

From: [Chelveston-cum-Caldecott NDP Survey](#)
To: ["Michael Cunliffe"](#)
Cc: ["Clerk@chelveston.org.uk"](mailto:Clerk@chelveston.org.uk); chair@ndp.chelveston.org.uk; phso.enquiries@ombudsman.org.uk

Subject: NDP-0174 - Voting system for Chelveston-cum-Caldecott Neighbourhood Plan
Date: 19 March 2014 02:23:00

Dear Michael,

Thank you for your criticisms of our voting process. I would be very happy to discuss them in person with you. Indeed I would have been very happy to have done so throughout the 9 month consultation process that we have been running with residents since we started last July. It is a great shame that you have chosen to make such an approach to the ombudsman at the very last minute of this phase of the consultation process. I am left wondering what your intent is in doing so. Does it help the Village move forward? You could so easily have knocked on the door to discuss it at any time in the last 9 months. Even better, you could have volunteered and gotten involved. Instead your approach to the ombudsman will undoubtedly result in many hours of additional work for hard pressed volunteers. I for one will not thank you for that but I am perfectly happy to stand up and justify our approach.

On the other hand, this is the first time that you have engaged at all with the process. We have kept detail records of all engagements with residents and so I know this is the case. You did not attend the exhibition of all proposals held on 15/16th December 2013. Nor did you attend any of the 6 consultation events in January and February 2014 at which the 21 original proposals were presented and discussed. (All of the registers of attendees at these events have been published.) Had you done so then you would have understood the challenge we faced and would have been more familiar with the documentation presented. You could even have used your apparent expertise to suggest a better approach for deciding on the preferred sites for inclusion in the plan.

Over 40% of households in the Village have been personally involved in the consultation process up until the point of the vote, and we have received many thanks and compliments about the way in which the process has been run. Of course we could have done things differently, but this was a communal effort by volunteer residents who care enough about the community they live in to get involved. You are of course entitled to your views but taking this approach at this stage is both unhelpful, ungracious and disrespectful to others who have been working hard and voluntarily on your behalf.

As part of the consultation process, we sent out 3 newsletters to all households detailing the process and the proposals. We invited full participation and questions from residents. One of these newsletters ([NDP-N003](#)) detailed the 21 proposals submitted by land owners, together with the date of the meeting at which each would be reviewed in depth by residents. We had an excellent turn out at these meetings and vibrant discussions. As a result, 228 comments and questions were submitted by residents to the land owners. None of these comments or questions were from you. Until the message below you have not raised a single issue and you have not even registered to be kept informed of developments.

In shaping the process, there have been 7 formal public meetings and 6 roundtable events to which residents and land owners were invited. The registers of attendees are all public and all

correspondence around the process is public. You attended none of these meetings. All of the processes and documents were discussed at these meetings and approved by members of the Working Party and the public present. Even the draft of materials sent out for voting were published for consultation, but again there were no comments from you. A report from the NDP Working Party is made and discussed at every Parish Council meeting, but again you attended none of these meetings. The agendas for all the NDP and Parish Council meetings are published on the internet and on the notice board just 30m from your house.

Residents and land owners have been involved throughout the whole process since we started and many hundreds of hours of volunteer effort have been expended to give residents the opportunity to review the proposals before them. Making an official complaint at this stage is of course your right, but it hardly seems a neighbourly or community minded way of going about things.

This is a complex process and the documentation is necessarily detailed. However, the essence is simple. We are asking residents whether they support or reject 19 development proposals that have been submitted. Previously, this has been done by nameless and faceless officials in the District Council with limited input from residents. Under the new regime of Neighbourhood Planning, we have done everything we could to give every Village resident this opportunity to have their say.

Whilst you can certainly challenge the execution of this, you cannot challenge the intent and the spirit of openness and consultation with which we have conducted the process. Better still, if you are so unhappy with the approach, I will willingly stand down as a Parish Councillor at the next meeting in April and will suggest that you be co-opted in my place to complete the process of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan for the Village. I have personally spent hundreds of hours this year so far on the Neighbour Plan and would be delighted to hand my Part of it over to you to execute better. All I want is a sound Neighbourhood Plan and if you believe you are the person to pull it together, then please step forward. I will step down. If I don't have the full confidence of residents after so many years of service to the Village, I have no interest in wasting my time trying to convince people otherwise.

I look forward to your full involvement in Village life in the future. We always need more volunteers to shape and maintain the community in which we live. At the moment, the task falls on a few people, often working late into the night and on call 24 hours a day. I can assure you it isn't fun and for me it just got worse.

Think about it . . . there could be a vacancy very soon.

Cllr Adrian Dale
Chairman of the Parish Council
Chelveston-cum-Caldecott

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[All correspondence connected with the Neighbourhood development plan is published at <http://ndp.chelveston.org.uk>]

From: Michael Cunliffe
Sent: 18 March 2014 22:44
To: phso.enquiries@ombudsman.org.uk; survey@ndp.chelveston.org.uk
Subject: Voting system for Chelveston-cum-Caldecott Parish Council

Hi

Please answer the following point on the voting system my is PIN1 - [REDACTED] and PIN2 [REDACTED]

I am writing to express my dismay that a democratic body can come up the voting system being used for Chelvestons plans.

Please respond to my point below

The UK voter turn out for this century for the UK general election is 62%. If by some miracle a local election had a turn out matching the average for a general election then 82% of these people would need to vote negative to out way the 38% automatically considered to be for the proposals.

Considering the above point and that we tend to average just over 40% in local government elections then it is mathematically impossible to effect the result by voting. How does this promote democracy and how can it be presented as a democratic voting system.

A quick count of the questions come in at 27. It is proven time and again that the more questions you ask the less likely you are to get a considered response. If in deed you get a response.

A very quick word count of the proposals come in at about 5000 words. This is a technical document requiring detailed study. You then ask a series of questions and if people do not reply because they do not understand, have the time or actually the cognitive abilities then you say they are for the pro the proposals.

Discrimination act. Considering the above then surely this is discriminative against those suffering from disabilities preventing them from studying a 5000 word technical document and taking this inability to do so as a positive vote.

Placing the statement saying you practise all of the above on the reverse side of explanation document. Again it demonstrated again and again that items on the reverse are less likely to be read, especially as all the information required for the vast majority of voter has been supplied. So for the majority of people there is little need to turn over. I.E how many postal or internet voter does the parish have in other elections.

It can be taken that you are aware that this system is fundamentally against the standard perception of voting papers by typing in bold, underlining statements and using a red font. However you do not make this immediately apparent when stating they are voting papers on the envelope nor even when it is opened.

Whilst I do not know if this is correct I believe that there is an overriding requirement to make voting simple and accessible. I would be amazed if this was not a legal requirement for anybody conducting a vote. Never mind a body elected to represent all of its constituents.

Regards

Michael Cunliffe