

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Thorpe Ward

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Dear Crystal,

10th November 2021

Your Thorpe Ward Councillors are a most diverse group and the most representative of residents. It is important that we harness that knowledge and experience to ensure that we are working effectively and that your voices are heard. In order to help achieve this, we have set up a number of think tanks that shadow the work of the council seeking to:

- Promote the exchange of ideas and information between all council members to assist policy development.
- Serve as an informed voice to assist the council's administration.
- Identify, articulate, and evaluate current policy issues and develop solutions.
- Provide timely comment on council's policy briefings and submissions.

As Independent Councillors, we are always happy to help with any questions you have and to find you the support you need because we are resident based and not aligned to any political party.

On that basis, below is our thoughts on the Governments Planning White Paper.

The current white paper proposes wholesale changes to the local planning system, whilst being obsessed about housing and the need to increase the yearly totals. However, housing is about people, people who need to work, need to travel, require health facilities, education for children and leisure. 'The Full Monty' You cannot build housing and ignore the entire infrastructure that goes with it, especially the cost, not only financial but to the environment and communities. This it seems, has been lost with the Government setting large housing targets for Southend-on-Sea.

However, it should be emphasised that the Government does not take into account the physical capabilities of an area to accommodate such rapid growth as land availability, existing urban densities, green belt and infrastructure provision. Therefore, the Government is taking away Southends planning for a natural growth (100 years), that is sustainable and respects the character and identity of our town and our population. **But the Government** are intent with a rapid growth, which is unsustainable in all aspects of the town including, health services, education and highway infrastructure. **The question that we keep asking is; 'Where would future generations live or will they be forced to leave the town they have grown up in to seek work and housing elsewhere?'**

If the Government wants to achieve their housing targets, they must demonstrate that they have the funding in place to secure the necessary infrastructure and services at the time they are needed, not years down the road, if ever. We have pointed out that infrastructure would need to be considered to accommodate the existing movement of vehicles throughout the town. That is only the start of the facilities and the infrastructure that would be required for 23,600 homes and well over 60,000 additional people in Southend alone.

The local plan system is unwieldy and time consuming; plans are almost out of date by the time they are completed. The response to consultation is almost exclusively by professionals working on behalf of consultancies, landowners, developers etc. A simplified system would clearly help local authorities and help aid in the decision-making process. **It is doubtful that the general public will show a great deal of interest, with the exception of any plans to build on green belt areas.**

The public is at its most vociferous when confronted by a site specific. A new local plan should not be based upon a 'standard housing methodology' which is a Government formula based upon population trends and the affordability of housing. Currently the Government target is 23,600 homes (**not the number of homes needed to meet the Councils own targets to satisfy their population requirements**).

Moreover, there is a clear resentment to this demand for more housing because it was so predictable and yet ignored by the politicians. Local populations also recognise that much new housing has been built in their communities to date, without much of the essential infrastructure. This has been referenced previously, residents see a continuing erosion of the standard and availability of the local support services.

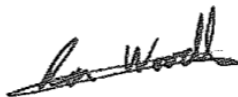
Therefore, the proposal to build 23,600 homes seems impractical and forces the town into large scale over- development, if the Council refuses to build on any remaining green belt land. We have noticed that within these new plans there is a proposal to develop a housing estate (garden estate) on the north east boundary of Southend-on-Sea with Rochford. The Council needs reminding that this area of green belt is designated as being only available for leisure use.

The National Planning Policy already states that green belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified. We have very little green spaces. However, as Independent Councillors we understand that within this corner of South East Essex there will be a minimum of 100,000 extra in population growth within the time frame of 17 years. Therefore, it would be understandable if the Government / Council undertook a feasibility study to develop a brand-new hospital, with accommodation for doctors, nurses etc. with university status, enabling local people to be trained in the medical profession to look after their local community in all matters of health.

This proposal would be accommodated within the country park setting as outlined previously. **Therefore, this area could be developed as a country park, what a fantastic environment that would be for a hospital and health facilities as indicated. This would be the only exceptional circumstance your ward councillors would subscribe to.**

This approach would therefore create a considerable area for housing development on the old hospital site in Prittlewell, which is closer to the town centre and local facilities. There are a number of disused brown field sites that have not been included in the consultation document and we will ensure that the planners are made fully aware.

Yours sincerely



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