



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

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9 February, 2017

Dear Nigel,

Thank you and your colleagues for taking the time to meet over the issue of housing in the Green Belt in North Somerset. We discussed the issue of the Ashton Vale proposal and I promised to send you my thoughts. I note that a number of arguments have been put forward to support the proposal which might seem superficially attractive but I believe that they are deeply flawed.

Green Belt

The argument has been put that because the Green Belt already is under pressure from development in Bristol that it should be either diminished or removed. This is to fundamentally misunderstand the nature of the Green Belt which is precisely to provide a barrier between urban development in the city and North Somerset. There is also an argument being made that suggests that if North Somerset housing numbers were accommodated to a large degree by the Ashton Vale site, then it would reduce the pressure for development in other parts of the district.

I believe this is also a flawed argument and highlights a further problem in the house planning procedure. If developers do not build all the houses for which they have permission on a given site, it is highly likely that the Council will be deemed to have failed to provide adequate housing numbers (despite the fact that they themselves are not the providers). In these circumstances the Council is likely to have to add the unpledged numbers to their rolling five year target which then increases the likelihood of further sites being given outline permission. The Council then finds itself in a Catch 22 situation. I do not believe, therefore, that giving permission for the Ashton Vale site would diminish the pressure elsewhere, but merely increase the long term risk of full development at Ashton Vale as well as further housing developments in other parts of North Somerset.

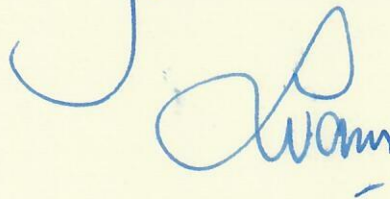
Cllr Nigel Ashton



Depending on the type of housing built, it could well be that North Somerset had increased costs for education (including transport costs) as well as social care budgetary commitments. It is unlikely that the Council Tax that could be levied would cover these and the burden would fall on existing council taxpayers. It is for these reasons that I believe that the current Ashton Vale proposals are quite unacceptable.

Since our meeting the Government has published its White Paper on Housing and has proposed new powers for local authorities to deal with the issue of developers who fail to build out permissions. This is extremely encouraging and I hope in time the Council will be able to use such powers to ensure that we have a planning, not development, led housing strategy.

I am copying this letter to the relevant Councillors and Parish Chairs.

Yours sincerely,


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