

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today regarding Neighbourhood Plans.

I know that this Administration is very supportive of Neighbourhood Plans (NPs) and many of you have Parishes that are progressing NPs, but I am here today to ask you to actively champion NPs within the Planning Process in BaNES.

The reason for my request is the increasing number of examples within the Authority where it appears that the NP has been ignored or policies overturned against the predominant, and sometimes overwhelming, support of the wishes of the Local Community. I am unable to discuss examples due legal issues but I would be happy to provide them privately. All I can say is that BaNES is publicising NPs in an article in Council Connect, referencing my community's NP and I have 2 examples in my own village.

Local volunteers have committed time, residents have engaged in the process and taxpayers have provided grants. Time, effort and money has been utilised to compile these plans.

When plan has reached the external examination stage it actually carries limited weight in the planning process. On completion the Plan has been examined against the NPPF and the Core Strategy twice, once by the internal BaNES team and once by an external independent inspector. When the NP is made it becomes the latest part of the Development Plan and where there is conflict between the Core Strategy and the NP, the NP should take precedence. When any other planning documents are adopted then they will take precedence in the event of conflicting policies.

It appears that Officers are not taking into account the weight and material nature of NPs. Nor are the views of Parish Councils, or the local communities taken into account. This is a grave injustice.

I would urge the Cabinet to ensure that appropriate training regarding Neighbourhood Plans is undertaken for all officers and members who are involved with any planning decision-making. I would also urge Cabinet to ensure that the Parish Council's views regarding planning are given the appropriate weight, bearing in mind that these PC's are responsible for the Neighbourhood Plans and therefore have an insight into the intent and reasons behind their policies, rather than allow officers to 'interpret' policies, which they have already examined. Please help the Neighbourhood Plans to stand as a testament to the hard work & commitment of their local communities. People have given freely of their time to educate themselves in order to protect their local environment. Please support them in order to ensure that the Neighbourhood Plan isn't just a meaningless, timewasting and costly non-project which is contrary to planning law.

Thank you.