

Mr A Mangnall, MP
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

By email only: anthony.mangnall.mp@parliament.uk

25 September 2020

Dear Mr Mangnall MP

Planning for the Future, White Paper August 2020

I am writing to you on behalf of Thurlestone Parish Council to express our concerns about the future of neighbourhood plans as set out in the Government's White Paper.

We are concerned that neighbourhood plans have been marginalised and that the opportunity for communities to shape and have their say on local planning matters is to be removed. Neighbourhood planning has been one of the most transformative community powers introduced through the 2011 Localism Act, yet it is now being brushed aside for no reason.

The **Thurlestone Parish Neighbourhood Plan** was made (adopted) in July 2018. It was supported by 92% of those who voted and the turnout was 60%. This was one of the best mandates for a neighbourhood plan in the country. It is hard to imagine a better example of community engagement and this has been endorsed by residents and other neighbourhood plan groups, as well as Historic England and the South Devon AONB Unit.

We are proud of the fact that we have found a way through the existing plethora of planning legislation and guidance to find a framework for the future sustainable development of our parish for up to 2034. We have spent £12,000 of government funding and incurred many hours of volunteer time over a 3-year period.

Whilst we appreciate the frustration that the government faces in terms of its housing targets and inherent complexities in the existing planning system, we trust that areas that already have neighbourhood plans are able to continue to maintain them. In the planning world, there is no "one size fits all" and to discard the years of work that have been contributed by neighbourhood plan groups throughout the country is not the solution to the present housing crisis.

To have neighbourhood plans simply focus on design would be over-simplistic and would not address local issues. The main objectives of our own neighbourhood plan are to tackle the second home issue and our demographic imbalance: 39% of dwellings in our parish are second homes and 43% of the population is over-65.

Neighbourhood plan policies help shape places at the local level and bring forward development that the local community want to see. Our policies are not limited to design, they deal with housing, the local economy, wellbeing, heritage, the environment, infrastructure and resources. These policies are aimed at supporting

year-round sustainable development that will enable more young people to live and work here. We also have a neighbourhood plan committee to monitor the performance of our neighbourhood plan and to recommend to the parish council whether individual applications comply with the neighbourhood plan.

Our aim is to help deliver sustainable development whilst protecting the environment, since our entire parish is in the South Devon AONB, including the South Devon Coast Heritage Coast, and most of the parish lies within the Undeveloped Coast. We now have a night landing site for Devon air ambulance and 22 non-designated heritage assets, and we are currently collaborating with our local planning authority, SHDC, to bring forward a community-led housing site that will enable six local families to get on the property ladder.

The evidence base of every neighbourhood plan made to date is a valuable source of local information. With hindsight, it is agreed that standardised templates may have been helpful, but the evidence generated comes from the neighbourhood area not from the district or county councils, or central government. Neighbourhood plans are 'bottom up' not 'top down', as proposed in the White Paper, when it refers to the government wanting to consider "*whether their content should become more focused to reflect our proposals for Local Plans*". Neighbourhood plans are, of course, already in general conformity with Local Plans.

We are also sceptical as to how digitalisation and the PropTech sector would assist communities like our own. There are many elderly people who do not use personal computers. As an example, we recently conducted a paper survey to sound out local residents in respect of a suitable site for community-led housing: 418 leaflets were distributed in the community newsletter and 102 responses were received. In this way, every permanent household in the community received a copy and had the opportunity to be involved. People were able 'to have their say' and the whole exercise cost £150 in printing and stationery.

We would like you to raise our concerns with The Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, and raise questions in Parliament to request clarity about the implications of the proposed planning reform on neighbourhood planning and to seek reassurance that the current neighbourhood planning regime will remain.

Thank you for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Sue Crowther
Chair, Neighbourhood Plan Committee
Thurlestone Parish Council, Devon

cc Ward Cllrs Judy Pearce and Mark Long (by email)