

14 February 2017



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA



John Penrose MP

Dear Mr. [unclear]

Thank you for contacting me about the Bleadon Hill development plans. I appreciate your concerns about the plans and, as I hope you'd expect, I'm going to be liaising closely with the Council over this. A democratically-agreed Local Plan is particularly important because planning inspectors have recently imposed 21,000 extra houses on North Somerset, against the will of the people. My fellow local MP Liam Fox and I, the Council and a huge range of local village groups spent ages lobbying Ministers, debating in Parliament, writing letters and even using a completely new legal planning power for the first time ever. We took it all the way to the Secretary of State himself but, I'm very sorry to report, we recently lost the appeal.

So if we've got to build all these extra houses, it's vital for the Council to get community agreement about where they go. Everybody wants local people to be able to afford to live in the area in future, but the homes need to be built in the right places, to regenerate central Weston and the seafront as a first priority. So we need to 'build up, not out' to reduce pressure on green fields at the edges of rural villages by allowing urban centres (e.g. Weston) to create housing in moderately taller buildings. Some people (particularly younger folk without children, or older residents who want to be within walking distance of shops, etc.) would prefer urban apartments, as an alternative to the traditional house and garden, and they're some of the fastest-growing sources of increased housing demand. You can find further details on my website at http://www.johnpenrose.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2500:penrose-welcomes-housing-investment-bid-for-weston-town-centre&catid=63:regenerating-weston-2a about new plans for central Weston and the seafront which, I'm happy to say, move things strongly in that direction.

The problem, of course, is that even if we soak up a lot of the extra homes by building 'up not out', it won't be enough on its own and the Council need to find more sites. There's a great deal of concern about the plans which is why I recently met with the Council's officers and political leaders, as well as with housebuilders like Taylor Wimpey (who would prefer to build closer to Bristol) to propose some alternatives by building 'up not out' in Weston and other urban centres instead, and possibly even extending the green belt to provide a permanently higher level of protection to villages which are presently targets for the developers. At this stage it's a glint in the eye of myself and a few others, but please let me know your thoughts and reactions if any of this strikes you as particularly good or problematic.

Yours sincerely,

John Penrose
MP for Weston-super-Mare