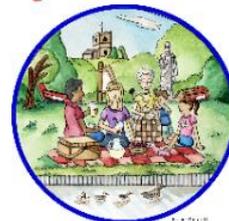


Mr N Huddleston MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0OA

Droitwich Spa
Neighbourhood Plan



30 October 2020

Dear Mr Huddleston

Re: Impacts of proposed Government planning reform on the value of neighbourhood plans

I am writing on behalf of Droitwich Spa Neighbourhood Plan Working Group to express our concerns about the proposals within the government's Planning White Paper.

We are extremely concerned that the White Paper consultation document on planning reform would lead to a slimmed down scope for neighbourhood plans and, in particular, our developing one in Droitwich Spa . We feel that this means there will be less opportunity for our community to shape and have our say on local planning matters.

Neighbourhood planning has been one of the most transformative community powers introduced through the 2011 Localism Act. Not only do neighbourhood plans involve a local referendum, but they are also accompanied by significant community engagement and have statutory weighting within the development plan framework. They help shape places at the local level and bring forward development that the local community want to see. They do this through a range of mechanisms such as: allocating sites for development (.e.g. for housing); and including policies on a range of themes such as design, the economy, and environment, to help deliver sustainable development.

While there are several unknown factors within the White Paper, our interpretation is that these proposals could have the following implications for neighbourhood plans:

- The scope of what neighbourhood plans can do may be reduced, with the focus largely on design.
- Neighbourhood plans may no longer be able to allocate sites for development (including housing) or be able to shape development and growth in the local area.
- Neighbourhood plans may largely no longer be able to include development management policies. These are the policies which planning officers usually take into account when deciding on planning applications.

What we do know is that the proposed allocation algorithm would require Wychavon District Council to greatly increase its housing targets. Within the boundaries of the town of Droitwich Spa there is little scope for further homes without encroaching on green spaces. Droitwich Spa also acts as the hub for wider local area and this puts pressure on medical, recreational and educational facilities within the town if housing is built around the wider Droitwich area.

It was clear from the House of Commons debate on Wednesday 7 October 2020 that many of your fellow Members of Parliament have the same view about housing allocations. It was also good to hear several of them call for the role of Neighbourhood Plans to be strengthened in order to give greater local democracy.

These proposals have the potential to reduce the value of neighbourhood plan making and to lead to poorer quality places for us. As part of our Plan making process we are currently undertaking a community survey.

Whilst it is still very much work in progress there are already some significant points which stand out from analysis to date –

- More than anything residents value the open and green spaces within the town. To lose any of these would be seen as a very poor decision hence it is vital that the Neighbourhood Plan is able to protect these.
- Pressure on medical facilities. You are aware of existing concerns through your meetings with the Patient Participation Groups in the town in past. It is issues like this which make local think that the current planning system is seriously flawed at a local level and the proposals in the White Paper only serve to increase this belief.
- Lack of facilities for young people within the town. Like medical facilities it is not directly part of the Neighbourhood Plan but is an issue local people wish to see more local influence.

The other issue which is always raised locally is why the infrastructure and facilities are not provided before extra housing is built rather than afterwards. We are sure that you are aware of local Droitwich resident's concerns about how road works for the Pulley Lane developments were only addressed after houses were occupied rather than before. This also applies to facilities such as healthcare and education where it appears no additional resources can be provided until resident numbers have reached certain thresholds rather than planning for it based upon projected extra houses being built.

We request that you raise our concerns with The Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, and raise questions in Parliament to request clarity about the implications on neighbourhood planning and reassurance that at the very least their current scope will be maintained and ideally strengthened.

This is essential for neighbourhood plans to continue and to have enough legal power to pack the punch they need to transform places for the better. Otherwise there is the risk that all the hard work of communities like ours will be undermined.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Mike Lambden

Mike Lambden

Chair – Droitwich Spa Neighbourhood Plan Working Group

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