

Wigan leader complains about inspector's view

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The Leader of Wigan Council, Cllr Lord Peter Smith has criticised a planning inspector's suggested revisions to the local authority's core strategy.

Inspector Kevin Ward rejected plans for a business park close to junction 25 of the M6 and recommended 1,000 new homes should be built in Golborne and Lowton and Standish.

Smith claimed Ward failed to explain his decision: "The government's planning inspector has failed to provide any kind of rationale behind his verdicts. His failure to support a new site for business development at junction 25 of the M6 is particularly confusing as it contradicts the government's growth agenda. I also imagine people in Standish and Golborne and Lowton would like to know his reasons for recommending extra housing there. The inspector offers no explanation."

The government requires councils to produce a local plan outlining where, and to what extent, development should take place. Each plan has to be examined by a government-appointed inspector. Wigan Council is now due to respond to Mr Ward's recommendations. But councillors say that is difficult as the inspector has not justified his decisions.

In response to Smith's comments, one developer active in the area, Himor, which proposes new housing at the Barrowcroft project in Standish, said it was unfair to say Ward had not explained his decision.

Samuel Stafford, associate director at Himor, commented: "Firstly, Mr Ward has stated that the submitted Core Strategy is unsound in a number of respects and the Council formally requested that Mr Ward recommend the modifications to make the document sound. Mr Ward makes clear in his letter dated 14 March 2013 though that the main purpose of it was to outline the modifications required. Mr Ward will provide a detailed explanation for the approach that he has adopted in his Inspector's Report.

"Secondly, Wigan Council may not think Mr Ward's recommendations are justified, but Mr Ward has clearly stated that he does not think that the Council's preferred option for addressing it's housing shortfall by bringing forward all of the safeguarded land at Golborne and Lowton for development and none elsewhere beyond the East West Core is justified either. Mr Ward may not have stated why he considers Standish to be a sustainable location, but he has stated that the evidence does not support the view that safeguarded land would only be appropriate at Golborne and Lowton and not at Standish.

"The alternative solution to the Council's housing shortfall is the release of Green Belt land across the Borough, but safeguarded land like that at Standish was allocated specifically to prevent this."

Stafford added: "The Council's own legal advice states that it is strongly arguable that the consequences of not having an adopted Plan are greater than advancing the current Core Strategy. An up-to-date plan is the best way of providing a policy framework to assist with the delivery of new housing and, whilst the options for addressing the shortfall have been subject to consultation and sustainability appraisal, the proposed modifications will ensure that the capacity of infrastructure, the ability to integrate development with local communities and the ability to deliver development and provide physical and green infrastructure are all taken into account."

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