housing in Torbay is slow to sell which may be the reason why developers appear to be slow to develop housing.
  - Prior to the impact of Covid, Rightmove listed over 1500 dwellings for sale at that time. Of those, almost 400 Torbay dwellings had been listed on Rightmove for more than six continuous months and of those, more than 100 had been listed for more than 12 continuous months. These data suggest a surfeit of housing and a lack of buyers. Matters are likely worse now.
  - According to data from the Office for National Statistics, house prices in Torbay are substantially lower than those in England (excluding London), in the South West, and in Teignbridge, as a comparator authority.
- Torbay leads the area in the number of unoccupied and long-term unoccupied homes. In July 2019, Torbay had 1,303 dwellings that were unoccupied for more than six months, according to Devon Live (31 July 2019). This number was almost double that for Plymouth, the second-worst area in Devon for unoccupied housing. They calculated that in Torbay 19.7 of every 1,000 homes were unoccupied – almost 2%. This situation is likely to have worsened.
- The number of jobs in Torbay has declined over the last five years. The impact of the coronavirus on tourism and related businesses is likely to result in a further decrease in jobs in our area. Thus, with the observed decrease in jobs, the anticipated additional loss of jobs this year, and the well documented link between jobs and house building in the local Plan and the three Neighbourhood Plans, no increase in housing supply is justified.

Now consider the needs of future generations.

- If this landscape is lost, it cannot be regained. The AONB is of great value from an environmental perspective as well as from an economic perspective in an area that relies heavily on tourism.
- The proposed development disregards the value of the landscape, and the value of the strategic gap policy of the Brixham Peninsula Neighbourhood Plan.
- Where development is needed, brownfield and other, allocated sites, are available for development.

In conclusion, on behalf of the Paignton Neighbourhood Forum I ask you to rule against the Appellate, supporting Torbay Council. The development is not sustainable based on NPPF policies and is in direct opposition to the will of the communities as presented in the Neighbourhood Plans. A ruling in support of Torbay Council will support the principles of localism and the efficacy of Neighbourhood Plans.