

Motions (2)

The following Motion was submitted by Councillor Mike Hewitson:

Opposing the Government's ill thought-through proposals for Planning

Council notes the publication of the hastily put together Government Consultation: Planning for the Future.

These proposals will deprive communities across South Somerset of their already limited ability to have their say on contentious planning matters. This is anti-democratic and unworthy of even this Government.

With 9 out of 10 Planning Applications already receiving approval, this White Paper will not address the principal obstruction to building more houses: the failure of developers to build out their approvals.

The Government's own assessment is that these proposals could lead to a 20% reduction in the delivery of affordable homes. This will make it more difficult for our essential keyworkers to put down roots in our communities, and nullifies the tremendous efforts they have made during the Coronavirus Crisis.

The 'temporary' increase in the threshold for Affordable Housing for small sites, from 10 up to 50 homes, will mean that rural communities in South Somerset could be overwhelmed as developers race to beat this deadline.

The environmental proposals are at odds with the Government's and our recognition of a Climate and Ecological Emergency and jeopardises our rich habitats and biodiversity by using greenfield sites and watering down impact assessments. This is not progress. This will spoil lovely South Somerset.

Proposal:

Council therefore resolves to:

1. write to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and to our local MPs to express concern over these proposals;
2. reflect the strength of concern across the Authority in its official consultation response;
3. highlight South Somerset District Council's concerns over these proposals with the public at every suitable opportunity;
4. provide Councillors with an update on the progress of these proposals at regular intervals;



South Somerset District Council

5. work with partner organisations such as social housing providers to understand the impact of these proposals on the delivery of affordable housing in South Somerset;
6. work with partner organisations such as Somerset Wildlife Trust to understand the impact of these proposals on our biodiversity and habitats.

Background Information

Planning for the Future proposes to:

- Reduce the input of local communities in planning decisions by limiting this to the Plan Making Stage.
- Promote the densification of existing settlements.
- Make environmental impact assessments “quicker and simpler”.
- Create a “one-size fits all” approach to planning policy, removing flexibility from Local Authorities to write their own planning policies.
- Remove from Local Authorities the ability to seek local agreements from developers towards the cost of infrastructure and replace this with a new Infrastructure Levy which is set by Central Government.
- Penalise Local Authorities who fail to determine applications within Statutory time limits.
- Increase the threshold on Affordable Housing for small sites from 10 to up to 50 homes.

The impact:

- Less democracy in local decision making. At present, South Somerset District Council receives thousands of contributions on Planning from local residents and communities.
- Playing fast and loose with the planet. Given our declared Climate and Ecological Emergency, which calls for radical action to reduce the impact of human behaviours on our planet, the proposal to make environmental impact assessments “quicker and simpler” is at odds with the need to make meaningful and sustainable change.
- Jeopardising investment in our communities. Since 2010, South Somerset District Council has raised more than £9m from developers in Section 106 contributions which have supported the building of community assets such as swimming pools, play parks and village halls. In my own Ward of Hamdon, s106 has brought in more than £150,000 in the last three years, delivering a well loved adventure playpark, and improvements to village halls and environment.
- These have gone directly to local communities. S106 has also helped to deliver a gross contribution of more than 2,600 affordable homes in South Somerset since 2006, and 49% of all affordable homes nationally. The proposal to replace this with an Infrastructure Levy, set by Central Government could risks halting the investment in our communities which we have been successful in delivering.
- Threatening to sanction Councils for failing to deliver a new Local Plan in a mere 30 months.
- Up to a 20% reduction in the number of Affordable Homes by the Government’s own estimates