

Message sent on 21<sup>st</sup> July to our planning committee members following an urgent meeting of local parishes and one of their councillors.

Dear planning committee members

First of all I wanted to say thank you to everybody for your recent helpful and very supportive comments. It really is a huge help to know that I have your views and your backing, particularly over an issue which raised so many immediate questions, not least regarding the manner in which both developers and our local council had conducted themselves.

When I last wrote I included a document I had circulated to local parishes and Breckland Council regarding some extremely sketchy information that Bill Borrett had supplied to local parishes in his position as joint Breckland councillor for most of them, after he had met with developers regarding a scheme they intended to promote for some 10,000 new homes near County School. I indicated that I would be attending a meeting agreed to by Gordon Bambridge, the Breckland councillor who shares responsibility with Bill for the North Elmham area and said I would write afterwards if there was anything to report. I have however held back until there was some clarity on at least some of the questions I raised both during and since the meeting.

The document I sent to you was used to centre much of the discussion on and as Gordon Bambridge had promised he used the opportunity to determine local feeling ahead of other meetings arranged with the developers and the Conservative Group for Breckland the following day. There was not and still is not any date arranged for an open meeting at the council where this matter is scheduled to be on the agenda. Extreme concern was expressed about the whole way the issue had been dealt with by the developers and Breckland but as that had brought us to a meeting where we had almost no information whatsoever about the development proposals I am pleased to say that nobody leapt to take a stance either for or against it.

Gordon did not hide that he was as much in the dark as everybody else in the room but when asked how it had come about that the only information we had come from a single councillor agreeing to an unaccompanied, un-minuted meeting with developers regarding a multi-million pound development that is the largest ever proposed in Breckland and the first of its kind in Norfolk; It relates to a government scheme that has been in place for years but our local authority has no accessible policy or strategy agreed for dealing with applications and the one submitted has quite blatantly ignored the requirement for public engagement to be demonstrated throughout and from a very early stage. As that engagement had to be demonstrated in the application (expression of interest) by the developers, the only thing they could rely on was the meeting with Bill Borrett, who is the district and county representative of several thousand people.

Gordon explained that the developers had approached Breckland through the council leader, William Nunn to discuss their proposals and he had told them to contact Gordon and Bill as the ward representatives for the area. When they did that they all arranged a meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> July but inexplicably Bill met with them on his own on 10<sup>th</sup> July. Gordon

stated he was 'both shocked and upset' about that but was clearly not in a position to say anything further.

He did indicate during a discussion about the likelihood of things progressing and what timescale might be aimed at Gordon that 'There are a number of substantial Norfolk Figures Behind This' and gave it as his opinion that a likely development time would be 20 years.

There was a very clear disclosure by a representative of the Mid Norfolk Railway who explained they had been approached by Lanpro a long time ago with the proposal they would establish a passenger line from County School to Wymondham and clearly the intention was that the housing development would centre on this. Unfortunately Lanpro had been other than open with the MNR and had failed to provide any detailed information or answer questions. They had never seen any firm proposals and he doubted a passenger line of any practical use could be established to link with the main line. The MNR are concerned however that Lanpro may be able to establish a passenger line without the consent of the MNR, who have never taken a vote on the issue, their heritage status will therefore be lost and the MNR will fold. The reluctance to communicate has led to the suspicion the developers will use the railway as a device to achieve government consent for housing and once obtained they will drop the railway aspect of the development.

To ensure that Gordon took something specific from the meeting I suggested he should make clear to Breckland that they should debate the whole aspect of the government's scheme for garden towns and after a full public consultation establish a published protocol/policy for dealing with expressions of interest. In respect of this application they should not be constrained by the 'deadline' that Bill Borrett had informed us the applicants will respond by because the government had specifically ruled out any deadlines in its prospectus on the matter. The response they should provide for the developers to include with their submission to the government is that the proposal has been prepared without any regard to the requirements of the scheme and in particular had failed to ensure clarity regarding current and future infrastructure provision and any public or local authority engagement when these were prerequisites. The meeting agreed this but Gordon said he would not be acting for our parish as we were outside of his ward and we would have to approach our own district councillor.

As a result I made the same request of our councillor Robert Richmond and also asked him to request that Breckland explain why the meeting between Bill Borrett and the developers had taken place. Robert said that the only information he had was the information I had provided to him in the form of the discussion document I circulated but he forwarded the lengthy email I sent to him to William Nunn (the leader of the council).

That is about it with regard to the meeting but I should add that before it took place I had mentioned this proposed development in a letter I wrote to our local newspapers, about the road safety threat to our parishioner's lives on the Elmham-Dereham road. It was published on Thursday and may have catalysed some action because our council has moved with remarkable speed to respond to Lanpro and circulate their letter publicly. The response is attached (sent via Bill Borrett) and you will see that it includes a very clear indication that

Breckland will not be rushing to respond and they advise the developers they will be unable to do so until a clear picture of the provisions for existing and future infrastructure is available and an extensive public engagement (starting with parishes) has taken place...which the developers must lead.

In essence the council response has included all that our parish asked for in the things sent to William Nunn in respect of this particular proposal and although I would not wish to lower that positive message I think I have to comment that it is unfortunate Breckland could not have responded that way immediately and avoided the alarm they are responsible for creating in this whole area. That our parishes were kept in the dark by both the developers and Breckland, regarding a project that the government has insisted must be community led following public support and understanding and subject to consultation from an early stage, appears both unfathomable and unconscionable.

I hope that leaves you feeling you have been fully informed regarding what has taken place up to now. It is inconceivable that the developers will seek to submit anything to the government without demonstrable support of the local authority and community and if they did it is impossible to imagine how the government could even consider registering it when that support is demanded by the garden towns scheme.

For the sake of completeness I have attached the very full email that Gordon Bambridge has just sent to the parishes that he (and Bill) are responsible for.

This issue is in the EDP today and that may create a situation where planning committee members are asked questions so please refer people to me if you wish and of course feel free to contact me yourself if you need me to provide some further clarity. I would be very grateful for any comments you may have at any stage and I will, of course, let you have anything that comes my way regarding this issue as it unfolds further. I will not be able to write to the whole parish immediately but will do so at the earliest opportunity and I will be writing to Breckland to chase up the outstanding issues and offer some feedback after I have re-read their response a few more times; fortunately I will be able to provide considerably more clarity than when I first wrote to you.

Finally I am grateful to Danny for asking what should go on the website and would suggest that the document I sent previously and the two above should be included please so I can refer to them in the parish circulation I will send out.

Regards.

Trevor

N.B. A reply from Breckland is still awaited regarding an explanation of how they dealt with this matter and how they will develop a view which will inform how they deal with the whole question of Garden developments in the future.