

COUNCIL MEETING 18/12/14 NOTES ON LOCAL PLAN MATTERS

This is meant to be the season of goodwill, when even 100 years ago at the first Christmas of WW1 opposing armies stopped destroying all around them to exchange gifts and play ball.

There are parallels today with the situation we find ourselves in the towns and villages of Uttlesford. They have suffered from eight wasted years. We have just gone through two years of planning by appeal; a period when the common foe was developers who thought they could do what they wanted where they wanted.

So right now is the time for ALL councillors from every political persuasion to come together. WW1 lasted four years. We are half way through our own war with another two years to go.

In many ways the start of WW1 was a cock-up; it just happened but few saw it coming. It happened because monarchs and politicians weren't very good at talking to each other.

If we are to prevent our own war lasting beyond the forecast next one to two years everyone within the council and outside needs to be prepared to come together with a largely blank sheet of paper and redo much of the plan. It needs to be done without one tribe imposing its will on the rest. It needs to be done in a truly open and consensual manner. I for one don't want to see another four years of squabbling, distrust and accusation of political stitch up. Six years - like WW2 - of developer free-for-all is in no one's interest.

That is why this proposal/amendment is being made.

It calls for:

1. Cross-party consultation and co-operation,
2. For a new working group to be chaired by a person or persons who enjoys the confidence of the public by demonstrating independence from covert party influence,
3. Not only would there be membership from all groups within the council but also places in the membership would be made available for community representatives who are not councillors. There are many capable people out there. There are parallels with the way Neighbourhood Plans have to be developed. The final decisions rest with elected members, but members of the local community play an active and real role. We have to show we trust them if we want them to trust us.
4. A start could be made in January 2015.

I am not going to pretend that even setting up the group and agreeing who to co-opt will be easy. But it will be no good simply saying the new body will be held in public and members of the community can watch from the sidelines and occasionally be allowed to have their say.

That would be cosmetic involvement. Too often in the past leading Members have told council Officers behind the scenes what information they want them to bring into the light of day. We have to stop stitch-ups behind closed doors. Officers must be told they do not only have loyalty to one political party and that their job is to tell them what they want to hear so that the politicians can ram their preferences through working groups and cabinet.

Trust has to be rebuilt within the council and with the people of this district. A good start can be made tonight by this council agreeing to this proposal.

It gives **STRONG ADVICE** to the cabinet which **DOES** have the responsibility formally to establish the working group.

Agreeing to these principles does not require a Conservative group meeting in January to meet behind closed doors to tell people what they should believe in.

No one who wishes to retain or regain any credibility and trust in the eyes of the public following the planning earthquake of two weeks ago should be afraid to vote for this proposal.

The proposal/amendment sets some principles and leaves the detail to January. I urge you all to think of the Spirit of Christmas Yet to Come. Mr Scrooge told the spirit:

“I fear you more than any spectre I have seen. But as I know your purpose is to do me good, and as I hope to live to be another man from what I was, I am prepared to bear you company, and do it with a thankful heart.”

Well, Howard, I don't expect you to go so far tonight as to declare having a thankful heart, but I do urge you to follow me and my colleagues. Otherwise, I fear for Christmas 2016, whether I am sitting down here or peering down from the gallery.

Mr Chairman, I implore all Members to support the proposal/amendment.