

Report of Meeting Between the SaveOurGreenbelt Dinnington & Anston Action Group and RMBC at the Town Hall on Thursday 3rd November 2011 at 1330

Those present:

Councillors:

Roger Stone (Leader of the Council)
Jacquie Falvey (Dinnington)
Jane Havenhand (Dinnington)
Simon Tweed (Dinnington)
Darren Hughes (Anston).

Officers:

Martin Kimber (Chief Executive)
Karl Battersby (Strategic Director)
Andy Duncan (Strategic Policy Team Leader).

Action Group:

Peter Frost
Graham Capper
Hazel Coates
Trevor Hill
Victor Betts.

The meeting was conducted in a positive and, in the main, in a cordial manner.

After the opening of the meeting by the Leader of the Council, agreement was quickly reached, in principle, on 7 points put forward by the Group viz:

Building on Brownfield sites should be maximised with priority being given to derelict and overgrown land

New builds to be complementary in style and purpose to any existing homes in the locale

Where building on Greenbelt cannot be avoided at any cost, preference should be given to scrub or grassland whilst retaining traditional recreation areas. Any building on agricultural land to be restricted to the lowest quality land

At least 25% of new builds within the Borough being categorised as 'affordable' or 'social' until the lack of housing within the Borough has eased

Priority being given to the needs of Rotherham Borough residents when allocating 'social' housing and other vacant properties.

No building on Greenbelt land whilst any Brownfield sites remain undeveloped

Unnecessary building of factory units until vacant ones are utilized.

The Leader of The Council gave a succinct overview for the need of a housing plan in light of Central Government policies. Members from Planning developed this theme and gave a comprehensive presentation as to the reasoning behind the need for building more homes and why Greenbelt land may be needed.

“The Council is preparing a plan for the long term growth of Rotherham Borough. In so doing we have to demonstrate that we have drawn up a plan to meet our projected needs for new homes and employment land in the most sustainable way.

We have set a proposed local housing target in the plan. This is significantly lower than the previous regional target imposed on us by government. We are the only South Yorkshire council to do this. It is, however, still slightly more than average new build over the last decade. In this way we are trying to set an appropriate target to attract investment to Rotherham while minimising the amount of greenfield land required. Ideally, we would not be looking at any greenfield sites at all. However, we simply do not have enough brownfield land (land previously developed) left to meet even our significantly reduced local housing target.

We have enough capacity on brownfield sites for up to 5,000 new homes. This leaves us around 7,750 short of our local target of 12,750 new homes over the life of the plan. The previous regional target for Rotherham was 24,482 new homes. Our proposed local target is around half this figure.

The government has set a deadline for council’s to get their plans in place. If we fail to meet this deadline we risk developers cherry picking the most attractive greenfield sites. It is in the interests of both the Council and local people to draw up our own plan together rather than have decisions imposed by others.”

In response, the Group stated that it wasn’t having a plan that was a concern but the content of that plan.

Moving on to the next concern, that of ‘quality of answers’ given to most of the questions raised by the Group before the consultation deadline in September, the Group gave clear examples of answers related to flooding to illustrate their concerns regarding the ambiguity of answers. As the Group felt that the reasons why the answers were unacceptable weren’t being made clear, other examples were not presented. Instead, The Group agreed to assist Planning in providing answers in a form that would be acceptable to the Group.

Concerns were raised by the Group relating to “lack of substance and relevance in the answers to residents’ questions” and “conflicting information available from RBMC regarding Greenbelt Development”.

In an attempt to make the Council, in particular the Leader, aware of feelings in the Dinnington and Anston Area (via public meetings) the Group put forward 2 more points:

“Consultation was never going to be an overt process”

“Lack of trust and credibility when dealing with the Dinnington area”

The Group was asked to clarify the ‘consultation’ statement and replied that ‘it was kept a secret’, which raised passions with some of the Ward Councillors.

Members of the Planning Team moved the situation along by giving a detailed account of how the consultation process had been structured and advertised.

“Over the summer we consulted on the plan for Rotherham’s future growth and prosperity. This set out how many new homes and employment land we think we need for the next 15 years and broadly where it should go. We also consulted for the first time on the detail of sites that could be developed in local communities to meet this need.

To publicise the consultation we:

- wrote and emailed around 5,000 people on our consultation database
- notified over 100 statutory consultees and local interest groups
- placed adverts in the Rotherham Advertiser, South Yorkshire Times and Dinnington and Maltby Guardian
- held a press briefing at the start of the consultation and responded to press enquiries throughout the period
- held radio interviews
- provided extensive information on our website
- held 20 public drop-in sessions across the Borough
- held 12 workshops with interest groups
- provided consultation material via Parish Councils, the central and all local libraries, on the Council's website, via the Area Assembly Network and local interest groups
- briefed Borough councillors, parish councillors and local MPs

In total, across the Borough around 1,500 people attended the 20 LDF public drop-in sessions we held. All comments made on the consultation will be made publicly available on our online consultation system at:

<http://rotherham.limehouse.co.uk/portal/> “

In response to the account given the Group stated that it didn't question the amount of work that had been put into the publicity but were disappointed by the low percentage of residents that were informed of the consultation process via the Council's campaign.

The matter of some residents feeling that they were 'being treated with contempt' by the Council was raised. The leader of the Council made clear, in no uncertain terms, that this was not the case. The Chief Executive went on to say that the Group being invited to this meeting was in itself a demonstration of courtesy toward the community. The Group agreed that it would convey this to residents at the earliest opportunity.

The Group agreed to make a contribution to the 'what to build where' forum.

Other issues which were raised by the Group and discussed were:

Dinnington East is not a 'deprived area' and suggested that attention needs to be paid to Dinnington North, with the dividing line being loosely based on Swinston Hill Road continuing along Church Lane

Building on Brownfield sites has improved areas of Dinnington eg Falcon Square and the end of Doe Quarry Lane

History demonstrates that the building of homes alone will not improve Dinnington town centre significantly, it sharing similar problems with Rotherham town centre

The Council's own demographic data demonstrates the growing need for homes to accommodate the post 60's, and that planning needs to take this into account.

The group welcomed the statement from the Leader that he was prepared to have meetings with representatives of groups to find solutions to their issues.

To progress the concerns of the Group it was agreed that:

Submitted questions - in the near future representatives of the Group would assist Planning to provide answers acceptable to the Group (VB to contact KB)

The Leader of the Council, Chief Executive and Members of the Group would meet again when appropriate

This report may be submitted to the BBC Research Team (Building on Greenbelt) by VB.