

Dear Linda

First of all, my apologies for not responding to your email of 27 June seeking a meeting with me. To deal with that point specifically, I have been following the preparation of the new Local Plan closely and, of course, received your petition earlier in the year. I therefore believe that I fully understand your views on the proposed expansion of Princes Risborough and, therefore, I do not believe that a meeting with you would be of any benefit to either party.

Turning now to your concerns about the conduct of the two public meetings held recently. The District Council – both the Cabinet Member and officers attended at the invitation of the Town Council. It was the Town Council's meeting and therefore any issues you have with the conduct at the meeting need to be addressed to the Town Council itself.

Regarding your concern about the consultation on the emerging plan, you raised this point in your petition and I'm not sure there is much that I can add beyond the response we gave at that time. The Cabinet Report responding to your petition set out the exhibitions, public meetings, and the role of the Steering Group, in addition to the formal consultation that has taken place.

As I am sure you are already aware, the Feedback Reports on the formal consultation events are available on the WDC website:

- the Feedback Report published in October 2014 on the consultation on the Draft New Local Plan, which took place February - April 2014
- the Market Research published June 2014 which was carried out at the same time as the consultation on the Draft New Local Plan in 2014
- the Feedback Report published in November 2016 on the consultation on the Draft Princes Risborough Town Plan that took place February – March 2014

On the specific point you raise on the membership of the steering group, the Steering Group has periodically reviewed its membership and RARA, as a member of the Steering Group, was part of those discussions.

Finally, on housing numbers, you ask that David Johncock withdraws a statement made at the Cabinet meeting considering your petition "that the Steering Group had been fully consulted on the increase on proposed numbers." on the basis that you believe that this is misleading. We have no record that he made that statement, but, put in the right context, this is not misleading.

You also suggest that officers said at the recent public meetings that there has been no consultation on the scale of the town expansion, and residents had been only informed. This is not a correct record of what was said. There has been public consultation on the scale of growth.

To be fair, the process of plan making is complex, and I am sure you do not intentionally mean to mislead. So I would like to be clear on what has taken place.

The community, and the Steering Group, has been fully consulted, engaged and informed on the proposed enlargement of the town, since it was first put forward in the early spring of 2014, and at every stage the Council has sought to explain the constraints within which it will have to make the final choices for the Plan.

- The first formal public consultation, that took place in the early spring of 2014, included different scales of growth. This was the consultation on the New Local Plan Options Consultation Document. We had a working assumption that infrastructure provision may result in ‘trigger points’ that would indicate what scale of development was feasible, and we did not know at that time what other sites might become available in the District through the process of consultation, the Green Belt review, and other work on the plan. These were therefore ‘fair’ options to put forward.
- The majority of feedback on this consultation objected to substantial growth – as it did to a review of the Green Belt, and the release of the ‘reserve sites’ – other proposals in the emerging New Local Plan.
- Just prior to that consultation taking place, Aylesbury Vale District Council had had their plan rejected for taking a ‘localist’ approach, and failing to plan for sufficient housing growth. We made sure it was clear in the consultation that no or low growth within the District was not an option.
- We were also monitoring other local plan examinations, and it was becoming clear that those Councils that did not plan for their full ‘Objectively Assessed Need’ for housing (OAN), either within their area, or within the housing market area, were failing. This reinforced the view that we had to plan for growth.
- Around the time the consultation on the New Local Plan was closing, two court cases made the importance of planning for growth (specifically the five year housing land supply) very clear. This also emphasised the need to get a Local Plan in place, even if it contained unpalatable levels of growth, because without a Plan the Council would have limited control over where development would go. As a result later in 2014 the Council released the ‘reserve sites’ for development, despite the recent consultation indicating a high level of opposition.

- In September of 2014 we held an exhibition in Princes Risborough to help illustrate what expansion of the town might mean. At that stage we still illustrated different possible growth options, although the smallest option had fallen away. We knew at this stage that road capacity would be critical, and that if that was resolved, there would be no absolute constraint on the extent of development. But other factors were still unclear, so we retained 'mid-growth' options at this stage. We were in a similar position at the public meeting that was held in January 2015.
- The exhibition in the summer of 2015 only had the larger growth option. Our understanding of the central importance of the way OAN was being assessed at examinations was by this time much clearer, and – baring some evidence to the contrary – it was unlikely smaller options would be regarded as 'sound' by an inspector. Furthermore there were no indications from our ongoing work on assessing other sources of housing supply to indicate that the Council would meet its OAN – and as such it would not have 'choices' about where development would go. Any 'unmet' need would need to be accommodated by other Councils under the Duty to Co-operate, which in practice meant by Aylesbury Vale District Council. This likely shortfall against our OAN and the principle of Aylesbury Vale District Council accommodating unmet need was incorporated in a Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Bucks authorities in August 2015.
- About this time the Steering Group was established, and got to grips with the constraints under which the Plan was being prepared – those of the national planning context. Options for smaller growth were no longer available because of the emerging evidence, and the need to meet as much of our OAN as possible, given that the larger growth option remained sustainable development as defined by the National Planning Policy Framework.
- The Steering Group had many meetings in the autumn of 2015 on different topics. Housing numbers were discussed at the meeting of 30 Sept 2015.
- In the early spring of 2016 we consulted on the draft Princes Risborough Town Plan, with the larger growth scenario. It was clear at this stage that the smaller options were 'false choices'. We also made the Draft Sustainability Appraisal available for public comment, which assessed different scales of growth.
- The feedback on this consultation highlighted that there was public comment saying the numbers were too high and others suggesting numbers were too low (developers/other authorities).
- In the summer and autumn of 2016 we had a challenge from Aylesbury Vale District Council that we were not doing all we could to meet our own need. Aylesbury Vale engaged the consultants GL Hearn to assist them with this challenge. This included a challenge that Princes Risborough

could accommodate more housing than the draft Princes Risborough Town Plan was proposing. This reinforced the point that lower growth scenarios at Risborough were not an option, as Aylesbury Vale was not prepared to accept the additional homes that this would displace.

- The recent exhibition at the town fare, and public meetings, were to remind residents of what was being proposed in Princes Risborough, given that since the consultation briefings on Princes Risborough had been included in events for the whole district-wide Local Plan. These events were therefore for information – although clearly it is also ‘consultative’ as it provides an opportunity for feedback.

So from this you can see that we have consulted the community on the scale of growth, and that the Steering Group has discussed the constraints that lead to the larger expansion area being the only reasonable option. As you are aware, the Steering Group’s terms of reference include that it should aim to work under ‘collaborative dialogue’ rather than old-fashioned ‘decide announce defend’ – aiming to rise above consultation to collaboration. This requires everyone to put energies into finding realistic solutions within the given constraints.

The hard truth is that, the District is unable to meet our Objectively Assessed Need for housing. We are expecting the Council to be tested hard at the forthcoming Local Plan examination both by the development industry and indeed by the planning inspector to show why the Council cannot meet its full Objectively Assessed Need for Housing within the District. If sites meet the test of sustainable development – as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework – we are obliged to bring them forward for development. Both the Steering Group and the District Council have to operate within these constraints and we would be failing if we took any other approach full in the knowledge that the plan would fail.

I trust this deals with the issues you raise in your emails.

Dear Katrina

Further to my email of 27th June (reattached below), to which I hope you will shortly be in a **position to respond, we remain keen to discuss RARA's concerns and aspirations for Princes Risborough** in more detail and to provide you with a more balanced understanding of why residents here are deeply worried.

As you are aware, we recently presented a petition to WDC of approximately 4,000 signatures, 3,000 from the residents in Princes Risborough alone representing over 50% of the electorate of the area, regarding significant concerns over the scale of expansion and overwhelming evidence of lack of infrastructure to support it.

**Our concern has been exacerbated by the Public Meetings on WDC's Expansion Plan for Princes Risborough held on 13th and 20th July. The meetings were stipulated to be solely for residents of Princes Risborough. Accordingly, we did not bring our legal and planning advisors. However, WDC's full time professional planners (none of whom are resident) presented the case for WDC. The Town Mayor and Town Council Chairman, Matt Walsh (resident of Hazelmere) declined to minute the audiences' concern on this matter which we believe to be undemocratic.**

**The large majority of those attending the meeting were astonished with Councillor Turner's outburst of contempt for the Town's attempts to challenge WDC. Councillor Johncock did not engage at all.**

**This seems strongly at odds with the WDC's presentation which stipulated that the plan was led by empowering local people.**

Furthermore, only 6 town councillors of the current 12 attended and only 2 of the 3 District **Councillors were present. The meeting was surprised by Matt Walsh's comment that this issue was not of primary concern to residents whom he had spoken with and had canvassed. Tellingly, he declined to advise what the primary issues are for Risborough residents.**

As a former Town Councillor and now committee member of RARA stated in his open letter to PRTC **last week: "Both WDC and PRTC have abandoned 'Localism' and are telling the town to 'help fix the broken housing market' with an expansion plan for Risborough that is contrary to sustainable development, vague and lacking in any detail, detrimental (traffic especially) to the rest of the district and neighbouring districts (The Thames Valley, South Oxfordshire and Aylesbury Vale) and is overwhelmingly opposed (with substantive and evidenced reason) by the residents of Princes Risborough and its surrounding towns and villages"**

District Councillor Carl Etholen of Bledlow and Bradenham ward, raised the issue of the impact of the vastly increased traffic generation on surrounding areas. His very valid points were passed over by Councillor Walsh and not minuted. We find it extraordinary that valid concerns are omitted from being recorded.

The constitution of the steering group remains strongly of concern in that its composition does not reflect the **make-up of the town. After Councillor Turner's clearly demonstrated contempt of the Town's residents, it cannot be correct that he remains on the Steering Group.** We would welcome the opportunity to explore the Steering Group further with you. Perhaps a survey of the previous

and current Steering Group members to evidence the effectiveness of the Steering Group and engagement of members is now timely.

One of the issues which has been raised in all public meetings, Steering Group and David **Johncock's response to you and the cabinet on 8th June's debate generated by RARA's petition, was** that the Steering Group had been fully consulted on the increase on proposed numbers. **Wycombe District Councillors officers finally admitted at the 'public' residents' meetings last week that no consultation on this scale of development had taken place and the process has been 'to inform' the town residents only. This was due to 'circumstances changing' which had prevented discussion.** Whilst this might be the case, we believe Councillor Johncock and colleagues must publicly withdraw this misleading statement.

We are concerned that the recent public meetings and debate were purely being used as a tool to attempt to demonstrate to the inspector that consultation has taken place. This is clearly not the case and the attitude of Councillor Turner at the meeting demonstrates this.

We look forward to hearing from you regarding a more collaborative meeting and will be grateful **for your confirmation that this letter will appear on WDC's files which may be presented to the Inspector in the future**

Yours sincerely

Linda

Linda Cannon Clegg  
Chairman RARA