

NOTICE OF MOTION - CONCERN THAT LANCASTER CITY COUNCIL DOES NOT HEAR THE RURAL VOICE

To be proposed by Cllr Roger Mace. Seconded by Cllr Mel Guilding:

"We are residents of villages in the Halton and Kellet Wards of Lancaster District. Our villages are rural in character and have been sustained as communities separate from the urban centre of Lancaster - in some cases for over one thousand years.

Under the section headed "Improving the Rural Environment", in the Lancaster City Council Planning Handbook 2000, published by Burrows Communications Ltd., it says "In responding to pressures for new development the City Council will look to guard against inappropriate change and protect the character of villages". We are unaware of any change to this commitment by the City Council.

We expect the City Council to

- safeguard the sense of identity of village communities*
- protect and enhance the social, economic, and environmental sustainability required by current and future rural residents*
- respect the visual amenity associated with the landscapes surrounding rural settlements*
- conserve the quality and character of village landscapes and the setting of rural villages*
- recognise that landscape containing green spaces is an irreplaceable community asset*
- ensure that local rural opinion informs City Council decisions that have an impact on local village communities*
- promote city coast and countryside - without sidelining the countryside*

We observe recent symptoms of neglect of the rural voice locally, in that

- the executive of this Council does not include elected representatives from rural wards in the District, and*
- unlike the situation in 2005, there is no longer a Cabinet member with a portfolio for "Rural Affairs" and*
- recent new brand identities for Lancaster and for Morecambe make no reference to the countryside of the District*
- there is no adequate forum in which issues of major importance to rural communities, such as the preparation of the Local Plan, can be properly debated.*

PETITION

We (the undersigned) are concerned at the symptoms of neglect of the rural voice locally as set out on the attached sheet, and we call upon Lancaster City Council

- to resolve to work with the Parish and Town Councils in the District and fully recognise their contributions in preserving the distinctiveness and aspirations of our local communities and*
- to set up a working group with Council Officers and representatives of rural parishes and of the City Council to enable rural views to inform the process of preparing component documents in the Local Plan*

MOTION

In view of the content of the above petition, which has been submitted to the Council with some 360 signatures from residents in Kellet and Halton Wards, and the concerns at the

symptoms of neglect of the rural voice as set out by the petitioners in the sheet accompanying the petition, this Council resolves

- *to work with the Parish and Town Councils in the District and fully recognise their contributions in preserving the distinctiveness and aspirations of our local communities and;*
- *to set up a working group with Council Officers and representatives of rural parishes and of the City Council to enable rural views to inform the process of preparing component documents in the Local Plan.”*

OFFICER BRIEFING NOTE:

The suggestion that Lancaster City Council does not consider the rural voice in its district or make provision to consider rural concerns is not accepted for several reasons.

- 1) It is supported by reference to a number of symptoms which are taken entirely out of context.
- 2) It fails entirely to examine documented evidence of the attention and care that is taken by Lancaster City Council to attend to the specific needs and spatial characteristics of its large rural areas; and
- 3) It shows an unawareness of the work undertaken at strategic high level by Lancaster City Council to promote the interests of the rural North West and to ensure that strategic policy decisions do not become over dominated by solely urban and metropolitan considerations.

Evidence

The petitioners provide a quotation from a planning handbook produced during the planning system as it existed 15 years ago. That system has been substantially updated since the introduction of a spatial approach to planning in 2005 with far more emphasis on councils having to prove that they have a sound appreciation of their area's socio-economic needs and can relate them competently to a detailed knowledge of the special geography of their areas.

When many councils initially failed to do so, Lancaster City Council was the first in the North West of England to secure adoption of its Local Development Framework Core Strategy. This is evidential proof of its ability to demonstrate that it understood the needs of its whole area. A core strand of that strategy was urban concentration and a network of vibrant rural communities. It was a plan which had at its heart the need to safeguard the special identity of rural communities and accommodate the bulk of growth within the urban areas.

In the work being undertaken since to replace the Core Strategy, significant attention has been given to the very difficult challenge of having to accommodate significantly different levels of growth whilst still safeguarding the very identities and characteristic which the petitioners allege are being ignored. The choices for strategic growth consultations carried out in 2014 demonstrate this.

The City Council is taking a lead on preparing a Development Plan document for the Arnsdale/Silverdale AONB on behalf of itself and South Lakeland District Council (SLDC) after the Inspector dealing with SLDC's Local Plan required this special rural area to be given more careful consideration.

The City Council is the managing authority for the Arnsdale/ Silverdale AONB, is a partnership member of the Forest of Bowland AONB and is a member of the Morecambe Bay

Partnership. It is also the accountable body for the Morecambe Bay Nature Improvement Area.

Its two new tourist brands were specifically designed to engage with a wide range of partners around Morecambe Bay and linkages with the wider rural areas for tourism purposes. The Lancaster Brand specifically includes the Lune valley and Bowland and the Morecambe Bay brand includes the rural areas around the bay.

On the higher level strategic front the City Council has played a leading role in a partnership of local authorities who have negotiated with National Grid to select a tunnelling option to connect an upgraded grid around Morecambe Bay with substation facilities at Heysham, without having to build new power lines around the special landscapes of North Lancashire and South Lakeland. A result, that if not achieved, would have had a considerable impact on Kellet and Halton.

It was the City Council who negotiated with Lancashire County Council to promote Lancaster District as the first pilot of its rural superfast broadband project to improve connectivity for residents and businesses.

In debates about the Northern Powerhouse it is representatives of Lancaster City Council who are challenging the over concentration of attention on the large metropolitan areas at the expense of the largely rural North West.

These are hardly the actions of a totally urban focussed Local Authority and demonstrate comprehensive evidence of rural focussed activity.

Mainstream Considerations

Consideration of the special needs of this district's rural areas, the problems of rural housing, access to services, skills losses, graduate retention and the custodian responsibilities for protecting some of the nation's most special landscapes is a golden thread through the work of Lancaster City Council.

It has become a mainstream part of its activity which does not need to be reflected by the designation of individual portfolios or forums, primarily because of the national policy requirement to engage in "spatial planning" rather than the older process of land use planning, which didn't have built within it a need to have regard to the special geography of the area.

The Cabinet members for Regeneration and Tourism have, as an inbuilt part of their responsibilities, the requirement to plan and provide services for the rural areas as well as the coastal and urban ones.

Member representation is also provided on the Executive Committees for both Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Full and comprehensive opportunities for engagement in the Local Plan process have been, and will continue to be, made available for all the communities in the district and the effectiveness of this must be proven to the Planning Inspectorate as part of the eventual examination process.

The City Council is also adhering to its Duty to Co-operate with the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans.

Conclusion

The City Council rebuts entirely the suggestions made by the petitioners that it ignores the rural voice in Lancaster District and has a substantial evidence base to demonstrate its considerable engagement in having regard to and protecting rural communities.

Chief Officer (Regeneration & Planning)

S.151 Officer Comments

The S.151 Officer has been consulted and has no further comments to add.

Monitoring Officer Comments

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments to add.