

CHEADLE UNITE – Community Brief

Get ready for a flood of housing development around Cheadle.

More road congestion open spaces taken from us
less space in our schools doctors and dentists.

Cheadle Housing a brief History

Back in early 2010 Residents around Cheadle presented SMDC with around 300-400 representations against large scale housing development (1320 dwellings = 26% swell) around Cheadle. Road improvements were in effect abandoned (too costly). Cheadle Unite was formed by residents to address the disproportionate amount of housing allocated to Cheadle, given our limited capacity to expand, particularly relevant while the regeneration of the Potteries was and is struggling with huge numbers of sites lying derelict around existing proven infrastructure (Road, Rail Drainage etc).

At that time our representations were successful after meeting the then Housing Minister John Healey (Lab) and through talks, Cheadle Unite and Councillors had our housing allocation reduced. Stoke-on-Trent and the Potteries agreeing to take on more housing, identified as helping focus regeneration around the Potteries. This was agreed under the then Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) which linked our Staffordshire Moorlands, the Potteries and Newcastle-Under-Lyme in a strategy that as the name implied covered a region. We did have to allow for some housing development and the only region that was relatively non-contentious was unfortunately Area 1 (Cheadle North near JCB) which secured the highest sustainability score. This would have at the time effectively given us adequate housing through to 2031, without the need for site allocations and any further development spread around Cheadle.

In May 2010 the change of government abolished the RSS when they introduced the Localism Act. This, as presented, would apparently allow local communities to influence planning decisions. However the early signs were not good. A number of articles have been published regarding the Localism Act. An early example from the Guardian (Sept 2011) has already been circulated, web link below (links to more articles are attached at the end):

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/georgemonbiot/2011/sep/08/planning-reforms-mockery>

To summarise, the act is very pro development and does little to nothing to benefit Local communities who may wish, for example, to restrict expansion. Further, it puts very little resistance to planning in place with huge areas of green fields and valuable countryside now at threat.

In 2013, a planning inspector reviewed our housing allocation (allowing developers to be heard, despite having not presented any previous representations) and re-introduced our additional 500 housing allocation taking guidance from the National Planning Policy which factors in the Localism Act. Further, he removed references to the need for road improvements in the main documentation setting a path to allow further development while there was a known need for road improvements for the town as far back as 1999.

With the re-introduction of 500 dwellings and given the way housing provision is now conveniently counted (land allocated e.g. Area 1 but without a planning application can be ignored) SMDC are able to claim we don't have 5 years housing provision. This entitles developers to propose development anywhere they can secure purchase of land.

Our understanding is that Government was getting flack for stating housing levels for each region when the Localism Act was introduced, as that in fact, gave a direct link between housing allocation misery and set figures presented by a Government that needs electing every so often. So Government changed their tact, suggesting local councils only need to provide housing for which there is a demand. However in parallel, Government offers Councils that take on housing a financial reward. The New Homes Bonus scheme rewards councils by matching 6 years council tax income from central government. There is no constraint on where (or who) the money is spent. Guidance is given in determining housing

demand, but this is rather nebulous and only requires the District Council to show evidence of demand via a report produced for them. In restricting housing development, SMDC should fare well under this scheme as our population demand is falling, figures as late as 2012 (ONS: Sub National Population Projection) show a drop in demand. Further our Neighbouring Potteries is struggling to attract development on many Brownfield sites.

However councils are only required to have some form of dialogue e.g. with neighbouring councils (S-o-T), little robust evidence appears to suffice. They are also allowed to present a range of housing demand figures. They can however also factor in national figures.

The need for increased housing is made up of longer living, separated couples and migration. Migration is likely to be the most significant factor here. Such figures are difficult to come by, but Oxford University did a study only last month and by their figures since 2011 the Migration Population rose by 565,000 in the UK. Where will they live?

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-31748422>

The Current migration trend is unlikely to be a focus for the current Government as it is estimated that the vast majority of our current headline GDP recovery is in fact a consequence of more people in the UK. When measured per capita (per person) it is in fact much poorer, but this figure isn't referenced.

<http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/apr/07/rising-uk-population-gdp-recovery-ons>

The transition to the new National Planning Policy / Localism Act is almost complete.

The Government and or SMDC may claim there was some form of consultation on the process but we do not agree with this. SMDC have produced a Statement of Community Involvement. This is apparently our opportunity to be involved in implementing the Localism Act. But its framework and introduction has been pushed through without proper consultation with the community.

In March 2014 Cheadle Unite received an opportunity to comment on the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). We responded on a tight 6 week deadline and asked for a number of things including:

- Engagement with the Potteries Councils
- Transparency on Drivers and Motivators in SMDC

Despite being told we would be informed if our points were accepted or rejected, we were not.

On 5th March 2015 we received an email indicating that they had adopted the new strategy way back in Dec 2014 and we had from 13th Jan to 13th April 2015 to object (i.e. only 5½ weeks left) and our objection path was via the high court, claiming that the adoption had been posted on the website on the 13th of Jan. When in fact we were only notified on the 5th of March and the adopted document was loaded on the site on that day.

Given this is supposed to set out a new interaction framework with local communities; you might expect an extra level of consultation with residents. However they let very few know, as can be seen from the total number of responses they received (15 in total) and present us with the high court if we aren't happy as our only comeback.

To give you a flavour of SMDCs SCI, in the future, previous representations are no longer taken into account and when asked how consultation in line with the SCI has taken place since its introduction regarding planning approvals for Brookhouses we have been informed that they don't in effect have to carry out the consultation themselves, they accept consultation has taken place if the developer presents them with paperwork to say it has happened!

So to summarise: Our housing allocation is set by SMDC who gain financially for every home built, can claim we don't have 5 years housing provision and has only to give us very little say in such matters. If we want to complain we have to do it every time there is an application. Further SMDC supply Planning Officers to support Developers in presenting a case to the Planning Committee. Residents do not receive any support from SMDC to make a counter claim.

'Corporate' SMDC intends to allow significant development around Cheadle unless you speak up.

Rumours of development on the Recreation ground and in every nook and cranny and green fields around Cheadle will continue. SMDC appear to have no desire to stop it. Any site is no longer safe and any claim of 'by building here we won't need to build over there' can easily be changed once those houses are built. Cheadle Unite have worked for over 5 years to get a working relationship with SMDC residents and S-o-T, anything that they offer in the future is likely to be lip service, they will do as they please, backed by new Government policy.

The Following Details how the views of locals are dead in the water: <http://www.theguardian.com/local-government-network/2012/aug/01/localism-neighbourhood-planning-realpolitik>

<http://www.monbiot.com/2011/09/06/making-a-mockery-of-localism/>

Backing our Claims - Frequently Asked Questions

- **Didn't we get our numbers reduced?**

Yes but under current National Planning Policy and the Localism Act they have been put back in for the purposes of a 5 year plan.

- **I have made representations and signed the petition to Government does my opinion hold?**

Apparently not, from now on under the Statement of Community Involvement, Previous representations can be ignored unless they relate to an existing application.

- **What evidence is there that SMDC are working with Stoke and the Potteries?**

Very little, we had to make a FOI request which was ignored 3 times before they eventually responded. The SCI document has many pages on so called community engagement with residents and that is longer than the evidence of discussions with S-o-T Given how little they engage with us, don't hold your breath.

- **Didn't Cheadle Unite ask to be involved with talks with S-O-T and the Potteries on housing focused on Brownfield Sites?**

Yes, and the answer – any meetings SMDC may have with other councils do not include the public

- **Isn't Bill Cash MP Involved?**

Yes Sir Bill presented a petition to reduce our housing allocation; this got directed to the Department for Local Government and Communities. However we are not aware that they have made any form of request for SMDC to reduce our housing targets. They indicate evidence for housing targets should be robust, however we have already presented significant evidence via Sir Bill Cash that our neighbouring Potteries are struggling to attract development on brownfield sites and the significant objections and infrastructural limits that exist around Cheadle, but the minister has not intervened. The main text details why this may be the case

- **What is this talk of Building on the Recreational Ground?**

The Rec should be protected as a park and recreation ground. Further, we understand the land belongs to the town. It should not be developed on **PERIOD** it belongs to the people of Cheadle.

- **Surely we are not alone on this. Is there any evidence for what you claim on a national scale?**

Yes the Community Voice on Planning (COVOP) is a national campaign. We have registered with them. <http://covop.org/>

- **What is the situation regarding SMDC and housing targets?**

Our understanding is that SMDC have already commissioned a document to justify a level of housing and that they are far from using minimum figures. This will be used as an evidence base for any Government Inspection.

What is notable is that to date no consultation of residents views and aspirations have been factored into this and SMDC are far from looking at minimum housing figures from that report.

- **Why don't we have adequate housing for five years if the land in Area 1 (North Opposite JCB) has already been adopted into the Local Plan?**

SMDC can exclude an area from the plan if there isn't a planning application in place for a certain area. Why this is so is unclear, however, there has been mention of a new JCB factory and we have asked about its potential location, without a response.

- **What is our relationship like with SMDC?**

Not good. We are sure that most full time Staff in the lower ranks are hard working and we get indications they are understaffed, however at higher very well paid 'Corporate' level, we get little response. Cheadle Unite get very little feedback from SMDC and the vast majority of questions are evaded or ignored. The only pro-active correspondence we have had from SMDC was a complaint for printing the Chief Executives name on our website. Note these comments don't relate to Cheadle Councillors.

- **Is it True Developers are getting pro-active support from SMDC?**

- Yes, for example in January SMDC Planning Officers submitted a 20 Page document supporting a planning application in Cheadle. We have asked who assumes legal responsibility for the claims made by SMDC Staff in light of clear concerns regarding the information provided, SMDC have not responded. As Council Tax goes to fund SMDC staff, we appear to be funding this advice and are it appears relinquishing Developers of any come back. Further we have asked for similar support for residents for a balanced perspective and again have had none from SMDC.

- **If they build a significant number of houses somewhere else in Cheadle away from my area is my area protected?**

It would be easy to think yes, but any short term relief is not likely to last. The more SMDC get approvals through the stronger the message to developers that applications get approval and the easier it is to claim additional development is simply infill. The reality is that SMDC can modify their housing targets based on a changing presumed demand. These are figures that they themselves commission. Further the more they can divide and conquer the community the weaker our voice becomes. The way they are now only flagging planning to immediately affected residents highlights how they are pursuing this strategy.

- **What are SMDC likely to do next?**

More Site allocations are likely this summer, bringing the prospect of more misery and uncertainty for residents.

- **Do you think Cheadle Unite speaks for many in Cheadle?**

Based on 300-400 Representations in 2010 and over 1000 signatures in 2014 along with a poll of over 100 residents we feel with a very high level of certainty that the vast majority of Cheadle Residents oppose the excessive levels of housing development that are on the horizon.

- **What can we do about this?**

Cheadle Unite is voluntary supported by a small core of people, for over 5 years we have fought for a better fairer deal for our town, but we are very limited and are unlikely to succeed unless wider community effort is forthcoming. If you wish to change the course of events, please disseminate this information and make your neighbours and friends aware of what is happening and detail to us how you wish to help or be kept informed Contact us via email cheadleunite@dsl.pipex.com our website is www.cheadleunite.co.uk
If we get a strong enough response we will arrange a public meeting, check our website for details.