

**QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL**

**Question from Councillor Mrs P. Rainbow to the Chairman of the Homes & Communities Committee**

I'm sure that many Members will be aware of the recent flooding events in Southwell on 12/13th June, which affected a number of properties and required immediate and swift mobilisation of residents and flood risk responders from late at night into the early hours of the morning. Residents are understandably concerned to understand why and how this happened, and when flood defence measures will be completed in Southwell.

I would like the Chairman of the Homes & Communities Committee to set out their understanding of the reasons for the flooding, especially in relation to land at and around Springfield bungalow. Why did the flooding happen, what was done about it, and what will be done in the future?

I'm sure the Council agrees that completion of flood defence and resiliency schemes for Southwell remain critical and I'd also like to ask, therefore, whether we could seek certainty from Flood Risk Management agencies, notably the Environment Agency and Nottinghamshire County Council, as to when current flood defence proposals will be completed.

Finally, I would like to put it on record our appreciation for the help given by members of Southwell flood forum on the night, who undoubtedly saved properties from flooding. Until you have been flooded you cannot imagine the devastating effect it has on those families, we owe it to our communities to protect them.

**Reply from Councillor T. Wendels**

Thank you for your question. As Chairman of the Homes and Communities Committee, I share Councillor Rainbow's concerns regarding the recent flooding events and the continued lack of permanent flood protection in Southwell and other villages.

Specifically in relation to the flooding which took place on 12/13 June in and around Springfield Bungalow in Southwell, I am informed that the flooding occurred after the site had been stripped of topsoil ready for construction and as such there was no positive drainage on the site. The exposed subsoil layer of clay did not have the ability to absorb as much water as it would normally have done, leading to water flowing at a greater rate to lower levels. I am informed that the developer has now carried out temporary works to prevent a recurrence of the events on 12/13 June and the approved surface water design for the built development should prevent the problem recurring. I understand the County Council, as the Lead Local Flood Risk Authority have confirmed that the drainage solution will, in their opinion, adequately mitigate flood risk.

I agree that the completion of flood defence and resiliency schemes for Southwell remains critical and the District Council will continue to press the County Council as Lead Local Flood Risk Authority, the Environment Agency and other responsible flood risk management agencies to implement appropriate schemes as soon as possible and to provide certainty as to a timescale for the works.

I would like to add my thanks to the members of the Southwell Flood Forum, who worked extremely hard on the night and as Councillor Rainbow has said, undoubtedly saved properties from flooding. I am only too aware of the devastating effect of flooding on families, having suffered flooding to my family home in Lowdham a few years ago. I am also very conscious that Lowdham also suffered flooding again on 12/13 June with water ingress to the Magna Charta Pub and a number of roads and gardens and we will continue to press the Environment Agency to implement a permanent and effective flood protection scheme for Lowdham as well.

Whilst Newark & Sherwood District Council is not the responsible authority for flood defence schemes, we have over the past 5 years spent £21,350 on flood alleviation and defence work in the District, including works to defend Potwell Close in Southwell. We have also allocated £653,421 to Flood Alleviation schemes in Southwell and Lowdham. The District Council will be contributing £453,421 towards the Southwell Flood Alleviation Scheme. This is money we have secured from government grant (£233,421) and from the Council's reserves (£220,000).

#### **Supplementary question from Councillor Rainbow**

In follow up I would like to ask that you support me in requesting that planning officers make clear that at every stage of works developers take precautions to ensure the safety of the surrounding environment especially in relation to known flood risk areas. This will include enforcing planning conditions where appropriate.

#### **Reply from Councillor Wendels**

Yes, I will support this.

#### **Question from Councillor P. Harris to the Chairman of the Planning Committee**

Although a recent appeal against the refusal of planning permission in Hockerton was dismissed, there is a concerning paragraph in the inspector's letter about not having a numerical number of new houses for the villages. This presumption may mitigate other planning rationale for rejection of future plans for residential development in smaller villages. I would like to ask what plans there are for addressing this deficiency.

#### **Reply from Councillor R. Blaney**

I thank Councillor Harris for his question. The appeal decision to which he refers was for the erection of two dwellings to the rear of The Stables, Kirklington Road, Hockerton (ref

19/00041/FUL). This was refused by the Planning Committee following a site inspection on 5<sup>th</sup> March of this year, in accordance with the officer's recommendation. As Councillor Harris acknowledges, a subsequent appeal was dismissed on 1<sup>st</sup> July.

Indeed, over the past five years, the only two other appeals against refusal for residential development in Hockerton were also dismissed:

- For 6 new homes in March 2018 (ref 17/02139)
- For 4 dwellings in March 2015 (ref 15/00064)

So, the first thing to welcome is that this Council has an excellent record in resisting inappropriate development in Hockerton, as it does in similarly small communities across the District. Incidentally, Councillor Harris may not be aware that the applications subject of both this latest appeal and the one for 6 new homes in 2018 were actually supported by Hockerton Parish Meeting.

Turning to what Councillor Harris describes as a "concerning paragraph" in the Inspector's decision letter, this does state that the Council's planning policies – and I quote – "do not appear to set a numerical ceiling". That is a simple statement of fact, not that the Inspector believes our policies should or could set such a ceiling. Indeed, putting the statement in context, the Inspector's very next sentence reads "Furthermore, the government's aim is to boost the supply of new homes and significantly so".

Further, a second Inspector who examined our Amended Core Strategy DPD concluded that he would only find it sound if the Council made a Main Modification accepting that its housing targets in total and by settlement are not limits but are minimum requirements. This was agreed and formally approved at Full Council on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2019. In other words, even if it wanted to, this Council could not impose a numerical ceiling on housing development, whether in Hockerton or, indeed, in Southwell.

Spatial Policy 3 (Rural Areas) of the Amended Core Strategy allows for infill development of 1 or 2 dwellings in communities such as Hockerton. For a scheme to be considered inappropriate, there would need to be harm identified, such as location, character, impacts, etc rather than simply a numerical judgement.

In conclusion, as each application must be assessed on its own merits, I do not believe there is any cause for concern regarding the recent appeal decision – and I certainly do not accept that it implies a 'deficiency' in our planning policies. They have been found sound, are robust and are defensible and I do not consider any further action is necessary.

#### **Supplementary question from Councillor Harris**

I accept for the smaller villages there is the issue of sustainable development but is there an indicative number of houses which can be considered for small villages as part of the LDF process?

### **Reply from Councillor Blaney**

Effectively the target is zero in these areas as the Development Plan is clear in allocating new development in accordance with a settlement hierarchy, with small villages being at the lowest tier. That said, our policies do accept that zero is not a maximum. In the case of villages, some infill development may be acceptable where there is no other harm and where there may be a housing need (such as affordable housing). It is crucial not to stagnate some of our communities as some do wish to see development.