

**Councillor Mohammed Iqbal
Leader of the Council
Town Hall
Market Street
Nelson
BB9 7LG**

12th September 2017

Via Email and Post

**Andrew Stephenson MP
9 Cross Street
Nelson
BB9 7EN**

Dear Andrew,

I understand from correspondence that I have received that you are encouraging residents in Earby to ***“help me fight Pendle Council’s plans to build on Earby’s green fields”*** and oppose the proposed disposal of Council-owned land in their area. Having had sight of the letter you have issued, I am disappointed that you have neither set out the reasons why Pendle Council is considering the disposal of these sites nor explained the considerable pressure being placed by the Government of which you are a member on local authorities such as Pendle both to deliver new housing and to deal with the funding reductions imposed by you.

- Firstly, as you know, consideration of the sites was the basis of an Officer report to the Executive. The recommendation in the report was for there to be a consultation with the respective Area Committee on the proposal to dispose of the land subject to the Executive’s consideration of this report. Acknowledging the concerns of Earby Councillors and the Town Council, the resolution of the Executive is to have a further meeting with the Area Committee and Earby Town Council to consider this further. Fundamentally, no decision has been taken to dispose of the land nor will a decision be taken until the meeting is held. Of course, the views of those who have contacted me/the Council will also be taken into consideration before any decision is taken on any of the sites.
- But, I do believe in being open and honest about the reasons why it is necessary for the Council to consider disposal of its sites for development.

- As you will be aware, national planning policies are determined by Government and not local authorities. These are set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), first produced in March 2012. All Local Authorities are required to have a Local Plan which sets out policies for the development and protection of land and these policies are expected to be in conformity to the Government's NPPF.
- The Core Strategy was adopted by the Full Council in December 2015. This followed an examination by the Government's Planning Inspectorate, which included a 5-day Public Inquiry, where it was concluded that the Strategy met the criteria for soundness as set out in the NPPF.
- A summary of the adopted housing numbers, **determined in conformity with Government guidance and considered to be sound by the Planning Inspectorate**, is shown below (along with the present position on housing numbers):-

| Pendle's Housing Requirement (as per Core Strategy) | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Overall Housing Requirement | 5,662 |
| Completions | (470) |
| Reduction of Empty Homes (Net) | (748) |
| Residual Requirement | 4,808 |
| Strategic Housing Allocation | (500) |
| Existing Commitments (permissions) | (1403) |
| Remaining Requirement to be met through housing site allocations | 2,541 |

- The proposed distribution of the remaining requirement for new housing across the Borough is set out below. Again, these are determined in conformity with the Government's NPPF:-

| Distribution of Pendle's Housing Requirement | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| M65 Corridor | 1,799 |
| West Craven - Barnoldswick | 172 |
| West Craven - Earby | 287 |
| Rural Pendle | 283 |
| Remaining Requirement to be met through housing site allocations | 2,541 |

- Given that Part 2 of the Local Plan: Site Allocations and Development Policies is not complete, it is not possible to say which sites will be developed. But, as you will also be aware, the NPPF requires Councils to have a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA). The SHLAA is an assessment of sites – put forward by land owners following calls for sites by the Council – which have the potential to be developed for housing in the future. These are not site allocations but simply a list of sites that are considered to be available and suitable for housing development.
- The Council is not excluded from proposing land in its ownership for development. Given the Government is actively encouraging public sector bodies like the Council to make the most of surplus land, with a stated ambition to release surplus public land with the capacity for 160,000 homes during the current Parliament (Housing White Paper: Fixing the broken housing market, para 1.26), the Council continually reviews its asset base to help deliver on this ambition.
- As you will have seen in the report to the Council’s Executive on the proposed disposal of sites in Earby (which also included sites in Colne), the Council has been pursuing a programme of land disposals over recent years. These disposals have comprised a range of sites (in Brierfield, Nelson and Colne) with the majority being previously developed land (brownfield sites). These sites are expected to deliver almost 400 new houses towards the housing targets. As the programme of disposals has progressed, the Council has fewer surplus assets for disposal hence consideration of the land at Earby at this time. Any development would, of course, go towards the 287 dwellings that need to be built in Earby.
- I do note in your letter the reference to other brownfield sites in Earby which could be used for development. I agree that this could be the case but what you fail to inform residents in your letter is that these sites are **not in the Council’s ownership** and you are aware the owners have shown no interest in bringing forward development. There was also a suggestion that the Council compulsorily purchases (CPO) the site but however, without the funding for the CPO and the delivery of a scheme on the site, the Council has no reasonable grounds for a CPO. If you are willing to lobby your Ministers to provide Pendle Council the funds to CPO these privately owned sites, then I would welcome this on behalf of the residents. However, I remain sceptical that you will write to residents to inform them of your inability to secure government funding to acquire such sites including the ones in Earby.
- Aside from Government pressure to make land available for the development of new housing, as you know, the Government has changed the way in which Councils like Pendle are financed by providing a financial incentive to Councils for the delivery of new housing. This is known as the New Homes Bonus and is funded largely from the reduction in general grant to Councils.

- For every new property built, the Council receives around £800pa for 4 years and expects to receive around £900,000 in 2017/18. And following changes last year, Council's must build at least 0.4% of their housing stock annually (in Pendle's case, this is c120 properties) before any reward is paid making the incentive to build even stronger. I note that you failed to discuss with me or the Council on the effects of this measure by the Government.
- **Can I remind you that, since 2010 to date, Pendle Council's funding from Government has been reduced from £13.8m to £5.7m, nearly 60%. Despite this, the Council's Administration under my leadership has risen to the challenge presented by this cut in funding and we continue to deliver good quality services to the residents of Pendle. However, this is becoming increasingly difficult due to a distinct lack of support from you as the Member of Parliament.**
- **So, not only is the Government using the planning system to place pressure on Councils to encourage more houses to be built, it has changed the funding of local Councils specifically to penalise those that don't.**
- And just to reinforce these points, in the recent White Paper on Housing – '*Fixing our broken housing market*' – published by the Government in February 2017 the Prime Minister states clearly that she 'wants to fix the broken housing market...[and]..the starting point is to build more homes'. I assume you endorse this message from your Leader ?

I understand that you are after the recent General Election worried about your own position but as the Member of Parliament for Pendle, I would have as a minimum expected you to contact me as Leader to discuss your concerns about site allocations. You chose to mis-lead residents and I believe your political letter trying to distance yourself from government policies on this matter is something which people will not be fooled into believing.

I look forward to your response and would suggest it would be a bold and transparent move for you to write back to the residents who received your original letter dated 31st August 2017 apologising for trying to mis-lead them. Alternatively, if you send me details of the people you wrote to, I am willing out of my own pocket to correct the deliberate mistakes and lack of information in your letter.

Yours sincerely

Councillor Mohammed Iqbal

Leader of the Council

