

Party Time at the Strategic Planning Board.

Dear Editor,

Do party politics influence planning decisions?

Does Cheshire East Council put residents first?

Observations are from the Strategic Planning Board Meeting at Crewe on the 20th August to decide on SL5 site -White Moss - which includes a working quarry and an arable field. The site is classed as greenfield because of a condition to restore the quarry in 2028.

Prior to the meeting, there had been some doubt as to whether Alsager Councillor Derek Hough (Libdem) would be allowed to vote-as it was thought his vote might be pre-determined. Why is it that no one ever questions if Councillor David Brown's vote is pre-determined when he is so instrumental in compiling the whole of the Strategic Plan? When interests are declared I have not heard him declare his participation. Am I right in thinking he must already have approved each site?

Planning Officer Ben Haywood introduced the plan with some photos that were clearly out of date.which I found frustrating since I had been told, by the planning department that I could neither distribute, nor have projected, any of the aerial photos of the quarry taken only last month. Councillor Brendan Murphy (Independent) was to question this later when I stated that no ongoing restoration-as agreed in the original conditions - had been made.

Cheshire East have shortened the times for public speaking --2 town councillors had to share a 3minute spot- neither had been warned in advance. When greenfield sites are being debated, which may disappear forever, should the time spent be so small when it is the shape of our countryside at stake.

Objections covering a multitude of concerns from Co-operation with neighbouring councils, sustainability,pollution and the 50% projected increase in Alsager households were forcibly made by Cheshire East councillor, Sam Corcoran (Labour), Alderman Derek Bould, (Alsager Residents Action Group) and Derek Longhurst Alsager Town Council (Independent).

I did not have to share the 3 minute slot for objectors and so managed to point out that since the houses were first proposed in 2012, (and the site much favoured by the council leader, Michael Jones)there have been blatant daily breaches of conditions which have been ignored by Cheshire East Council -no enforcement or interest shown by any department.

The greatest concern I voiced was that only the southern half of the quarry was being considered -where the houses would be built-and that nothing was said about whether any of the aggregate recycling, the quarrying or the newly established company-Total Concrete Products-operating since 2013 without building permission- would move from the south of the quarry to the north.

It was hinted that restoration would be agreed in the north -this would be yet another condition- but if an agreement made in 1988, and secured by a bond, can be renegeed on-- why should any agreement or condition be trusted?

If such restoration is planned, why not show it on a presentation map of the whole quarry(like the earlier proposals) -or is it now too much of a commitment?

I also pointed out the ludicrous substitute for amenity space and that reports on areas like methane gas were desk top and would also go into conditions.

One of the developers agreed to be questioned but said he only knew about the siting of the houses when he was asked by Councillors Brendan Murphy (Independent) and Janet Jackson (Labour).

The Highways Report showed no concern over the extra houses now that the numbers

were reduced from 1,000 to 350 but failed to add them to a projection for the 50% increase.

How many times have I heard it said that an impact survey will be made after planning permission has been given.

Councillor John Hammond (Conservative) from Haslington was not pleased because there was no mention of money for a highways problem in Butterton Lane. David Brown asked Cllr Hammond if he could approve the plan -if money were to be found. Cllr Brown assured him it would not be a problem and Cllr Hammond agreed to approve the application. When it came to the debate Councillors Derek Hough (LibDem) and councillor Janet Jackson proposed refusal on the grounds of insufficient information and prematurity to the Local Plan. This caused Ben Haywood -planning officer- to issue a stern censure to the effect that it would reflect badly on Cheshire East council if a plan they had recommended was later withdrawn. Councillor Murphy (Independent) was quick to rebuke the officer for a remark that was tantamount to blackmail. Ben Haywood tried to deny what had been said but withdrew the statement when Councillor Murphy persisted and was supported by members of the public.

Councillor Murphy made his views clearly and forcibly with words to the effect that he hoped no acquaintance of his would ever consider buying a house in a quarry with a blast zone, a flood zone and close to a motorway. The proposal to refuse was only supported by Councillors B. Murphy, J. Jackson and D. Hough.

Councillor S. Wilkinson (Conservative) complained that the debate was too long -over the two hearings - and he and councillor David Brown proposed and seconded approval.

Hands shot up immediately from eight conservative councillors; for at least three of them it was the only sign of animation throughout the proceedings.

I hope that my observations have helped with the initial questions.

Yours faithfully,

Mrs. S Dyke. Alsager.