

Monday 14th June 2021

F.A.O. XXXXXXXX
Team Leader Planning Policy
Bedford Borough Council
Borough Hall
Cauldwell Street
Bedford
MK42 9AP

Milton Ernest villagers
in opposition to the current MENDP.
For correspondence purposes only:
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
Milton Ernest
Bedford
XXXXXXXXXX

Dear XXX,

Ref: Milton Ernest Neighbourhood Development Plan

We, as some representatives of the 'Site 518 Concern Group' and as villagers of Milton Ernest write as a follow up to our two letters of 8 March 2021 and other email communication we have had with yourself and Sonia Gallaher of Bedford Borough Council (BBC) since then.

We are writing this letter to BBC and are directing it to the Examiner Mr David Hogger too. We obviously appreciate the route to the Examiner is through BBC.

We have spent the last few months campaigning in a bid to get the current Milton Ernest Neighbourhood Development Plan (MENDP) thrown out. We believe it is the wrong location for the village, not just for one or two reasons but for many reasons, all of which you will be aware of through our recent correspondence with BBC.

We have been trying so hard to communicate with our own Parish Council and have found this an incredible struggle, it's as if they don't want to talk to us, which as a relationship between a village and a village Parish Council we find completely bizarre. We continually feel as though the door is closed on us.

To summarise our situation with the current MENDP:

We are very uncomfortable regarding the site selection process, in the way some sites have had little reference even to a degree where they could even be classed as having been ignored, such as sites 678 and 907. You only have to read the site assessment report by Troy Planning and Design to see this.

We have had no virtual consultation meetings during the consultation period Nov to Dec 2020.

We have had incredibly limited communication with our Parish Council over the past few months and it is certainly not for us not trying. We have recently had what we considered an important Parish Council meeting (10 June 2021) cancelled which quite a few of us were planning on attending (by any means available) as we have time critical questions that need answering, as does the examiner as we see from publications on the BBC website. We keep hearing Parish Council meeting cancellation being blamed on covid restrictions but we feel at such a critical time in the process there are always ways around this, virtual meetings for example. The planning process continues and time milestones will still be reached.

We as a group would like to ask the Examiner the following questions:

1. We notice that responses to the 21 questions that have been asked have not been fully replied to by MEPC within the stipulated three week time period. Your letter, Mr Hogger, is dated 10 May 2021, and the responses from the Parish Council are not on the Bedford Borough Council website as of today's date 14 June 2021.

It is noted that, Mr Hogger, as the examiner has made the following request on the 10th of May: "In the interest of transparency, may I prevail upon you to ensure a copy of this letter and any subsequent response, are placed on the websites of the Parish Council and the Borough Council."

This has not been displayed on the Parish Council website. As a result, many residents of the village will be unaware that the examiner has questioned the site selection process and result, as detailed in point no. 14 of his letter.

This includes the plans for site 907 and a letter from the owner of Louis Park who says his representations to the MEPC have gone unanswered. Please advise what implications this will have on the time process for the MENDP?

2. Would it be in order to request from BBC or the Examination body a public hearing? There does not seem to be a precedent for this, however under the Covid restrictions we have been subject to no public meetings and villagers not knowing what sites developers have offered etc. We do not think it unreasonable to ask this especially as it is clear that the MENDP only offered one site and that no others were given satisfactory consideration.
3. The consultation with residents has been for a maximum of 25 houses which is documented in the MENDP, therefore this is the maximum number of houses that residents are basing their responses and decisions on. We have also noticed on other correspondence that the number of houses could be higher than this number, please clarify the intentions here. Does the Examination body have the authority to modify the plan to accommodate more than 25 homes? Would this be accepted in a referendum? Does the Examination body have the power to recommend other sites not previously offered?
4. DLP Planning Ltd (the agent for site 518) stated in its Regulation 16 response that:
"On behalf of our client these representations welcome the publication of the Submission Version of the Neighbourhood Plan for Milton Ernest. Having been involved in the various stages of the emerging Neighbourhood Plan, DLP are confident that the Plan's preparation has been undertaken against a robust evidence base, carefully considered by the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (NPSG)."

It is evident that this landowner has been involved in the NDP from the outset. Given the Regulation 16 response by Optimis Consulting (the agent for site 907, seemingly de-selected in a non-objective manner), this does not appear to have been an equitable arrangement.

5. The PC has advised us that they are consulting a contractor in order to answer the questions put to them by the examiner as a result of the Regulation 16 responses. In the interests of transparency, we would like to be reassured that this is not, for example, DLP Planning Ltd, but an independent party with no interests in the current NDP process. Can you please advise what is expected by BBC in terms of declarations of interest by all parties concerned and whether these are required to be made public?

We would very much welcome a meeting with BBC and the Examiner and we hope this can be possible.

Thank you for your time in reading our letter. We look forward to and appreciate your speedy reply as we all know time is of the essence.

Yours sincerely

On behalf of concerned residents of Milton Ernest

This letter has been emailed to:

clerk@miltonernest-pc.gov.uk

enquiries@optimis-consulting.co.uk

info@majesticare.co.uk