

## Saham Toney Neighbourhood Plan

First, following my special article last month on how the Plan can be used to respond to planning applications, I'd like to thank those villagers who have recently added their voices to the objections against a proposed 54-house development at Nilefields. If you don't want so many houses in one place, that's designated not only as a buffer zone to protect an area that's the main UK breeding ground for stone curlews, but also as a 'rural gap' to prevent Saham merging with Watton, or if you think it's wrong to build on an area so prone to flooding, there's still time to object – just write to [planning@breckland.gov.uk](mailto:planning@breckland.gov.uk) to let them know.

Last time I told you we were expecting the examiner's report on the Plan, but things haven't quite worked out as expected. Instead of publishing his report he requested some final checks and comments by both ourselves and Breckland Council. He set a deadline of 28 June for responses. We prepared ours and gained approval for them from the PC, who sent them to the examiner 4 days before his deadline. Meanwhile on the same day, Breckland Council, with all its resources, told the examiner it would need another two weeks to respond, thereby delaying things till 12 July. As I write this (11 July) we don't know if they will meet the new deadline, but regardless, it once again shows how Breckland Council, by design or inefficiency, or both, is delaying the Plan. That despite a promise made by their director of planning that they would do everything they could to ensure the Plan went through the exam process quickly and efficiently.

No matter, they can't delay things for ever!

For now, I can't publish or give you any details about our latest response to the examiner, as he has put a strict gagging order on things until he publishes his final report. But as soon as he does that, the regulations will impose a rigid two-stage timetable on Breckland to arrange and hold a village referendum, with a simple 'yes/no' question asking you if you want the Plan to be adopted. From report publication to referendum a maximum of 13 weeks is allowed.

Once we see the final examiner's report we can start telling you what precisely you'll be voting on. Although there will be some constraints on the PC's ability to campaign for a "yes" vote after a referendum date is announced, those won't apply to my group. We are now thinking how best we can encourage you all to vote for the plan. That could be with posters, leaflets delivered to your door, events at the WCCC if permitted, and/or

online, at which we'll answer your questions. If you have any thoughts on how best we can give you the information you need to make up your minds, please get in touch.

Last month I gave you some overall reasons to vote "yes" when the time comes. This month here's a list of some of the key development issues in the village the Plan tackles:

- The number of new houses and where and under what conditions they are built;
- Maintaining a physical gap between Saham and Watton;
- Protecting and conserving the village's heritage;
- Protecting and enhancing the village's landscape character;
- Protecting wildlife and its habitats;
- Preventing flood risk due to new development, both on- and offsite.

The Plan addresses all of the above, based on reams of evidence we have prepared with the help of relevant specialists. While planning and development are often emotional matters, the way applications are decided is based on cold, hard facts. The Plan sets out the facts, and based on those tells planners and developers alike what is and is not acceptable in our village. Without the Plan there is no other document that does that.

So I hope when the time comes, that you will vote "**YES**" at the referendum. It's your village and it's your Plan. 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!***