

Sir William Cash MP
50 High Street
Stone
ST15 8AU

18 July 2023

Dear Sir William,

We the undersigned are seeking your intervention regarding a planning inspector's recent decision to allow an appeal for outline planning permission for 200 homes on greenfield land at Baldwins Gate Farm (Appeal Ref: APP/P3420/W/23/3314808, see the attached inspector's report). As a community we feel let-down by both local and national government, as well as local and national planning policy, and are deeply worried about the precedent this decision sets for the future of our village, other communities like ours and the wider British countryside.

We believe the decision to allow permission for 200 homes in Baldwins Gate represents nothing short of a failure of democracy. This planning application was unanimously rejected by a committee of elected councillors who determined that the benefit would not outweigh the harm. Their decision was then overturned at appeal by a single, unelected inspector appointed by central government. We recognise the necessity for an appeal process to facilitate the completion of projects that are unpopular locally but are of benefit to the nation as a whole. However, to acknowledge the unique contribution of local knowledge to good planning decisions, intervention by central government should ideally be reserved for cases of national importance. In all other cases locally elected planning committees should be empowered to make final decisions.

In this case the planning system has produced the decision, through the unelected inspector, that there is a requirement to build 200 homes on the best and most versatile agricultural land in Baldwins Gate. This is a small village which is displaced from any meaningful infrastructure, transport links or centres of employment. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) para.105 states that "Significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes." Despite the inspector's insistence that the local bus service is adequate (an opinion that is in direct conflict with the first-hand experience of the local population), it certainly does not provide choice to most of the residents of Baldwins Gate. It therefore simply cannot be successfully argued that this development is required for the greater national good, and a planning system which comes to that conclusion is clearly broken. Instead of favouring the interests of the wider population by building "the right houses in the right places", the current planning system overwhelmingly favours the requirements of the developers and their preference for building on the most profitable land.

Local communities need to have confidence in the planning system. It is decisions such as this one, which is patently contrary to planning policy and to the role of local democracy in decision making, which erode and destroy public confidence in the planning system. We feel that if this decision stands, it is proof that we have merely been given the illusion of democracy, whereby we dutifully cast our votes in local elections to choose councillors to represent us, only to discover that their decisions are easily overruled.

This community embraced the Government's policy that neighbourhood planning is a statutory part of the planning system (a policy that has only been strengthened with successive revisions of the NPPF) and took the opportunity to create a Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP). A group of volunteers spent four and a half years working on this document at great personal cost in terms of time and effort and even received grant aid from government to engage specialist consultants. It was then put to a referendum in line with policy and subsequently "made" on 21

January 2020 after an 82% vote in favour. Even after all of this, the planning inspector effectively nullified the NDP, which was the most up to date planning policy that the Borough Council had at the time. In essence, the planning inspector allowed the appeal on the basis that the local Neighbourhood Plan (the Chapel and Hill Chorlton, Maer and Aston, and Whitmore Neighbourhood Plan, see attached) is more than two years old and therefore, because the local authority states that it is unable to demonstrate a five year housing land supply, it has minimal weight. We believe this to be an erroneous interpretation and application of the law and an assault on neighbourhood planning.

We also have serious questions about the Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council's housing land supply, which has contributed to this decision. The population of Newcastle-under-Lyme fell by 0.5% between Census 2011 and Census 2021, yet the projections of housing need are based on inflated Office for National Statistics mid-year population projections for the inter-census years. Further, the borough claimed to have a five year housing land supply until very shortly before the opening of the public inquiry. The timing, coupled with the obvious cherry-picking of data, needs investigating. In any case, the Government's stated position is that although housing targets need to start with a number, this number should be advisory and not mandatory, and it is deeply concerning that the Government's appointed planning inspector has an opinion which is in such dissonance with their own.

We are of the opinion that the Government needs to intervene in this specific case, because the appeal decision sets a national precedent which is in direct contravention of their publicly stated intention to allow communities more influence over the future of their towns and villages. If this decision is left to stand, then we would invite the Government to publicly admit that the promises they made with the introduction of Neighbourhood Development Planning will not be honoured, and that effort spent producing an NDP as well as the cost to the public purse, will likely have been in vain.

If this appeal decision is allowed to stand, it will have significant egregious implications:

- for development in the immediate Neighbourhood Area of the Neighbourhood Plan;
- for development across the entire wider rural area of Newcastle-under-Lyme, which has now been laid open to uncontrollable development on greenfield land;
- for neighbourhood planning in the borough as a whole, including for the current 'made' neighbourhood plans and those presently being worked on.

This decision by a planning inspector, and its interpretation and application of the NPPF regarding the weight of neighbourhood plans, may well also have negative effects for neighbourhood planning across England as a whole. Developers will present it as evidence in every planning appeal that involves a Neighbourhood Plan and the Secretary of State needs to be aware that inaction in this case is a decision in itself, as it sets a precedent that will enable planning to be led by the developers rather than by local councils and communities.

We close by again requesting you to intervene by referring this egregious appeal decision for action by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up.

Yours sincerely,

Christopher Knight

G Sudirikkuge

Geoffrey Harley

Paul Catterall

Nicole Smith

Barbara Harley

Janet Catterall

Etienne Smith

Harrison Belfield

Holly Maguire

Hugo Nagel

Amy Belfield

Seevali Hewa Kirindage	Frank Murphy	Mrs Carol A Probyn
Emma Wain	Faye Rowe	James Green
Ivan Wain	Debbie Drinkwater	Lesley Murphy
Miss Sarah J Brockley	Clive Drinkwater	Bill Coddington
Kerris Joynson	Edna Drinkwater	Michael Hampton
Ms Susan Cripps	Barry Hall	Janet Hampton
Sue Keller	Ronald Newton	Ian Minshull
Calvin Morley	Marjorie Newton	Chris Meeson
Christine Herbert	Andrew Bryce	Elizabeth Meeson
Clare Dickson	Michael Baggaley	Neill Walker
Andrew Dickson	Diana Wragg	Lee Hartshorn
Tim Bigham	Mark Adams	Kate Hartshorn
Miss Joanne M Henk	Dr Manoj Popat	Michael Baston
Peter Beardwood	Brian Dunlop	Catherine Baston
Michael Hall	Fiona Boulton	Chris Johnston
Thomas Watson	David Alcock	Heather Johnston
Leoni Watson	Sue Alcock	Brian Johnson
Dave Eyre	Mr W Johnson	Jon Cooke
Amy Eyre	Mrs P Johnson	Audrey Pedley
J A Ledger	K Worrall	Julie Walker
R J Ledger	Y Worrall	Susan Johnson
Steve Lewitt	Mr J Dawson	Susan Kaminski
Janet Lewitt	Dr Julia Ibbotson	Robert Kaminski
Peter Jenkinson	Val Mayers	Peter Mulcahy
Wendy Jenkinson	Andy Mayers	K Lane
Adam Jenkinson	Lisa Clements	Rebecca Mulcahy
Zuzana Rozanska	Scott Lightfoot	Sheila Ramage
Julie Woolmer	Tim Waye	Richard Latham
Mark Woolmer	Miss Aimee Bentley	Peter Keller
Hayden Knox-Smith	Helen J Fox	Ron Hattersley
Susan Knox-Smith	E Michael Fox	Julie Wheat-Hattersley
Mark Shufflebotham	Joanna Hutton	Alexandra Wheat-Hattersley
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