

Yvonne Parker  
Programme Officer  
Pendle Core Strategy Examination  
Town Hall  
Nelson  
BB9 7LG

20<sup>th</sup> March 2015

Dear Ms Parker,

I am sorry to hear about Mr. Thomas's illness and hope he makes a speedy recovery.

### **Procedural and overarching matters**

I speak as someone who is passionately interested in the future of Pendle, and who has wished to participate in all stages of the Core Strategy. But I feel frustrated by my attempts to make any impression on its course, and angry that so many people who would like to have made their views known did not even hear about the Core Strategy and its implications in time to respond. I am also annoyed that I have had to use so much of my time in responding to this document and have even, at times, had to put my life on hold in order to research the masses of information contained within, and cross-referenced by it.

I do not believe that the necessary procedural requirements have been carried out in the development of the plan.

Point 1.2 of the SCI refers to the Council's involvement with the local community and states that, if carried out correctly, community involvement can 'help to provide a greater sense of public ownership....strengthen community cohesion and promote a sense of social inclusion...draw upon public knowledge and prioritise the public's aspirations...promote a commitment to change through joint working'. It says that the new planning system 'is intended to be more transparent, more accessible, more accountable and more participatory. There is little evidence of this. I, and the local people I have spoken to, feel alienated and excluded by the consultation process. The Core Strategy documentation is unwieldy and difficult to access. Representation forms have been prepared in such a way that comments can be easily analysed and filed by the officers, but are too technical for members of the public. Those representations from the few local people who did feel able to take part have been largely ignored.

By October 2011, the council were saying that over 3500 individual comments had been made. But these comments included the huge input from developers and organisations. In addition, the figures do not indicate the total number of respondents. Since most of the letters contained several comments, and some contained many points, the actual number of participants was far lower. If these responses are analysed, a far less rosy picture emerges.

Most of the responses of the public have been merely noted, with no further action recommended by the officers. A few minor points have been altered, but the main thrust of the document remains the same.

Council minutes over the past few years contain plenty of evidence of strong and widespread opposition to any threat to the countryside. It would therefore be reasonable to expect that the Core Strategy, with its call for an allocation of many of the green fields around Pendle, particularly around Colne, for housing and industrial development, would be vigorously responded to. Yet it has not: representations from the public are few. The problem with the way the Core Strategy has been presented to the public is that these significant threats can only be identified if a great deal of time is taken to sift through the information. Localised maps are tucked away in appendices. Facts and figures are scattered throughout the documents and it is difficult to make sense of the whole.

The council knew that it was not reaching the majority of the population, but did not change its tactics over the whole of the consultation period. There was a chance, in 2007, to build on the success of the 'You Choose Campaign': representatives from community groups were invited to attend meetings and 112 of these people commented on their vision of the future of Pendle. It is striking to see how many comments were in support of the re-instatement of the Colne to Skipton railway, the regeneration of terraced housing and mills, the use of brownfield sites for new developments, the protection of our countryside and heritage, and the promotion of tourism. There were no calls for the development of greenfield sites and few supporters of the bypass. Their comments were tabled, but do not seem to have made much impact on the substance of the Core Strategy, which proposes many hectares of greenfield land for housing and industrial allocation, and makes no proposal to prioritise the hundreds of brownfield sites of Pendle. In addition, there does not appear to have been any effort made to involve the communities who were represented.

According to 4.21 of the SCI, 'As representatives of their local community, Pendle's 49 ward Councillors and the Member of Parliament have an important role to play in acting as a channel of communication between the public.' The ward councillors and the MP could have been excellent intermediaries between the council and the public. They are in constant contact with the council and with their constituents and have had ample opportunity to acquaint themselves with the issues that are relevant to their communities and to explain them to the public. Unfortunately, this has not been the case. The councillors and the MP have not attempted to publicise the Core Strategy or to urge people to become involved in what they knew was a consultation of vital importance for all the people of Pendle. The council officers should have ensured that this happened. It would have been cheaper and more effective than many of their own consultation methods.

It is not until October 2011 that Neighbourhood Development Plans are mentioned, in the 19th edition of the Framework newsletter. These should have been introduced at an early stage of the consultation process. I know of no attempt to establish one in my ward, or anywhere else in Pendle.

I do not believe that the council has given a true picture of the extent of the public consultation. The figures and the photographs may look good on paper, but do not reflect the experience of local people. In comparison, the meetings held by Elevate for the South Valley

Master Plan were very successful: they were well advertised and managed to engage people. They allowed people to genuinely participate, by using post-it notes and other aids instead of incomprehensible representation forms. Discussion was encouraged and people were left in no doubt as to the effect on their area the proposals would have. I can see no reason why these kinds of methods could not have been used by the council-led consultations.

Yours faithfully,

Sheila Smith