

Ms Mary Travers
Planning Inspector
c/o Ian Kemp.

8th January 2018

Melton Local Plan Inspection

Dear Ms Travers,

I write as a resident of the village of Somerby. I am no planning expert (I am a senior executive with a multinational organisation), so I hope you will forgive the lack of technical language in my letter. I have thus far had no involvement in the development of the local plan, but would like to make my views known.

General

As a businessman, it appears to me that the plans developed bear little in relation to the real needs of the community (and I speak as a long-standing resident), having much more to do with the perceived requirement to construct large volumes of housing within MBC. This overarching 'need' to construct housing seems to have been used to create a rather partial process where the expressed needs and desires of residents have largely been ignored and the overarching dictat of MBC to 'build some houses' has won the day. My brief engagements with MBC have typically resulted in an answer of "tough – we need houses – we have a government target to hit – if you don't like it, you'll have to lump it".

The document ignores significant developments which are in process on the borders of MBC. For example – the substantial investment being made in Oakham to construct housing in a well served, sustainable manner has been ignored in favour of significant additional housing planned for my own village (Somerby) – a village that has poor transport links, no employment opportunities, and where there would appear to be some risk of flooding in the proposed development areas. Set this against the thousands of houses being built some 5 miles away in a town with good transport links, good employment opportunities, and an infrastructure (housing, health etc) which can cope with an expanded population.

The developments proposed within the plan appear to take little account of sustainability needs, employment opportunities, or environmental considerations – the sole focus is to build houses. The plan as cast will result in significant damage to heritage environments, large increases in traffic in rural/agricultural villages (since people will need to drive to get to work in either Melton or Oakham), and will turn some villages into small towns.

Employment is a key driver of housing need – and building houses in villages, miles from any employment opportunities will result either in more traffic/travel, village populations consisting largely of those who are not in economic activity, or both.

Matter 5 Other Housing Allocations

There would appear to be no evidence of a clear, robust process of site selection. The 'scoring' mechanisms used are very qualitative in nature, and therefore open to abuse (see my earlier comments on employment). I am also rather confused as to the nature of both heritage and flood risk assessments.

Heritage assessments seem largely to include buildings within Melton Mowbray itself, and place buildings outside the town as significantly lower in importance – there is no value being placed on heritage assets which are not scheduled. When I consider my own village, planning permission is being sought for sites which clearly impinge on heritage assets, and which are clearly at risk of flooding – and these sites are now appearing in the draft plan as being suitable for development. Somerby is in a pastoral setting, and yet sites are identified within the plan which would visually destroy the setting, with some marginal notes about 'mitigation' – this appears to mean planting trees.

I go back to my thesis that this plan is solely about constructing new houses to meet 'government targets' – it has little to do with economic growth, sustainability, environmental impact etc. It seeks to 'create' demand in order to fulfil perceived (as opposed to actual) need, and in doing this will have lasting, largely detrimental effects on a rural, agricultural community. Little consideration has been given to brownfield sites, infill development, or the creation (in detail) of new villages to meet the demand MBC says exists.

I have no comments to make on the other Matters in the examination document.

I would close in suggesting that MBC would do well to look at other rural councils (for example Harborough) who appear to have taken a more rigorous, evidence based approach to calculating need and demand, and who have taken time to understand the nature of such need, and recommend development in places appropriate to that need.

Thank you for taking the time to read this submission.

Simon Scrivens.