

PLANNING UPDATE

COUNTY COUNCIL'S FAILURE OF DEMOCRACY



Fury at the failure to uphold our Neighbourhood Plan

Morpeth Liberal Democrats shared the community's anger at the approval of the proposals for the County Hall site on 7th March. The decisions about the housing and retail park fly in the face of the Neighbourhood Plan and could have wide reaching implications for neighbourhood plans everywhere. Therefore, we and others have requested that the Secretary of State "call in" the decisions so they can be decided by objective experts and Morpeth representatives can have a chance to state their case.



Andrew Tebbutt with the protest

We believe that what happened at the Strategic Planning Committee meeting appeared politically orchestrated and members of the public were shocked by the failure of democracy. One resident said; ***"I have worked for various local authorities over three decades and I never came across a decision which was so openly perverse. To deliberately damage the economy of one area to the advantage of another so blatantly could be described as corrupt."*** Another resident said; ***"The standard of expertise and knowledge demonstrated by the Committee Members raises questions of credibility in the whole planning approval process."***

Can political parties make political decisions re planning applications?

It is in fact illegal for political parties to instruct their members to vote in certain ways in relation to planning applications, while those who have strongly held views before the meeting, are required to declare a prejudicial interest and leave without taking part in the debate or the vote. **Kirkhill Councillor Andrew Tebbutt's** views were well known, so he was instructed by the Legal Officer not to take part or even be in the room, so he resigned from the Committee to enable another councillor to take part. Others do not appear to have been so honourable. **Yet we know that the Labour Manifesto says that opponents to their plans for Morpeth just want the town "preserved in aspic", which, in our view, means that all Labour members of the Committee had a predetermined and prejudiced view.**

How did the Neighbourhood Plan Come about?

The Lib Dems have led the Town Council for 10 years and arranged for the Council to become a Frontrunner in the roll out of the Neighbourhood Plan process nationally. We involved many community volunteers and consulted with residents all the way through. Our plan passed referendum in February 2016 and in May 2016 came into legal force. It is therefore legal requirement that decision makers abide by the policies in neighbourhood plans unless there are significant reasons why not.

So, how come our plan has been set aside by County Strategic Planning Committee?

Unfortunately, the attitude in the County Council has been to find any way possible to misinterpret and get around the policies in the plan. The **Labour dominated** Planning Committee has supported/encouraged this approach e.g. Lib Dem committee member Andrew Tebbutt, the only Morpeth Councillor on the Committee, spoke passionately against the Mitford Estates application as it conflicted with our Plan, but was out voted.

Unfortunately, a move in Parliament to give neighbourhood plan qualifying bodies the right of Appeal against planning against decisions was **defeated by the Tory Government.**

Labour and the Tories between them have managed to reduce the impact of our Plan to virtually nil.

BUT, ALL IS NOT YET LOST!

Morpeth Lib Dems and others, including the South Morpeth Coalition, the Town Council and Dransfield Properties (who own Sanderson Arcade) have requested that the Secretary of State "call in" the decisions so they can be decided by objective experts and Morpeth representatives can have a chance to state their case. **Town Councillor Joan Tebbutt** has sent the SoS a pile of information re community opposition to the proposal, to add volume to the voices making this request.



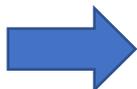
Alison Byard with the protest

Morpeth Town Council also requested that the Secretary of State issue a “Holding Direction” to prevent the County Council determining the applications. This has now been put in place. Apparently these Directions are not usually sent out except in complex cases. Hopefully this illustrates a certain level of concern that will lead to a call in. It may be that we will not hear what the SoS decides until after the elections on 4th May.

The possibilities are as follows:

EITHER

He decides not to call in the applications



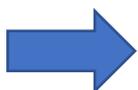
The applications are approved.



Judicial Review to be considered at huge expense

OR

He decides to call in the applications



There is likely to be a Public Inquiry and we will fight this, together.

Work has been ongoing and will continue.

Alison Byard was heavily involved in the Public Inquiry about the Barratts application in Stobhill, an application that was supported by Independent Councillor Ian Lindley. Alison has been a member of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and the Town Council’s Planning and Transport Committee.

Joan Tebbutt has been one of the lead members of the South Morpeth Coalition since it began some years ago, and fought two Public Inquiries over the Bellway applications in Loansdean plus the Public Inquiry re the Barratts application in Stobhill. She has worked for over four years on the Neighbourhood Plan, firstly as a community volunteer and later as Chair of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, to get the plan in place. She led a group of Town Councillors and residents to prepare for a Public Inquiry re Mitford Estates, but we were denied that opportunity. Joan has repeatedly tried to get the Labour leadership to engage with the Town Council over the County Hall site and always been rebuffed. She made two five minute speeches against the County Hall site proposals at the Committee on 7th March on behalf of the Town Council.



Joan Tebbutt reminding Cllr Davey about the Plan

Joan says; “My life has been the neighbourhood plan for over four years and I will continue to fight for it to be upheld. If we get to Public Inquiry I will work to help prepare our case. Together with others in Morpeth, Councillors and volunteers alike, I have worked hard to create this plan, whilst Labour and Tory candidates did little or nothing. All the public records of meetings demonstrate that to be factually correct. Yet Tories now pose at the front of the march and demonstration. They are good at that, but what relevant work have they done? I very much hope to be elected to the County Council to bring my knowledge of planning and understanding of neighbourhood plans to the County’s planning committee.”

If you want experienced and committed councillors who have proven records of working hard for Morpeth, then Vote Liberal Democrat on Thursday 4th May. We have all worked unstintingly for Morpeth & the people in the town.

Alison Byard
Candidate for Morpeth Stobhill

Andrew Tebbutt
Candidate for Morpeth Kirkhill

Joan Tebbutt
Candidate for Morpeth North