

## **Barrow cum Denham Annual Parish Meeting**

**28 April 2022**

### **NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN REPORT**

1. By way of introduction, I'd like to stress that a Neighbourhood Plan can do many things for the community that it represents. It can rule on where development should go, what the design criteria should be, what types of housing should be provided and many other things. What it cannot do is to say that there shall be no further development at all. That was never an option.
2. Many of you will have seen the report in the local press about West Suffolk's plans for 170 new homes in Barrow, to be built on two sites. 150 on the site to the south of Bury Road (designated BD13 in the draft Neighbourhood Plan) and 20 on the site south of Denham Lane (BD9).
3. These are West Suffolk Council's preferred sites in its emerging Local Plan for the plan period, which runs until 2040 and will be open to consultation in the forthcoming consultation period (26 May to 26 July). That consultation is West Suffolk Council's consultation, not ours.
4. Many of you will know that our Neighbourhood Plan Group has been working on the basis that we need to provide for 77 new homes. The sites for those homes have not yet been formally decided.
5. That figure of 77 differed from the indicative figure of 159 given to us by West Suffolk Council in 2020; a figure that was reduced to 148 in 2021.
6. On advice, we preferred our figure because we considered the methodology West Suffolk Council had used in arriving at the 159 and then 148 was fundamentally flawed. We challenged West Suffolk Council's figures, but that dispute was never resolved.
7. The figure of 170 that we are now faced with is called the Strategic Housing Requirement (SHR) and is arrived at by a different methodology. This is a top-down methodology which starts from the SHR for West Suffolk as a whole and then allocates that figure to towns and villages. Barrow, being a Key Service Centre, ranks with the other Key Service Centres second in the hierarchy, below the towns of Bury St Edmunds, Newmarket, Mildenhall and Haverhill.
8. We were originally promised by West Suffolk Council that it would give us this figure in December 2021, but it kept postponing the meeting until finally offering a date of 26 April which we accepted.
9. However, we were incensed that the Local Plan figures had been made public before that meeting. We made our feelings known to the Leader of West Suffolk Council, the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Planning and, of course, our own District Councillor, Ian Houlder. We have yet to receive a satisfactory answer from the first two gentlemen.
10. Be that as it may, at the meeting on Tuesday, we questioned whether the figure of 170 was set in stone. We were told the following:
  - (a) West Suffolk Council would not accept any figure below the 170 citing 1) national obligations, 2) district-wide capacity constraints in other locations, and 3) the seniority of Barrow's Key Service Centre status above other settlements.
  - (b) that if we persisted with a plan allowing for only 77, the likely outcome was that that number and the associated sites would become additional to the 170, not displace it. This was a very unsatisfactory stance for West Suffolk Council to take, indicating that unless we worked collaboratively with the Council, we faced compounding the risk of disproportionate development.

11. At this stage, we are not prepared to accept the figure of 170 without first seeking ways in which it can be challenged. We are taking advice from our consultants and, if necessary, legal advice.
12. First soundings suggest that there may be avenues that we can explore. We have asked West Suffolk Council to provide us with the precise method whereby they arrived at the 170 and we are asking them to clarify what basis in law they claim to the assertion that if we proceed with the 77 or any other figure below 170, we are at risk of adding to the 170 and not displacing it.
13. We do not necessarily accept the sites proposed by West Suffolk Council. Our consultants are currently examining a number of options and will report to us by the end of May. The sites proposed by West Suffolk Council are genuinely open to consultation and we are confident that if we put forward alternative sites with objective justification, we can persuade the Council of our case.
14. Both the Neighbourhood Plan and West Suffolk Council's Local Plan have to be submitted to the Planning Inspector for approval. The difference between the two plans is that the Neighbourhood Plan must undergo one more stage – a Yes/No referendum of all electors in the Neighbourhood Plan Area.
15. West Suffolk Council does not anticipate being able to submit its plan to the Inspector before the end of 2023. This gives us considerable leeway.
16. Once we have agreed on the figure of new dwellings we need to plan for, we can finalise our plan policies and submit the Neighbourhood Plan to you, the community, for consultation, called in the jargon 'Regulation 14 consultation'. That consultation period lasts six weeks and we are looking at ways we can engage the maximum number of people in that process.

Cllr Zigurds Kronbergs

Lead Member for the Neighbourhood Plan

Barrow cum Denham Parish Council

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