

Email from District Cllr Harry Spencer-Smith to Ickleford Parish Council – 12 July 2017

Dear Miles and fellow Parish Councillors,

I was very concerned by Miles' letter to The Comet about Barratt's proposed plan for a large number of houses in Ickleford parish next to Lower Stondon. I explained the situation to those residents who attended the Parish Council meeting on July 11th but I would like to expand further.

Firstly, I was elected when the Draft Local Plan had designated only 57 houses for Ickleford and was as shocked as everyone else when a figure of over 400 appeared in the final Local Plan which will be examined by the Planning Inspector in the autumn.

Barratts, I now understand, have held the site in question next to Lower Stondon for some time. They came forward with it when the District Council had a general call for sites so they could produce the Preferred Options paper a couple of years ago. Contact was maintained during the Draft Local Plan and final Local Plan stages. The Department for Communities and Local Government has placed an obligation on local authorities to help those making applications for housing provided it is in line with local policy and the over-arching National Planning Policy Framework of 2011. This states there should be a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

In summary, the developers came forward with the site without special encouragement. Once they had engaged with council officers at the pre-application stage, the officers, in the light of their statutory duty to help suggested an application could be put in this summer. The site is in the proposed Local Plan and officers are obliged to respond proactively to developer's approaches.

Any formal application, as opposed to pre-application talks, would take months to come to fruition. With the holiday season coming any application seems unlikely to be finished and ready to go to Committee before the autumn examination. Indeed something of the proposed size of LS1 could take up to a year. Unfortunately the publication of the Local Plan does not freeze the planning process and prevent aggressive applications. So what can we do about it?

Any application still has to be determined by planning officers first. Then it has to go to full planning committee where I can be a Councillor Advocate or not depending on the Parish Council's advice. Finally it must pass the independent Inspector's public examination in the autumn.

The Inspector, as I have said before, will read every single objection and we have registered to be called to give our evidence, although it is at the Inspector's discretion who he decides to call. I have also been in correspondence with an Ickleford resident who wants the Inspector to recognise the proposal for Bowmans (made after the Plan was finalised) which he believes removes the need for the IC2 site. As we know the Inspector can make modifications to the Plan. The fact that Bowmans has since entered the mix, the fact we were not allowed consultation on the additional sites and the new traffic studies data we could potentially produce give us a good case to argue. It is important to realise the Inspector is completely independent. Finally I would like to make it clear it is not correct to say it is a done deal.

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I understand the level of frustration with the situation we are in. No Councillor wanted the quantum of housing that Central Government is telling authorities throughout the UK they must take. That may be a matter to raise with your MP.

In the meantime I continue to advise the Parish Council on how to deal with the level of housing being proposed. They will confirm the research I have undertaken, the strategy recommended and consultants I have proposed.

Yours sincerely,

Harry Spencer-Smith

District Councillor

Cadwell Ward