

Evening with Nigel Huddleston answering Civic Society questions

8th September 2016

19.00 to 20.30 hours

Q1. John Goodwin

“What is meant by “localism” and how does it help the community?”

NH:

Pure localism is absolute decision making, not there yet.

It is about issues we are interested in, heritage for example.

Another local MP, Sajid Javid is now the Secretary of State for Local Government so handy for NH to contact for help with local issues.

Also Gavin Barwell, Minister in same team in charge of Planning and Homes.

Central government will continue to give instructions and guidance.

National policy framework will evolve overall masterplan for local decision making.

CC's and DC's to work with local bodies to pull local plans together.

SWDP is a bottom up plan but with overall targets to meet, not true localism but better than previous plan.

Regional special strategies not thought through and in limbo for 6 years so that developers have taken advantage of to push through random opportunistic plans.

105 parishes in NH's constituency.

Smaller villages struggle with keeping pubs and shops open and finances in order(parish councils).

More influence being seen of neighbourhood plans, but advisory only but hopefully should include development plans, have to be careful of NIMBYism as should state what is required too.

Recent examples where neighbourhood plans overridden by Sec of State, bad decision e.g. Drakes Broughton issues. They need more clarity.

More years to come of slight mix of where responsibility lies.

Look to the SWDP for a lot of development.

NH plea for putting together a neighbourhood plan if not one already which will be referred to as a reference document for planning and conservation

Per Brian Chilver we have a town plan as a neighbourhood plan cannot be put together for Evesham, too large.+

Q2. Brian Chilver (3 questions)

Q2a. “How can we protect sites of long-term value to preserve character of Evesham from inappropriate development (re Abbey Rd dev)?”

NH;

400 letters on subject received.

Just as much correspondence for more housing as well as against (e.g. asking where children will live).

Encourage people to write to planning authorities and argue on planning grounds.

NH has no say on planning, NH can only pass on letters.

Petitions are worthless.

Planning is not a democratic process.

Decisions made on “is this proposal approved or not approved on planning grounds”

Complicated issue.

NH encourages people to write in and guidance only on could be included in such correspondence by NH.

More speculative proposals will come in, but more grounds to object as we have the 5 year plan.

NH will do what he can but re-emphasised focus objections on planning grounds.

Writes comments to planning committee as a local resident not as serving MP as they find it offensive.

Cannot write to planning committee on behalf of an individual but can write in on behalf of a Parish Council.

So if Parish Council write to NH summarising views and opinions of local committee then NG can pass this on.

Q2b. “Has consideration been given to building on former military bases, as infrastructure already exists?”

NH:

Couldn't agree more, nearby Long Marston being developed, bit in Warwickshire and overspill into Worcestershire and inevitable that at some stage Throckmorton will be developed as well. No infrastructure and local impact to be considered but an obvious space to deal with local demand.

Some villages really expanded, NH's own village of Badsey for instance.

Just outside Bicester there is a huge development with complete support of local community.

Q2c. “How do we get developers with large land banks to build as opposed to only building when maximum profits can be obtained?”

NH:

There is a law going through to require that to happen, not just for developers but for other large companies e.g. Tesco and other supermarkets are the worst offenders for having bought land in the past and sit on until price has gone up. Not allowed to do this now.

Empty properties, there have been laws but just not enforced. Lack of chain of title, there are 100,000 properties with no known ownership nationally. Where owner known only allowed to remain unoccupied for a certain time before double council tax has to be paid.

Ensure your local council know of any empty properties left dormant for a while (Cefn's example).

Q3. Dr Philip Greenwell

“What progress on re-doubling of Cotswolds line and the Honeybourne line to Birmingham?”

NH:

Honeybourne to Birmingham a challenge as parts of line is The Greenway a walking and cycling route. Also very expensive to do and unlikely unless private money or Long Lartin development happens and demand occurs.

Cotswolds line, more regular service next year, Worcestershire Parkway will improve service. Doubling very expensive, bits done, £200-300 million to complete job. GWR a number of studies that can improve links, hourly service but not stopping at every station as does now to provide a 2 hour trip to London. One of the biggest advocates was David Cameron.

NH to work on Theresa May.

If NH can achieve the above in next 12 years he will be happy.

Dr PG; Fiasco at Pershore station car park.

NH; will improve, GWR have plans but timing not known. Just as bad in Honeybourne too. 20-100 spaces planned for Honeybourne

Q4. Jill Haycock

"New pedestrian/cycle bridge over Avon in Bengeworth, why removed from local Transport Plan when local population expanded since submission?"

NH;

Don't know why removed and NH will pick up with Emma and Martin who are district councillors for Bengeworth. Was in Town Plan.

Will try and find out answer.

Not direct area of responsibility but happy to assist in getting an answer.

Q5. David Way (asked by JG)

"Why don't we have positive or proactive planning as they do in Germany, Holland and Scandinavian countries?"

NH;

Used to travel a lot and not all European towns and villages are pretty. Wychavon study of 2 towns in Germany and Holland regarding use of cycle lanes and self build housing.

Not all Europe has proactive planning and where it does sometime mismatch of building, some German MPs think we have a good model as we protect villages and towns.

Q6. Caroline Abbey (asked by JG)

"Where has agreed compensation for new bridge has gone, badly served by Highways Dept, how can we get this dreadful service improved?"

NH;

Compensation money did go to local council whether promised to local community NG does not know, NH will look into. Does know that some of the compensation money paid. NH does not have answer for this.

NH takes some issue with Highways England serving community badly. Big improvement, Worcestershire is one of the best in the country especially when compared to neighbours re mending potholes.

Roads will always be an issue and primarily a County Council issue on Highways Dep. We do invest more per capita compared to other counties.

Highways England only in charge of 2 roads M5 and A46. Rest is county's responsibility.

A study recently done on traffic flow in Evesham and no doubt controversial and some big proposals coming up on how can be changed. For a town of 20,000 plus people traffic situation not good enough

Strong case for ring road to be completed around Evesham but will cost a lot of money.

JG; couple of meetings held, well attended and report produced on views raised, copy to be sent to NH.

NH; Not NH's area of responsibility or remit but will write on our behalf.

Some people do not want more roads or better railways.

Someone; Any plans of widening A46 from Evesham to M5 as thousands of houses being built?

NH; large shopping complex being proposed just off A46 at Tewkesbury which will make it worse. Approved without any improvements to infrastructure, NH working with MP for Tewkesbury on this. A46 is Highways Agency and all Worcestershire MP's working with Gloucestershire MP's submitted proposals to Patrick McGloughlin asking for additional money

Q7. Colin Tether

“Listed building issue. Lots of older buildings listed but newer buildings post 1945 not listed but beautiful but in threat of being knocked down, what can you do to change system to make it more responsive to modern buildings that need to be kept?”

NH;

Some recent listed buildings in London horrible but listed due to age. Wychavon does not have a proactive listed buildings plan especially for those off the radar e.g. farm buildings, NH happy to suggest to Jack at Wychavon, Stratford have a proactive positive route to get everything listed.

Current policies & procedures work quite well. Some people do not want their building listed but others have submitted to English Heritage.

2,500 listed buildings in Wychavon, all buildings pre 1700 largely in original condition are listed. Between 1700 and 1840 most are listed if largely intact then it starts to get very loose. Has to be at a request and especially after 1939 have to be of significant interest and quality. Beauty does not qualify to have listed. If we have any changes to suggest NH will forward on to the relevant Dep.

Lately councils have not been letting property developers get away with changing windows without prior permission and have made some reinstall correct type.

Q8. Robert Hale.

“How do we create joined up government across various levels of Council to create “ownership” of a civil society?”

RH had tried to report an issue with verge foliage been cut, app did not work and then fobbed off between Councils. Media and electricity boxes strewn all over the pavement. Cycle paths non existent.

NH;

Carry on having people that care and communicate to local council, lots of people complain not many people “do”. It is good that RH tried to contact Council. In terms of joined up government, not sure current structure of local government with County and District Councils is right, lots of people contact NH for issues such as bin collections. Some people members of both DC and CC and therefore need only go to one person. NH wary of over-powerful DCs and CCs being involved with Parish Councils. Some PCs well run, others not so good all to do with quality of volunteers and enthusiasm. Need to encourage more people from different backgrounds to get involved in local councils to ensure known where responsibilities lie.

Q9. Jim Powell (asked by JG)

Q9a. “Why have authorities allowed huge number of new houses when infrastructure not extended and enlarged especially in old parts of town?”

Q9b. “Why has redevelopment of existing properties been allowed in areas liable to flooding, has the government relaxed their advice and powers and is there a conflict of interest between Severn Trent, The Environment Agency and Wychavon DC?”

NH;

A lot of questions there and happy to answer on 1:1 for details. Broad answers: lots of money in flood prevention £2.5 billion over next few years. No relaxation of Government policy on building on land liable to flooding, however the building quality and flood resistance much better. One of the best flood prevention companies based here in the constituency. We can deal with problem of flooding now better than in past therefore not surprising that building gets approved as can be dealt with or built in such a way that makes them acceptable. Good relationship with Environment Agency as based in

Tewkesbury they work closely with Councils and if somewhere is likely to flood will not get approved.

Bigger issue of why building without infrastructure, we have talked about that and we know concerns, we need more housing in the right place and if planning authorities believe infrastructure cannot cope it will not get approved, it is a pre requisite for approval for planning. May not be ideal, compared to some areas we are ok. Definitely concerned about transport and infrastructure. We have good schools, younger people coming in to keep them open. Large areas of Worcestershire becoming retirement villages and then schools close. Evesham a concern to NH as he lives here.

Q10. Olga Allen

“How can we as residents ensure large multi nationals listen to what is pertinent in our area e.g. Lidl expansion. Asked by Lidl via a notice if we are in agreement with proposal and do we have any suggestions. Many forms returned suggesting entrance/exit of store be located at roundabout. In planning application looks like Lidl not addressed this issue.”

NH;

Again we have done the right thing in replying to consultation. NH does not have power or control over this area, but did advise people to complete those forms and submit them so opinions known to DC. Does not know what conclusion will be but surprised if it is status quo as so obviously bad. Continue to campaign. This one should be considered and happy to make a representation.

Q11. Richard Thomson

“Where will our grandchildren live? Time to go back to the New Towns Commission, an organisation that looked at whole of country and decide where new settlements should be? Have to be placed properly. Not happening at present. Unrelated ideas. ”

NH;

Fair point. Reason for SWDP. There were proposals a few years ago for major developments of mini new towns. Not acceptable for a central dictat any longer due to local considerations. Will have to clear and honest and if that means shifting economy away from London and SE to the North where available housing is available then this must happen. Must ensure sustainable transport links. Scottish MPs want people to move to Scotland. We cannot continue to build within 20 miles of M25 but we have to spread the economic activity as SE getting overcrowded. Challenge is between local need and making tough decisions. Will probably see more of smaller developments 5,000-10,000 houses close to centres of activity.

RT; cannot keep subsuming small towns by keep adding to them e.g. Evesham so the character is lost.

NH; Section 106 agreements there to provide community assets and assist supporting infrastructure. Cannot let housing happen without supporting infrastructure. Nearly every village has benefitted from Section 106 money, however there are a lot of Parish Councils sitting on a fair bit of money that they need to spend to make improvements. May not go the right place. May need to revisit as where lots of new developments Parish Councils struggling to spend the money. Would love to see planning proposals cost so much money that it is a disincentive for speculative building. People have to be realistic where they can live in future. Onus on government to ensure infrastructure there and economic incentives evenly spread across country.

Q12. “Various” (asked by JG)

“where are the Section 106 agreements being spent following increase in developments. Is there a point of contact, where does it go.

NH;

Good question don't know where it is recorded or where there is a central depository, not secret. Don't know why Parish Councils do not promote where the money has been spent (e.g. new playgrounds). New homes money goes to Parish Councils, Section 106 can be various, if buildings number above a certain size then contribution sought to alleviate infrastructure impact of new building on community e.g. new schools, doctors' surgeries, roundabouts or social housing, always subject to negotiation. Fair to say not always enough money received.

RT; not as visible in Evesham as in some villages.

NH; Not ideal but better than it was a while ago. If councils not explaining where money spent then we should complain, DC and Parish Council. Ask awkward questions.

NH; thanks to all of us for involvement in local community as that is how things happen and if it can help not hinder, do involve NH.

Evesham is a desirable place to live, came top in a poll, reason NH chose to live here for schools, community etc.

Some good things going on and can continue to improve, lots of positive things.

Local government money handed to central government and then regurgitated in a weird way, but some changes will occur on business rates to be kept locally.

Q13. John Goodwin (for Ian & Pat Stanton)

“ BT premises on Abbey Road, what can be done, it is an eyesore and BT do nothing?”

NH;

Please send NH what we have as NH meeting with BT's public affairs head next week. NH and BT have run ins as NG on Cultural, Media and Sports Select Committee and NH raised broadband issues to BT. NH suggested BT director paid too much given poor customer service. BT Broadband and mobile coverage number one issue in mailbag not housing.

NH; feel free to contact NH on issues.

Final speech.

Colin Tether gave a warm thank you to NH for giving his time. Valued explanation of role and impressive knowledge of local issues and honesty and willingness to consider changes. He “gifted” to NH a copy of the previously mentioned report from the public meeting on “traffic”. Will NH come back in 2-3 years and chat again?

NH; would love to return and thanked everyone.