

Saham Toney Neighbourhood Plan

On 13 August Breckland published its decision to allow the Plan to go to a village referendum, and we now await their announcement of its date. That may have been made by the time you read this. When it is, we'll let you know on our website and on posters around the village, and we'll launch our "Vote Yes" campaign, that will include a short video about the benefits of the Plan, posters, information leaflets delivered to every household, and opportunities for villagers to ask questions in online meetings or by phone. On the latter topic, please get in touch by email if you'd like to participate in either a group meeting online or have a one to one phone or online conversation with us, to discuss any concerns or questions you have about the Plan, and we'll arrange something suitable.

Naturally our main message to you is that the Plan is positive, it will benefit the village and we hope as many of you as possible will vote "yes"! If approved, it will form part of the statutory development plan for Breckland, and by law, planning decisions will have to take account of its policies. Hence **the Plan will provide certainty, sustainability, control and protection** in terms of future development.

But in this article, I'd like to concentrate on persuading anyone who might be so inclined, against voting "no".

We recognise not every villager will support every aspect of the Plan. Inevitably, the policies for new housing are the most likely to stir emotions and attract opposition. You may feel that in order to stop a particular site or sites being developed, you should vote "no". But, you may not realise that a "no" result will not only **NOT** prevent such development, but will actually allow development to take place on any site in a 'free for all' manner, lacking strict controls and without the protection the Plan provides for our local environment.

Why a free for all? Because without the Neighbourhood Plan, applications will be decided by the Breckland Local Plan alone. That says Saham will have at least 33 new homes between 2019 and 2036, but has no upper limit. In the 18 months since that plan came into force, 29 houses were completed and another 19 approved. At that rate, we might expect another 190 homes by 2036! Worse still, it's written into the Local Plan itself, that if not updated to the satisfaction of a Government inspector, its housing policies become out of date in November 2022. If so, after that date they won't apply in planning decisions. Yet Breckland have still to start work on the necessary update, and may not have left themselves time to meet the deadline. Local Plan policies

may also become out of date and not apply if Breckland cannot show it has at least a 5-year supply of land for housing. And that's something it's only been able to show in one of the last 7 years.

Local Plan policies provide much less protection for the village than those in the Neighbourhood Plan. If Local Plan policies become out of date and we have no Neighbourhood Plan, then we can anticipate development of any plot of land that becomes available, with densely packed houses of bland appearance, perhaps blots on our landscape, that in some cases merge Saham with Watton, destroy wildlife and its habitats and lead to more flooding than we already have.

Whereas the Neighbourhood Plan provides certainty about where houses can be built and how many, how they are designed, and what must be done to protect our landscape, historic buildings and natural environment, as well as ensuring there's no new flood risk.

So, without trying to sound over-dramatic, if you vote "no" there's every likelihood it will do more harm than good. If you vote "no", thinking that will prevent a particular site or sites being developed, please think again, as it will do the reverse and allow those sites to be approved with far less control on the number and type of houses, or no control at all if the Local Plan policies lapse in the meantime. It will also be possible for sites that have been ruled out by the Plan to be developed, such as those on the east side of Pound Hill, or along the bottom end of Hills Road, for which 71 houses in total were proposed by landowners.

Inclusion of a site in the Plan does not mean its development can go ahead without the need for a planning application. Every allocated site will need one, and deviations from the Plan's policies will be reasons for the application to be refused – controls that will not exist without the Plan. So rather than vote against the Plan, when the time comes, submit an objection to a planning application for any site you don't like.

But meanwhile please vote "Yes" to the Plan to avoid losing all of its many benefits.

Your village; Your Plan: Vote YES!

As usual, if you have any comments or questions on any of this, or the Neighbourhood Plan in general, please get in touch with me.

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