

Saham Toney Neighbourhood Plan

As I write this (11 June) we have been told to expect the examiner's report on the Plan during the week starting 14 June. As that is after the print deadline for this issue, I can't yet tell you what must be changed in order for the Neighbourhood Plan to go to a village referendum, but rather than wait for the August Saga, we'll publish the report on our website with some initial explanation as soon as we get it.

Breckland Council requested, and were granted an extra week to make a second response to the examiner's earlier questions, and finally submitted that on 21 May. Nothing in their new response particularly concerned us, but we were pleased to get them to "own up" about how many houses have been built in Saham since their own Local Plan was approved in November 2019. That number was 48 – for context, set that against the Breckland Local Plan target for Saham up to 2036, which was 33. Of the 48 houses, only 3 (on Ovington Road) were included in and supported by the Neighbourhood Plan.

We have already used this fact to submit an additional objection to the current application for 54 houses at Nilefields, and will do likewise for any future applications for sites not included in the Plan.

Breckland must arrange a referendum within 13 weeks of the examiner's report. Until we see what changes the report may require, I can't tell you precisely what you'll be voting on, but all the same, in advance of that information, I urge you to start thinking about the need to vote and also how you will vote, and offer the following general observations about both:

- ☑ **The Neighbourhood Plan is the best document the village has with which to exercise control over what development takes place – and what does not - over the next 15 years;**
- ☑ *Without the Plan, development will continue to happen as Breckland planners see fit – you can judge for yourself if you're happy with the 48 houses on sites they've approved over the last 18 months or so;*
- ☑ **The Plan is the only document that meaningfully protects the local environment – i.e. Saham's landscape, character, separation from Watton, green spaces, heritage, key views, habitats and wildlife;**
- ☑ *Apart from the Ovington road site included in the Plan, most developments recently approved by Breckland have focused almost entirely on a desire to build more houses regardless of other factors;*
- ☑ **Sites allocated in the Plan have been assessed against a range of factors to ensure they are suitable, and will only gain planning**

permission in future if they meet the rigorous criteria the Plan specifies;

- ☒ *Without the Plan, there is a very limited range of policies a site must satisfy to comply with the Breckland Local Plan;*
- ☒ **The Plan, together with the village SuDS Design Manual, offers real protection against increased flood risk from new development, and practical proposals for improving current problems villagers experience;**
- ☒ *The Breckland Local Plan offers almost no protection against flood risk and does not even address improving things as they stand;*
- ☒ **The Plan has been written by a group of villagers who care about what happens in Saham, not faceless planners in Dereham who don't know anything about our village.**

If you disagree with part or all of the Neighbourhood Plan, I ask you to think what the alternate is: no Plan and hence no village control over what happens! In that scenario you can expect more of the same – at the rate of 48 homes completed under Breckland's rules in 18 months, there will be perhaps another 480 in the next 15 years.

The Plan matters. It can make a real difference to the way Saham develops in future. Once approved, planners and developers cannot ignore it and continue 'business as usual'. The Parish Council and villagers alike will have the means to object effectively to unsuitable development: by simply quoting any non-compliance with the Neighbourhood Plan policies. And also, to check that sites included in the Neighbourhood Plan meet all the criteria specified to ensure they are acceptable.

I hope you agree and when the time comes, that you will vote "YES" at the referendum. Use your vote and use it well!

As usual, if you have any comments or questions on any of this, or the Neighbourhood Plan in general, or if you'd like to be added to our mailing list, please get in touch with me. **Most importantly, stay healthy and safe!**

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***Neighbourhood Plan
Shaping the future of
Saham Toney!***