

The Right Honourable Sajid Javid MP
Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government
House of Commons
London
SW1 0AA

Dear Mr Javid

I am Chair of Charfield Parish Council in South Gloucestershire, representing a village and parish of about a thousand homes. In 2013/4 the village was the subject of two large housing development applications for over 170 houses, which were allowed on appeal because of the lack of a 5-year housing land supply. These have increased the village size by 15%. Under the County's Local Plan, adopted only a few months before these applications were filed, our housing allocation was for 24 infill houses.

The village showed tremendous unity in arguing that the village was not a sustainable site for these houses, as we are predominantly a car-based dormitory village for workers in Bristol and Gloucester and have very little infrastructure. There was great disappointment that our village plan and our well-argued case against these houses failed to convince the inspector that harm outweighed benefit.

As a result, we were encouraged to embark upon the Neighbourhood Plan process, which we hoped would enable the village to retain some sense of control over future development and to restore some sense of confidence in the democratic process. .

We therefore started the Neighbourhood Plan process in January 2016. To date our Neighbourhood Plan is progressing on schedule and we are beginning to work on the actual draft plan following community engagement and consultation with residents and other local stakeholders. However we have struggled to understand how we draft a plan when one of the main policy documents, the recently adopted Local Plan that has to be our baseline, was firstly deemed 'out of date' and now will be totally replaced by the new West of England Joint Spatial Plan and a new South Gloucestershire Local Plan. The timeline for these (assuming all goes smoothly) is Autumn 2018. The consultation stage of these documents shows a housing allocation for our village of 1000 houses – effectively doubling the size of the village. This proposal was announced in November 2016 at a time when we were conducting a parish wide survey of the village for the Neighbourhood Plan.

We fully understand that our Neighbourhood Plan has to align with the unitary authority Local Plan. That Local Plan now also has to align with the West of England JSP. Neither of these is currently written or even available in draft form. We therefore have a relatively recent Local Plan that allocated 24 houses in our village and a new plan that is proposing 1000. This situation is already encouraging at least one developer to submit a planning application for another large development in the village despite a request by the Council to allow the strategic planning to proceed unhampered and we are aware that there are a number of other developers in advanced discussions with other land owners.

We seem to have only two options open to us, if we exclude the one of abandoning the project completely. We can produce a Neighbourhood Plan based upon the existing recently adopted but doomed Local Plan, which will have a very short and limited life and will require almost immediate substantial review or we can slow progress on our Plan in the hope that the new Local Plan and West of England JSP will appear on time, at which point we can direct our policies in the light of theirs. There are risks inherent in both options. To “go early” would be to spend all our energy in a short life document and have to revisit the whole process again. To delay would give a normal life expectancy to the document but would a) allow further uncontrolled development, assuming no worth in an ‘emerging Plan’ and b) may cause the Plan to fail at Inspection because of the length of process and the age of the data. There is also a problem with either option of our credibility with the residents of our village.

This is causing a crisis in the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and obviously severely undermines the whole concept of Localism. Other parishes in the county are watching this situation intently, making their assessments as to whether to embark upon an exercise that is extremely time consuming and demanding and with such uncertain outcomes or value.

The Neighbourhood Plan process is a relatively new one and it is being introduced at a time when the demands on the planning process are intense. Decisions by Councils, Planning Inspectors, yourself and the Court of Appeal seem to indicate that the process is still far from established and the laws governing this area are being introduced fairly regularly at the moment to address the inevitable problems of a fairly radical new process.

We have failed to find a similar example of our situation that shows us a way to progress in a proven and robust way. I am seeking what aid and advice I can bring to the Steering Group in the hope the project does not falter and fail at this important stage.

I am therefore writing to you as Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government for your advice and guidance in how best we can serve our community and provide an effective Neighbourhood Plan that reflects the best of sustainable development and localism.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Roshier', with a stylized flourish underneath.

Mark /\\ Roshier
Chair – Charfield Parish Council

Cc Luke Hall MP, Parish Clerk, Steering Group