

NORTON ST PHILIP PARISH COUNCIL

MENDIP DISTRICT OF THE COUNTY OF SOMERSET

www.nortonstphilipparishcouncil.co.uk

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Tracy Aarons and Andre Sestini
Mendip District Council

By email

20th September 2021

Dear Tracy and Andre,

MDC – LPP2

I am writing concerning the Inspectors report on Mendip District Council's Local Plan Part 2 (MDC LPP2). The Parish Council has grave concerns about some of the content of this report and the conclusions the Inspector has drawn from the information presented to him at the second round of hearings.

Our concerns are set out in the attached document.

Fundamentally we think the Inspector has completely ignored the Local Plan Part 1 (LPP1) Inspector's requested addition of 505 additional dwellings to be spread 'District Wide' as stated in both LPP1 and the LPP1 Inspector's report.

We consider the evidence provided both prior to and at the Hearings by the 3 villages of Beckington, Rode and Norton St. Philip and also by Mr. Richard Daone of BANES Planning Policy demonstrated incontrovertibly that Mendip District Council (MDC) has already overprovided on its housing supply.

This is acknowledged at paragraph 86 of the Inspector's Report which states '*there is no need for a further 505 homes in the north-east of the district*'. The Inspector then proceeds to give entirely new reasons which were not previously considered and are outside of the scope of the Examination of the submitted non-strategic plan. This new justification for the 505 additional dwellings is entirely unrelated to that given in ED20. The PC strongly suggest that the 505 are not needed at all. Furthermore, and critically we (and as far as we know everyone else) have had no opportunity to comment on these new reasons.

At a MDC meeting held on 11th February 2020 by MDC Planning Policy the Principal Planning Policy Officer recognised that "there is a democratic problem here...developers turned up at the Hearings...it was difficult for communities to engage...the Inspector had taken the development industry view rather than the communities...this is not a model of how we would do consultation". At the conclusion of the presentation I specifically asked Andre Sestini the following questions. '*Andre, would it be a fair summary of what you have said that: The Local Plan Part 1 is still the adopted plan (although certain policies may have less weight). That the Local Plan Part 2 Inspector has put forward suggestions directly contrary to the Local Plan Part 1. And you do not feel able to challenge this and you are advocating that we – the Parish Councils – do this on your behalf*'. The reply from Andre was a simple 'Yes'.

We also recall that at a well-attended public meeting at Stratton on the Fosse on 17th Feb 2020 the Deputy Leader of MDC pleaded with Parishes to challenge the Inspector on this matter as she stated that MDC, despite being "very unhappy" was not prepared to do so.

Quite why MDC decided not to seek justification from the Inspector at any stage, when many other Councils in similar positions have done so, is a mystery to us.

The consequences of MDC not challenging the Inspectors 'suggestion' that the 505 be allocated to the NE of MDC whilst excluding Frome, the most sustainable location of all, is that MDC has decided without any consultation with this Parish to propose a further allocation of a minimum of 27 dwellings to the village of Norton St. Philip. As Jo Milling stated at the stage 2 Hearings, this necessitated the Council taking what she described as a "short cut" around the Council's own procedure for Community Involvement.

This village has already provided 113 dwellings against a target minimum of 45 little more than half way through the plan period - giving an overprovision of 68 or 251%. The addition of a further 27 will increase the overprovision to 95 or 312% - easily the highest in the whole of Mendip.

There is no mention in the Inspector's Report on proportionate development in the villages of the NE despite this being a key element of the adopted LPP1. The Report is completely silent on this.

We have grave concerns about the impact this allocation will have not only on the character and appearance of the village but also on the Norton St. Philip Neighbourhood Plan (NSP NP) and what action MDC are considering taking in this matter. It was stated at the MDC Cabinet meeting on 1st March 2021 that MDC needed to consider the Inspector's report into LPP2 before taking any further action concerning the Norton St. Philip Neighbourhood Plan.

The way that MDC has approached the whole issue of the Inspectors 'suggestion' about allocating further additional dwellings to this Parish does little to give us confidence that MDC will continue to actively support our NP through to it being 'made'.

We would welcome your thoughts on this matter and be pleased if you are able to give us reassurance that you will continue to actively support our NP. We also request that our concerns expressed in this letter and attached Note are circulated to Cabinet Members ahead of the Meeting of 4th October, at which we understand the Inspector's Report is to be on the Agenda.

Yours sincerely



Pp

Ian Hasell
Chairman
For and on behalf of
Norton St. Philip Parish Council