

Tue, Aug 3, 2021

Dear Chairman of MEPC,

I have submitted this request via the PC website in order that it is recorded via the proper channels but would like to give you the opportunity for earliest consideration, given the associated timescale pressures:

"I write with reference to the examiner's report on the submission version of the Milton Ernest Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP), recently published on the Bedford Borough Council (BBC) and Parish Council (PC) websites. In this report, the examiner recommends a number of plan modifications prior to putting the NDP to a village referendum. One modification is of particular concern, namely the examiner's request that the NDP stipulate a MINIMUM development of 25 homes at the Rushden Road site (518) proposed by the PC. This is in direct opposition to the wishes of the village as a whole (MAXIMUM 25 homes), as expressed in its response to the 2015 questionnaire and as subsequently and correctly detailed in the submitted NDP. The examiner's request is, frankly, unjustified. The BBC, in its published response to the examiner's question no. 7 on the NDP, stated clearly that development limited to just 25 homes would suffice as it "would not impact on borough wide housing needs". The robust defence of a maximum of 25 homes by the PC in its own response to the examiner is also both noted and welcomed.

I urge the PC not to succumb to external pressure in this matter but to maintain its stated position, representing the village as a whole and exercising control over development.

Could the PC please indicate:

- how it intends to respond to BBC in this matter (which of the proposed plan modifications does the PC intend to adopt?)
- the timescale for its response and
- whether additional written support from the villagers is considered beneficial?

Since timescales in preparation for referendum, and in particular potential modification of the NDP, will be short, I would appreciate a swift response to the above questions."

Kind regards,
Mr XXXXX

Dear XXXX,

Thank you for your email. Sue Bottoms did circulate your communication a little earlier today.

A very similar question has been raised by another resident and whilst answered earlier in the week, I also asked for a copy to be posted on the PC website for wider circulation. I understand that this request currently sits with the site administrator.

I will therefore replicate my response below and then seek to address your other questions.

The Neighbourhood plan is a tool engineered under the Localism Act. Neighbourhood planning gives communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape the development and growth of their local area. They are able to choose where they want new homes, shops and offices to be built, have their say on what those new buildings should look like and what infrastructure should be provided, and grant planning permission for the new buildings they want to see go ahead. This background is important, as without a Neighbourhood Plan all planning applications would simply need to comply with the Local and National Planning Policies. In effect, the local

community would have little say in what, where or how many homes were built within their community.

The Parish Council commissioned a local survey in 2015 that included a question to seek views as to the number of homes that the community thought should be built within the next 15 years. The largest grouping fell within the 11 to 25 banding, although at this time there had been no requirement by the Borough for any homes to be built.

You may recall that as part of Bedford Boroughs development of the 2035 Local Plan they determined a number of homes required to achieve their housing targets. Whilst this initially included the potential for new settlements, they later made the decision to shorten the lifetime of the plan to 2030, thus reducing the total of homes required within the duration of the plan. This process identified the resource levels of existing villages of a certain size and assigned a number of homes to be found within each parish. Milton Ernest was included within a group where between 25 and 50 homes were expected.

In recognition of the survey result the Parish Council focused on the lower end of this range and set to identify suitable sites that met the specified selection criteria and could accommodate a development of 25 homes. Throughout the process the steering group and Parish Council have maintained and defended this figure.

The Independent Examiners report made reference to the expectations of the advice given in the PPG, where it states that 'neighbourhood planning bodies are encouraged to meet their housing requirement and where possible exceed it'. This point was also raised by certain respondents to the Regulation 16 consultation process.

The Examiner went on to report that there is no substantive justification for referring to the 25 dwellings as being a maximum and that consideration may be given as to whether or not that figure could justifiably be exceeded, without harm to matters of acknowledged importance. Consequently, he concluded that the use of 'maximum, as used by the Parish Council, should be replaced with 'minimum'. Part of his reasoning concluded that by the use of 'maximum' the number could as easily result in less than 25.

You may recall that in reply to the examiner's questions (7) the Borough confirmed the allocation of 25 dwellings in Milton Ernest would not impact on the borough wide housing needs. They went on to say that the Local Plan 2030 assumed an average of 33 dwellings in the 8 villages which are to allocate 25-50 dwellings – some have allocated nearer the top of the range.

The Parish Council have resisted and will continue to resist, higher development numbers in favour of the figure presented by the majority of villagers. This position can only be sustained, however, within the framework of our Neighbourhood Development Plan.

(1/8/21)

The Borough has to make the decision on whether to proceed to referendum within 5 weeks of receiving the final examiner's report. They have already amended the plan with the majority of the examiners recommendations and are currently preparing the Executive report to proceed to examination. They have asked the Parish Council to address the examiners comments regarding mapping. A deadline of the 5th August has been given. The PC has already commenced this process, utilising the support of external consultants to ensure the required changes continue to demonstrate the necessary NPPF compliance.

I'm in the process of seeking clarity with the borough concerning the Reg 18 (publicity) phase and will update you as soon as I hear back.

As commented above, the PC remains committed to deliver on the plan and will continue to make every effort to meet its aims.

Best wishes

Chairman of MEPC