

Address to Alton Town Council on behalf of the Holybourne Village Association

Me – former Mayor, raised family in Alton, served for 16 years as a Town and District Councillor and have taught for more than twenty years in the town. A man of Alton by any measure. But also Chairman of the Holybourne Village Association. A village – but a part of Alton and where the village wants to be. It brings a unique village setting to the wider conurbation of Alton. Altonians make much use of the village for walking, (with and without dogs) cycling and enhancing their own wellbeing in a very rural setting. The village now provides the only formal Fireworks display in the town which has become hugely popular with people who live in the town itself.

One thing you may not be aware of is the Concordat with Holybourne – in return for not seeking parish status. In return, a commitment from the Town Council to do all that is could to support the development and special nature of Holybourne. So we felt an acute disappointment when we learned from the would be developers that they have been speaking to the Town and District councils and the Alton Neighbourhood plan group and had kept the village completely in the dark about it.

So why am I here tonight? You won't be surprised to learn that it is to ask for your help and support, what the Town Council committed to all those years ago. We are facing an existential threat in the form of a planning proposal to build more than 220 houses in the village. Currently there are about 650 houses in the village. The land on which the proposal is based has not been included in the EHDC's first draft of the Local Plan and we want to ensure that it is not included either in the Alton Neighbourhood Plan. We have been hamstrung in our efforts to the threat of overdevelopment however by the secrecy with which the ANP have surrounded their work. I can understand why they would do this but it completely contravenes the Government's advice on how Neighbourhood plan groups should work.

Paragraph: 015 Reference ID: 41-015-20160211

What is the role of a parish or town council in neighbourhood planning?

The terms of reference for a steering group or other body should be published and the minutes of meetings made available to the public.

Clearly the ANPG has not done this and we would request that Alton Town Council immediately rectify this. However.... Just in case the ANPG is reluctant to follow your instructions I would refer you to a legal precedent which I have supplied to our local Town and District Councillors prior to this meeting. In the ruling of the FoI Office, Goring on Thames Parish Council were required to supply details of all communications by their agents (the Neighbourhood Planning group) which had passed between them and any external agencies.

I would ask you to instruct the ANPG to supply all that I have asked for in the list that I am now passing on to the Mayor. I cannot see that given the precedent and the Government's own instructions, you have any choice.

What I am sure no one in Alton wants is to see houses built on greenfield sites immediately adjacent to current dwellings. I am not talking only about Holybourne but Windmill Hill and land up the Old Odiham Road. There is no need for any of these sites to be nominated by the Neighbourhood Plan if sites identified in the Local Plan are accepted, but nomination will serve as an open gate to developers. Sensitive densification of town centre sites such as car parks and development of other sites identified in the Local Plan will meet our needs. It is not necessary to destroy what we already enjoy.

Alton Neighbourhood Plan(ANP)

We note the ATC statement published in the Alton Herald that the ANP steering group is “by the people, for the people”. It is indeed vital the public have confidence in the ANP steering group (ANPSTG). This document is to request formally full transparency for the work being done by The ANPSTG, ATC and any consultants.

We note the following:

The former Town Clerk is now employed by the consultants working for ANPSTG. Transfer of employment took place during the formation of ANP. ATC officers have recommended ATC should approve further funding for these consultants to respond the EHDC local plan.

At the September public consultation the chairman of the ANPSTG gave a presentation where he said the ANP were “further ahead” of EHDC in their process. He also said that ANPSTG would recognise, democratically, the opinions voiced at that public consultation.

The EHDC local plan consultation is proceeding with a 700 house “hole” in the Alton allocation. Altonians are being asked to respond to an incomplete picture. It would have been useful for the public to have the complete picture when responding, particularly since ANPSTG were well advanced with their process.

To maintain confidence in this process, ATC and ANPSTG, we request ATC release the following to the public:

1. An overview of the how ANPSTG works, the committee, the consultants, the “executive” and how it reports to ATC
2. Full minutes of all ANPSTG meetings.
3. Full details of funding of external consultants to assist with ANP. Details of how such consultants were selected and the alternatives that were considered.
4. All correspondence between property developers and ANPSTG members, the ANP consultants and ATC officers.
5. All correspondence between ANPSTG, ANP consultants, ATC and EHDC council and EHDC planning officers.
6. The terms of reference of the Alton Neighbourhood Plan group.

Freedom of information decision

Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR)

Decision notice

Date: 13 September 2018

Public Authority: Goring on Thames Parish Council

Decision (including any steps ordered)

1. The complainant has requested that the Goring on Thames Parish Council provides copies of email correspondence between a volunteer working group and a private company, carrying out work relating to the development of the Goring Neighbourhood Plan. In addition plans, drawings or proposals submitted to the Goring Neighbourhood Plan steering group or sub-group were requested.
2. Goring on Thames Parish Council disclosed some of the information requested but stated that the email correspondence was not held in its own records.
3. **The Commissioner's decision is that that under regulation 3(2)(b) of the EIR, any information falling within the scope of the request, that is held by the volunteer working group, is held by the council.**
4. The Commissioner requires Goring on Thames Parish Council to take the following steps to ensure compliance with the legislation:
Confirm or deny whether any information is held and issue a fresh response that complies with the terms of the EIR.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/neighbourhood-planning--2>

"What is the role of a parish or town council in neighbourhood planning?"

In a designated neighbourhood area which contains all or part of the administrative area of a town or parish council, the town or parish council is responsible for neighbourhood planning. Where a parish or town council chooses to produce a neighbourhood plan or Order it should work with other members of the community who are interested in, or affected by, the neighbourhood planning proposals to allow them to play an active role in preparing a neighbourhood plan or Order. ***The relationship between any group and the formal functions of the town or parish council should be transparent to the wider public.*** A parish or town council may choose to establish an advisory committee or sub-committee under section 102(4) of the Local Government Act 19723 and appoint local people (who need not be parish councillors) to those bodies. Members of such committees or sub-committees would have voting rights under section 13(3), (4)(e) or (4)(h) of the Local Government and Housing Act 19894 . ***The terms of reference for a steering group or other body should be published and the minutes of meetings made available to the public.***"