

Alexander Stafford MP
Member of Parliament for Rother Valley



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA



Ms Sharon Kemp
Chief Executive Officer
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
Riverside House
Main Street
Rotherham
South Yorkshire
S60 1AE

Our Ref: AS10402

11 January 2021

Dear Ms Kemp

Re: Land South of Lodge Lane, Dinnington (RB2020/2048)

I am writing on behalf of my constituents in Dinnington and Rother Valley, to object to the planning application for the erection of 151 homes on land South of Lodge Lane, Dinnington (RB2020/2048).

I am sure that you are aware of the history of this land, and as such, I ask that Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council acknowledge that the people of Dinnington do not want this land to become a private housing development. The recreational grounds on this land have been a cherished part of the local community since the 1920s, funded by contributions by the miners.

Many local residents have questions about how this land, the Miners Welfare Recreational Ground, an integral part of the local community for so long, has been allowed to become run-down and now planned to be used for housing.

Questions that my constituents and I want answering are:

- Why was this land allowed to be reallocated as land suitable for housing, when it seemingly contradicts Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council's Core Strategy Policy CS 19 'Green Infrastructure' confirming that *"Green Space, will be conserved, extended, enhanced, managed and maintained throughout the borough"*?
- The Dinnington Neighbourhood Plan states *"[the] wish for sustainability has led to differences in attitude towards the utilisation of Green Belt land and brownfield areas that continue to be a point of contention between Rotherham MBC and Dinnington Neighbourhood Plan Group."*

The Plan further states that: *"It should be noted as part of the development of the Plan the Town Council did put forward alternative housing sites to be considered as part of the Local Plan process to those listed above. These the Steering Group considered provided better more suitable and sustainable locations elsewhere in Dinnington which could accommodate all or most of the housing growth planned for it. Further, as many of these alternative sites utilised brownfield, vacant or under-utilised land this would minimise (or indeed avoid) the need to build on greenfield sites in the Green Belt. It was determined through the Local Plan process that Dinnington's housing provision was best met through the sites [listed above in Plan]."*

How and why did RMBC planners determine that the brownfield sites put forward by Dinnington St John's Town Council, would not be able to meet the housing growth requirements?

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- The National Planning Policy Framework states that strategic policies should use as much previously developed land as possible. Why was RMBC's approach to allocating Green Belt land around Dinnington for housing purposes, when the Town Council were satisfied that brownfield sites could meet the housing allocation needed?
- The NPPF states that exceptional circumstances must exist to justify changes to Green Belt boundaries and that all other reasonable options for development must be exhausted before green belt development is considered. The Town Council say that this is not the case, so what analysis was done by RMBC to justify this decision?
- What process did RMBC follow in choosing former Green Field sites in Dinnington, including the former Welfare Recreation Ground, for housing? There are many fields and green spaces surrounding Dinnington, why was the Recreation Ground seen as the most ideal? Should, or could, this process be re-examined?
- What analysis and study carried out by RMBC has shown that this recreational ground is surplus to requirements?
- How can any decision be made on the loss of playing fields without RMBC at first writing and researching a playing field strategy, to measure the current and likely future demand for pitches for various sports?
- Has Sport England been asked to provide comment in their statutory consultee role in protecting playing fields and the presumption against the loss of playing fields?
- Should/will the central issue in considering the principle of the development in this location centre around the allocation of the site as Green Space where the NPPF and local planning policy SP38 only allow the loss of such a site where... *'the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location'*?
- Policy H1 of the Dinnington Neighbourhood Plan states: *"In order to help meet the present and future needs of all residents of the Parish, new housing development proposals, should...c) ensure that at least a third of new homes in a development of more than ten dwellings should have one or two bedrooms and no more than 50% of new homes should have 4 or more bedrooms to redress the shortfall of smaller houses available locally, subject to review and monitoring."*

Policy H1 is clear in the need to ensure that 33% of homes will be either one or two bedroom properties. The proposed amount of two bed-roomed homes on this development is 12.6% (and, as a side note, on the proposed 286 development in Throapham (RB2020/1346) it is 12%), there are no one-bedroom homes. Will RMBC ensure the Neighbourhood Plan Policy H1 be taken into consideration and given appropriate weight when determining this and other developments in Dinnington?

I have often seen this land referred to as either abandoned, overgrown or disused in media reports. It must be clearly pointed out that this description does not make it clear that the current state of the land is not what the community wanted. The people of Dinnington fought against the abandonment of the site; but, have been unable to get control of the land back. They have been told that the land didn't belong to them, the miners and past generations who'd founded it, paid for via members fees, who'd maintained it for decades – they found that it belonged to the charity (CISWO),

a charity they believed was set up to 'watch over it' and preserve it for future generations.

Dinnington St John's Town Council, local residents and former miners, have fought for this site to be listed as an Asset of Community Value. Initially this was successful, but overturned on appeal by the property owners in 2014.

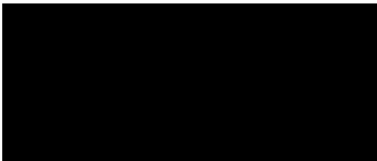
The Town Council have continued to vocally object to the development of this site. The Dinnington St Neighbourhood Plan states: *"The consensus is that it should be retained as green space, and legal and other measures beyond the scope of the Plan are being taken to ensure this. Should it be necessary for the site to go forward as a housing site, residents consider that at least 40% of the site should be retained as green space."* As highlighted above, they tried, unsuccessfully, to include brownfield sites into the Local Plan instead of this land. I strongly believe that Parish Councils are best placed to know and represent their local communities.

The consensus of the community is to continue to make use of this land for recreational use. They strongly feel that the lack of maintenance and upkeep of the recreational facilities was a deliberate decision to run-down the facilities to enable the future sale and development of the land. Whilst I cannot comment on historic meetings and decisions made; it is clear that the sale of former miners' recreational grounds and/or facilities is all too common a battle here in Rother Valley and elsewhere in the country, between former mining communities and the land owner.

Many residents do not believe CISWO have acted in the interest of the former miners and mining community in respect to this land; they now want their Local Authority to stand up and protect their assets for future generations.

I look forward to your response and to inclusion of my objection on to the planning portal.

Yours sincerely



Alexander Stafford MP
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