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Update on Proposals for Development of Northampton South East

In the last Parish Council Newsletter in July, just after the 'West Northamptonshire Emergent Joint Core Strategy' was published for consultation, we alerted you all to the proposals for the development of West Northamptonshire. Since then a considerable amount of work has been carried out to oppose the proposals for our immediate area. Your Parish Council has been very actively involved in this work.

The proposal to build 18,000 houses in the area called Northampton South East, as well as a new link road between the A45 at Billing to a relocated junction 15 of the M1, which were both completely new proposals, would have a devastating effect not only our village but all other villages in the area. After an enormous amount of research and investigative work, with accurate information being difficult to access, Kevin Ward, with the Parish Council, gave two presentations in the Village Hall on the 19th and 24th August. This was to give local residents an overview of the planning process, details of the proposed developments and the effect they would have on our community, and to open up a discussion amongst villagers. Leaflets were distributed giving information on how and where to make your views known. The overwhelming majority of those present on the two evenings (about 140 in total) indicated that they were against the proposals for the development of Northampton South East as outlined. With this mandate the Parish Council set about examining the most effective ways of conveying objections to the West Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit (WNJPU) in the very short consultation period allowed – now extended to **30th September 2009** – and supporting villagers in making their own response. Two WNJPU exhibitions, staffed by their officers, were mounted in the daytime at Brafield Village Hall on 19th and 20th August – the only such exhibitions in this local area.

Brafield Parish Council joined forces with Little Houghton, Great Houghton and other local Parish Councils, to discuss joint approaches to opposing and fighting the proposals. Meetings have been held on a weekly basis to share ideas, information and research, exchange views, and update each other on progress, and these have led to a collective approach to a number of issues.

A very lengthy questionnaire was included in the formal consultation document. The Parish Council has used this as the basis for its own extremely thorough and detailed response. This has been shared with others in the Parish Council's consortium. Because it constitutes the most complete and powerful rebuttal of the Joint Core Strategy using planning arguments, in addition to it being submitted as our own Parish response, it is going to be submitted as a collective response from the whole group. It is likely that it will be sent not only to the WNJPU, but also to a wide range of people in central, regional and local government including M.P's, Ministers, and the Planning Inspectorate who have responsibility for approving the Strategy.

The Parish Council discussed the possibility of forming a Brafield Action Group with a number of local people. Keith Crompton who was persuaded to Chair it, has worked tirelessly since taking on this role, and we all owe him, and all the members of the Action Group, a huge debt of gratitude for their contribution. As residents of Brafield, members of the Parish Council have been involved in, and supported the work of, the Action Group, liaising with Keith throughout.

Terry Barnell as volunteer village webmaster has been updating the website daily to simplify and summarise a number of the issues, and provide support in accessing details from other sources. His success in doing this has meant that the website is being used in preference to that of the JPU itself!

Members of the Parish Council attended the 'Question Time' meeting at the Sunley Management Centre organised by Radio Northampton. The panel that took part included the leader of Daventry District Council, Chief Executives of WNDC and North Northants Development Company, Sally Keeble M.P. Northampton North, Roger Kingston Northants Residents Alliance and an academic on Urban Affairs.

In preparing a Joint Core Strategy for West Northamptonshire, our District Council, South Northamptonshire Council, is working alongside Northampton Borough Council, Northamptonshire County Council and Daventry District Council through the West Northamptonshire Joint Strategic Planning Committee, established by law for this purpose.

So what are the individual Councils saying?

The Parish Council attended the meeting at Towcester on 25th August when South Northamptonshire Council became the first of the partner authorities to cast serious doubts on the plan and specifically objected to the inclusion of the Northampton South East development area. Sadly, we hear that Northampton Borough Council, at their meeting on 9th September, was not quite so forthright, though the minutes are still in draft form and have not yet been approved for publication.

The County Council will sit on 1st October to decide upon its response to the Strategy, and we're led to believe it will make a strong and formal statement of opposition that will comment very directly on the completely inadequate provision for infrastructure in the proposals.

The Parish Council is grateful to all those residents who have kindly given a copy of their response letter or questionnaire as requested. This is enabling us to see where responses are coming from, so we know where to target further support. Helen Barnell from the Parish Council has been collating these responses and, so far, has received 106 (mainly individual letters) which is a fantastic start. Many more have been promised and are in the pipeline. Copies can be dropped into the Village Stores or Ramco Convenience Store, emailed to barnell@globalnet.co.uk, or given to any Parish Councillor, clearly marked COPY, please. The more responses we receive the better - please encourage each member of your household to respond individually.

TOGETHER WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

So what happens now?

'West Northamptonshire Emergent Joint Core Strategy' consultation ends on 30th September 2009 so please aim to get your replies in by then.

'West Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit' Committee will then consider responses and other evidence and produce a revised document, the 'Pre-Submission Draft Core Strategy', in November 2009. This will have legal standing and will be subject to formal public consultation.

A further revised document, the Submission Draft Core Strategy, will be published in March 2010. This should take account of comments received on the Pre-Submission draft and will be submitted to Government and subject to formal public examination.

The Parish Council and the collective Parishes Group are already planning for these later stages and recognise that opposition may need to be a long term process, and may involve legal challenge and action. We are gearing up for this, and are considering the engagement of key figures and organisations locally and nationally in support.

Next Parish Council Meeting:
Tuesday 24th November at 7.30 p.m. in the Sargeant Memorial Hall Brafield

Members of the public are most welcome to attend any meeting
At the start of the Parish Council meeting, time is set aside for public enquiries