

Dear Brandon Lewis

**Residential development at land west of Farm Lane, Leckhampton,
Gloucestershire
Application Number: 14/00838/FUL**

I am writing to you to ask if you will please urgently review the recent decision not to call in the above application.

I know you have had many emails on this, which surely illustrates the intensity of feeling that something is going badly wrong: this is not without good reason.

Many years of hard work and a great deal of public money has gone into the Joint Core Strategy, which is meant to be a collaborative plan for the future of this part of Gloucestershire.

The government has appointed a highly qualified and experienced Inspector to examine and assess in detail all aspects of the plan for soundness. The public has been broadly supportive of this process and Elizabeth Ord is respected as thorough, unbiased and impartial. Her examination is now at an advanced stage; she has issued a Preliminary Findings report, part of which relates to the above application.

However Tewkesbury Borough Council, regardless of opposition by their partner JCS authority Cheltenham BC, two MPs and three Parish Councils is trying to force this application through BEFORE Inspector Ord makes her final recommendations on Leckhampton, due shortly.

Development at Leckhampton within the JCS is rightly subject to a Master Plan, the outcome of which will have a profound and permanent effect locally.

But in this instance TBC is aggressively acting outside the JCS ethic of co-operation and agreement. This is unacceptable.

I wrote to DCLG over eight months ago (I have never written to a government department before) to express my extreme concern at the way TBC was handling this application then.

To quote your department's own words: "*The Government is committed to give more power to councils and **communities** to make their own decisions on planning issues, and believes planning decisions should be made at the **local** level wherever possible.*"

But in this instance it seems the desires of the community living within a one mile radius of the location are being dismissed by the TBC councillors (whose office is 13 miles away and some of whose wards are up to 17 miles away).

Attempted development of this location has history: repeated applications have been made, and in recent years it has already twice been the subject of Public Inquiry, both times ruled against development here as inappropriate and unwise. And Inspector Ord is also of that opinion in her interim report:

Quote:

*'59. In summary, balancing the harms and benefits of this site, in my judgement some residential development is justified on the Cheltenham part of the site. **Nonetheless, this should not be on those areas that have high landscape and visual sensitivity.'***

The location is adjacent to, and visually forms part of the nationally important Cotswold AONB, so one would hope that TBC's trained planning officers would be careful to ensure that anything proposed should take account of this: should be of low density with plenty of green space, use appropriate materials, minimal impact, harmonise and achieve a dialogue with this precious landscape - an opportunity to create outstanding design, even something award-winning.

But no: shamefully, TBC has briefed the developer to cram as many houses into the site as possible, imposed no conditions on materials, no allowance for Local Green Space, disregarded the inadequacy of local roads, etc.

It has led one very senior planner to say *"this is the worst planning decision I have ever seen"*.

Why is TBC behaving this way? I can understand how scooping the New Homes Bonus without having to resolve infrastructural problems (which Cheltenham will be landed with) would be attractive. But to stamp this jackboot into the face of something so beautiful and valued?

Whatever the motives, Leckhampton, Cheltenham's finest 'edge village', is about to have a most egregious developer-led planning decision imposed by its neighbouring authority – unless you please impel Tewkesbury BC to hold until Inspector Ord issues her recommendations. This is in the interest of the entire community; the reasons why development here must be plan led are manifold and manifest. Inspector Ord has taken the trouble to acquaint herself thoroughly with the area and has considered all the issues in depth.

It begs the question: what is the point of all this time and expenditure spent scrutinizing the JCS for soundness, agreeing that a Master Plan is the correct way forward for Leckhampton, if then a partner authority acts unilaterally to blow apart this Master Plan with *"the worst planning decision"*?

I urge you please to require Tewkesbury Borough Council to await Inspector Ord's recommendations.

Sincerely

Anne McIntosh