

Letter from Margaret and Keith Turner to dave.hodgson@bedford.gov.uk; Dave@mayordave.org.uk; Craig.Martin@bedford.gov.uk; Gill.Cowie@bedford.gov.uk and copied to Richard Fuller MP on 30th May 2021

Dear Sirs

We wish to object to the proposed Dennybrook Village.

The Dennybrook Vision Document Is far from being visionary. This document is a rural nightmare which proposes creating Urban sprawl from beautiful North Bedfordshire landscape. Combined with the proposed Wyboston Garden Village this would not be a village but create a new town in Rural North Bedfordshire.

Honeydon is a small Hamlet on the Bedfordshire Cambridgeshire border. It comprises approximately 25 houses over half of which have been purchased by their current owners in the past 10 years. These are people who have chosen to live a rural life surrounded by farmland and nature. They are not people who choose to live in suburbia.

Honeydon floods regularly and this will be impacted by building houses and roads. Surface water will be unable to drain and will add to that which already finds its way into the brook and onto the road. This will increase the flood risk both in Honeydon (and further downstream in St Neots) and have impact on the state of our road. Our land, 6 acres of prime pasture, will be subject to flooding caused by development on arable fields adjacent to my boundary whose topography is at a higher level than mine

The roads in this area are narrow and in several places single track. They are not suitable for the increased volume of traffic caused by building this development. Neighbouring villages will also be impacted by the increased volume of traffic. Traffic making its way to the A1, Bedford or Cambridge will have to go either through St Neots or Chawston. Traffic travelling west will have to go through Bushmead and Thurleigh. These roads are already busy as the poor state of the roads in these villages shows.

There is no provision within the vision document for doctors, dentist, opticians, schools or shops so these facilities nearby will be overwhelmed. We already know the strains that Hinchingbrooke hospital is under and as the 2 main doctors surgeries for this area are over the border in Cambridgeshire this is the hospital which will be impacted most.

There is no mains sewerage supply to Honeydon but again in the vision document there is no reference to a sewage treatment plant that would be needed to serve the development.

This project will have a detrimental effect on this area of North Bedfordshire. We will see increased pollution from light, noise and traffic. Wildlife will suffer. The area is home to Barn owls, tawny owls and little owls. Skylarks grace our skies along with woodpeckers, Red Kites & buzzards. Kingfishers are seen on the reeds in the brook and our garden has had visits from wading birds: avocets and curlews. The hedgerows and fields are home to badgers, foxes, deer and hedgehogs and the grass verges are designated nature reserves where we see Bath Asparagus growing wild – one of the few places in the country this plant grows.

We understand that there is a need for housing and that as a county we have an obligation to meet. However, there are places much better served to fulfil this obligation than a greenfield site that does not have immediate trunk road links, that does not have easy access to amenities and which is a haven for wildlife.

In addition to my objections I wish to raise the point that some of the land offered up for this development is owned by the family of the County Councillor representing this ward, Tom Wootton.

As there is so obviously a conflict of interest here, can we please ask how this ward will be represented in council with concern for this development?

Yours sincerely

Margaret & Keith Turner

Response from Richard Fuller MP

Dear Margaret and Keith Turner,

Thank you for copying me in on your email to the Mayor and other Borough Council officials.

I will set out my views below but at the outset, please be aware that planning issues are formally a responsibility of local councils and not members of parliament and as a result, it is absolutely right that you should seek the views of the Borough Council representatives on your email.

I am aware that there have been proposals for developments at this site in the past. At the moment a vision document has been prepared by a developer which I assume is part of a marketing effort ahead of a future Local Plan insofar as this might influence Bedford Borough Council for inclusion of the site.

Your local Parish Councils and your local Borough Councillors in the areas affected will rightly be the first to respond. I acknowledge that in circumstances where there might be an actual, or perceived, conflict of interest for a Parish or Borough Councillor that he/she would recuse themselves from debate or determination and that this can cause a deficit in local representation.

For my part as your Member of Parliament, my focus is firstly on the impact of nationally set house building targets on communities across my constituency. These are crucial as my constituency is already growing at three times the national average: we are already doing our bit and a lot more.

Since the planning white paper consultation last summer (<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-for-the-future>), proposals on a new standard method for calculating housing need have been amended to refocus the current method on urban centres. The Local Housing Need will be increased by 35 per cent for areas with the largest proportion of the 20 most populated cities and urban centres in England. This is because urban areas already have better infrastructure in place, such as schools, shops and medical facilities, to support more residential development and population growth. It also makes good use of existing brownfield sites concentrated in urban areas while protecting our green spaces and countryside from development. Moreover, urban centres provide better access to sustainable forms of transport and contribute to our national effort to address climate change. Backed by £7.1 billion in public investment, the National Homebuilding Fund will also support brownfield remediation, regeneration and infrastructure delivery. These changes were welcome and as I indicated in my speech below, it is vital that all areas take their share of house building rather than it always being those which have already taken a significant share.

The above changes will have the effect of “re-pointing” future housing growth toward more urban areas but I accept that there is still work to be done to ensure that areas such as ours do not take disproportionate future housing when it has already shouldered so much of the housing need over recent years and when that need has not been met equally by neighbouring local authorities.

I have held discussions with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government with regard to the “Planning for Sustainable Growth in the Oxford Cambridge Arc” policy paper and I will have further meetings with regard to this both with them and local stakeholders. This is an early document and will lead to a public consultation as part of their plans to develop a Spatial Framework, so there will be plenty of opportunity for constituents to have their say - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/planning-for-sustainable-growth-in-the-oxford-cambridge-arc-spatial-framework>

As you may know, I have spoken out locally and in Parliament about house building targets and in particular, the need to ensure that each local authority takes its share of future house building, given that all local authorities do not start in the same place with regard to recent house building. I shall continue to support efforts to maintain the rural character of North Bedfordshire and to pressure

the government to ensure that housing targets are not excessive. You may have seen my speech in the House regarding the current house building targets - <https://www.richardfuller.co.uk/news/richard-raises-concerns-planning-reform-and-house-building-targets-debate>. Although the debate was over-subscribed which meant that there was a limit on the length of speeches, I hope that this is helpful in setting out my broader views.

Indeed, later today I have secured a debate in the House of Commons entitled “The effect of house building targets in North East Bedfordshire” and details of the debate will be posted on my website later today/tomorrow and you can also sign up for my weekly newsletter, which will include details – www.richardfuller.co.uk

I have also made representations to each of the councils in my constituency with regard to specific planning applications, which is an unusual step for an MP. Ahead of any formal development proposals being made in your area, I should outline that I have limited my interventions where the proposals are: a) large and b) where there is a common view against development from local Parish and Local Authority councillors. MPs do not have the powers unilaterally to stop developments.

Let me turn now to East West Rail, as that is also relevant. I begin by referring to the proposed route for East West Rail. The current proposal is for a route north of Bedford and then on to Cambridgeshire. An alternative route originally consulted on was south of Bedford via Wixams but this was not supported by the Borough Council. I refer to this, as the views of local authorities are very important in significant infrastructure developments such as East West Rail.

The Council’s response to East West Rail’s consultation in March 2019 stated:

“ The Council recognises that one aim of the EWR Central section is to support new settlements in the Arc (and for new settlements to enhance the case for the railway).

2.11 *During the preparation of its emerging Local Plan the Council recognised that it would be beneficial to allow the newly created and expanded communities to the south of Bedford to mature before introducing further change. This means that growth opportunities in Wootton, Shortstown, Wixams and Stewartby are limited for the duration of the Plan.*

2.12 *The Plan also considered the merits of four new settlement proposals, at Colworth, Twinwoods, Thurleigh and Wyboston. Whilst none of these has yet been allocated, it is likely that their promoters will submit them again to be considered for allocation in future plans.*

2.13 *The Council is committed to an immediate review of the current submitted Local Plan once it is adopted, so as to incorporate the new Standard Method of calculating housing need. Each of the*

potential new settlements, ranging in size from 4,500 to 10,000 dwellings, will be considered for inclusion in that Plan if submitted.

2.14 *Each site is to the north of Bedford and would be better served by a northern route for EWR through Bedford Midland, as would much of the development potential between Bedford and Cambridge. In the Council's view, therefore, there is little or no scope to count further development south of Bedford against the benefits of a southerly route for EWR. "*

East West Rail decided to adopt the northern route rather than the southern route. As a result, this will be influential in deciding future house building in the area. Indeed, I challenged the Special Advisors at the Department for Local Government and Housing to name another example of a country that has sought to gain economic advantage by connecting two universities. I am not aware of Harvard and Yale in the US suggesting this, nor Monash and Sydney universities in Australia. It has all the hallmarks of the musings and determinations of a disconnected technocrat and it is. The OxCam Arc is the brainchild of Lord Adonis and, sadly, has not been kicked into the long grass by either Mrs May or Mr Johnson's governments.

I will do my best as your MP to ensure that some sense prevails in this endeavour. For example, I have already hammered away at the ridiculous "one million homes" target set by Mr Adonis (a target now dropped) and at tempering the overall housing growth pressure on Bedfordshire. This constituency is already growing at three times the average. Sadly, Bedford Borough Council has (as set out above) already submitted plans that were highly influential in getting the East West rail line to go through and north of Bedford – opening up entirely new areas of Bedfordshire for housing growth.

The attitude of local authorities are crucial: for example, Buckinghamshire already got shot of Lord Adonis' super highway (so it will now run from Cambridge to Milton Keynes then turn into a standard one lane A road through leafy Buckinghamshire) and Cambridge district councils have protected mid Cambridgeshire from more housing pressure by ensuring the East West rail route goes north, through an area already earmarked for housing.

Perhaps to help put this into context, between 2012 and 2020, there were over 8,000 new properties built in Bedford Borough. That is just 2,000 short of the figure for the urban Milton Keynes local authority and just over 2,000 more than the South Cambridgeshire local authority area.

As I indicated at the outset, if there are specific proposals for this site, I will confirm my views at the time when the exact plans are known and when we have more than a "vision statement" but I hope that I have been able to provide an indication of my views and my willingness to stand against development where it does not command local support and is not supported by local representatives.

Thank you for getting in touch.

Sincerely,

Richard Fuller MP

Member of Parliament for North East Bedfordshire