

Statement to Allerdale Local Plan Examination on behalf of Brigham Residents.

In Brigham there is widespread public concern over the large number of planning permissions and planning applications for housing development in advance of the finalisation of the Core Strategy / Local Plan.

These approvals/proposals relate to sites at Hotchberry Lane, Kirkcross, School Brow, Ellerbeck, Lawson Garth and some additional locations. The details including the numbers of units in relation to housing targets and existing village size are well documented on the planning applications section of the Council's website as are the representations and objections of very many individual households and those of the Brigham Parish Council.

The Inspector has called for brevity in statements and in accordance with her wish only the briefest summary of this widespread and deeply felt public concern is set out below:

1. The unsustainable scale of the proposals in social, environmental and economic terms.
2. The wholly disproportionate scale of these proposals to the size, character and function of our village and to identified housing need within it.
3. The continuing recommendations for approval of these proposals by the Planning Department in advance of the Local Plan due to a *laissez faire* interpretation of NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework) so that housing development in Brigham is not planned in any meaningful sense and the Core Strategy/Local Plan exercise is seen as a costly irrelevance by most villagers.
4. The cumulative damage of these proposals in terms of landscape impacts and damage to wildlife conservation and biodiversity.
5. The incapacity of infrastructure especially storm and foul drainage to accommodate the overall scale of these proposals.
6. The incapacity of the village school to accommodate increased pupil numbers and/or the unsustainable nature of the alternatives proposed by developers and the Council to 'bus' primary school children to town schools.
7. The severe road safety and traffic impacts of these proposals.

The Local Plan Examination would appear an opportunity to ensure that the future development in Brigham is more proportionate to the size, character and function of our village, commensurate with its needs and respectful of its character.

Having studied the Pre-Submission Draft of the Local Plan including the Council's proposed modifications it is striking that there is so much more with which to concur than with which to disagree. An excellent example of this is the Vision for Rural Areas at page 17.

“ Rural Areas – will be made up of thriving, sustainable communities with improved access to employment opportunities and greater diversity in the local economy. Availability of affordable housing will have increased and existing services will have been retained and in places enhanced whilst the quality of the local environment and biodiversity assets have been protected and enhanced.”

It is frankly impossible for Brigham residents to reconcile this vision with the reality that they see around them of more and yet more housing proposals, almost entirely speculative in nature and bearing no relationship to employment opportunities, diversity in the economy, need for affordable housing and the protection of the local landscape and wildlife.

Similarly the objectives at pages 24 and 25 are entirely laudable and would be welcomed by the community were the reality of planning decision making not the precise opposite ! viz. Objective 7 (re-use of previously developed land), Objective 9 (local distinctiveness), Objective 10 (Ecology), Objective 11 (Landscape Character), Objective 11 (Flooding) and Objective 16 (Minimising the need to Travel.)

It has been challenging to key in villagers' concerns to the Local Plan process in a constructive way. This is because whilst people's concerns have been well expressed in the case of representations on individual planning applications, the Local Plan Process is, by its nature more complex, bound by legality and national political direction. Nevertheless we believe that in relation to our village, Brigham, the Local Plan could be improved and made more relevant to people's concerns by taking greater account of Local Distinctiveness and Circumstances.

Possibly the fundamental source of the mismatch between public expectations of what an open, fair and balanced planning system should produce for Brigham, and the experienced reality of more housing development at whatever cost for its own sake, is to be found in **S1 The Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development** at page 22 of the document.

Hopefully, discussion in the Local Plan Examination will result in a re-casting

by the Council of Policy **S1** and possibly **S2** and other lower order policies to include references to proportionality, adherence to housing targets and identifying need to guide future housing development in Brigham. In short for the Allerdale Plan to be improved so that Brigham may benefit from good *Local Planning* taking account of local distinctiveness, needs and circumstances rather than being subject to slavish and unthinking adherence to national political direction which whilst in itself transient, will have great harm on the lives of villagers in the long term .

Other changes may be sought in the course of the hearings in response to an increased understanding of the Council's position and the contributions of other parties represented.

Roger Hopcraft

5th January 2014