

A Shill at Large

Government Local Plans Expert insults Sussex Councils

Chairman of the government's Local Plans Expert Group, John Rhodes has provoked widespread anger after insulting Local Councils at a public hearing in Sussex.

Mr Rhodes, who was there on behalf of a property company which has been rejected by Councils in Sussex, told the hearing that they had "failed spectacularly" and "needed help."

His comments were made at the Public Examination of the Mid Sussex Local Plan in Haywards Heath. Just a few hours earlier, and at the same hearing, the Council had received glowing praise from its two MPs, Sir Nicholas Soames and Nick Herbert.

"We are here to demonstrate our wholehearted support for the draft local plan as it is presented," Sir Nicholas told the Hearing. "We support the level of housing where it is promoted by the council and we respect the very difficult work it has been to balance with the critical environmental constraints of the area."

Mr Herbert echoed Sir Nicholas's support and urged the Inspector not to delay the plan stressing that both MPs "strongly oppose" the proposal put forward by MMT (Mayfield Market Towns), the property company represented by Mr Rhodes. MMT was rejected by the planning Inspectorate last year and has been publicly rejected by all local councils and by the owners of the land.

However, not long after the MPs had left the building, Mr Rhodes told the Inspector, Jonathan Bore, that Sussex is "a part of the country which has failed - It has failed in relation to the NPPF and it has failed in relation to its residents. It has failed spectacularly."

He then stated that Mid Sussex had "an unsound plan" and outlined, in detail, the steps which he thought the Inspector should take to remedy the problem. These included forcing the council to agree to a strict review to address not only its own housing needs, but also a shortfall of houses in neighbouring Brighton and Hove and Crawley - which he said is a total of 38,500 homes.

"With respect, the local authorities in this area need some help in identifying their responsibilities in terms of proactive action to look at the extent of the need," said Mr Rhodes adding that, "We would be very happy to be part of an exercise to try and draft the terms."

Mr Rhodes's last comment produced a blast of laughter throughout the council

chamber, but he didn't give up, and by the end of the day he had secured permission to take a part in the drafting of a new document to outline a possible review strategy. This is to be discussed at the public hearing next week (Dec 9).

Mr Rhodes has been closely involved in the creation of Britain's planning laws - In 2014 he was one of four advisors to the government on the original drafting of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). And, as Chairman of the government's Local Plans Expert Group which produced the recommendations for a new Housing White Paper expected later this month, he will have intimate knowledge of future planning laws which haven't yet been published.

Local residents have taken to Facebook to vent their anger at his behaviour at the hearing, calling the process undemocratic and accusing Mr Rhodes of bullying the council and abusing his position to promote his client's proposal:

https://www.facebook.com/preservingtheweald/posts/1138006716275820?comment_id=1139620922781066¬if_t=feed_comment¬if_id=1480708631663291

The Examination is to resume on Friday (December 9)

Background information:

- <http://www.quod.com/news/john-rhodes-advising-government-on-local-plans/>

- <http://www.quod.com/news/national-planning-policy-framework/>

- <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3077598/West-Sussex-farmer-Robert-Worsley-gave-275m-save-village-hero-time.html>

- <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/earth/countryside/11618126/The-great-rural-fightback-meet-the-villagers-turning-down-millions-from-developers.html>

- <http://www.midsussex.gov.uk/planning-licensing-building-control/planning-policy/local-development-framework/district-plan/district-plan-examination/>

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