

Saham Toney Neighbourhood Plan

I'd like to acknowledge the villager's article about the plan in last month's issue and thank the author. In this case I had discussed the main issues raised when I met the author at his property in January. I don't have the space to respond in great detail but I'll try to address the main points:

The article mentions the results of village questionnaires in 2015 and 2016 about site size. We'll continue to bear those in mind, but one fundamental thing has changed. Breckland Council has removed the limit on site size (it was 5 houses) from its policy. So I'm afraid, like it or not, we cannot impose a limit either.

138 villagers responded to the consultation a year ago, roughly the same number who responded to each of those two earlier questionnaires. So I'd suggest if one result is valid, so is the other; but the main point here is that we can only take note of the opinion of those who do respond, as with anything like this.

Finally I'll try to explain more about the overall allocation number:

- 1) We haven't set a number yet and won't until the site selection process is complete;
- 2) The number will be based on detailed sustainability principles, rather than just being a number that feels right to the most people;
- 3) The Breckland number - 33 - has no logical basis. 5% of the number of houses inside our settlement boundary has nothing to do with what is or isn't sustainable outside the boundary;
- 4) 33 is a minimum number. The Local Plan does not set an absolute maximum, but instead would rely on subjective interpretation of the phrase "not significantly more than";
- 5) The Local Plan does not include the Government's affordability factor, by which allocations must be increased - for Breckland it's about 27%. But that will apply to our plan, so 33 immediately becomes 42.
- 6) The Local Plan doesn't impose much control on where its 33 houses could be built. What's better: a well justified number, built in agreed, allocated places, or ad-hoc applications from opportunistic developers, who are the ones currently building the 61 houses noted in the article?
- 7) The Local Plan doesn't balance its level of development with benefit for the village; our site allocations will.

8) 48 was a number we calculated before Breckland Council had published any number, and before we had decided to allocate sites. Its only relevance now is the fact that the vast majority of villagers who responded to the consultation last year supported it, so it acts as an indicative guide to villager opinion on allocation numbers at that time;

9) Whatever number we allocate, it will apply right up till 2036.

Other main news

We've had some useful comments on our latest draft policies from our consultant and the Breckland coordinator. Most encouraging was the fact the Breckland coordinator told us our plan is now the most thorough and well justified one she has seen in the district, and "not far away" from what Breckland Council expect and require.

We are just finalising our village design guide, so hopefully that will be available on our website around the time you read this.

As I write, we've started reviewing the independent site assessments report by AECOM. After that we'll start a process to select sites from those that are either suitable, or suitable with certain conditions. We won't complete that in time to report final results before the May Saga print deadline, but I'll give an interim update then.

If you agree it's wrong to build 54 homes on land at Nilefields that often floods, would create a dangerous road junction, is home to a wide variety of wildlife, would merge Saham with Watton, and which offers no benefit to villagers, please object if you haven't already. You can find a link to the application on our website.

As usual, if you have any comments or questions on any of this, or anything else to do with the Neighbourhood Plan, or if you'd like to be added to our mailing list, please get in touch with me.

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