

Petition presentation, Rosie Pearson, Full Council 27 July 2020

Good evening. Thank you for accepting this petition.

Before I present it, I would like to talk very briefly about the validation process, which will need a thorough investigation.

I believe many hundreds of signatures have been wrongly discounted. The Chair and Vice Chair of one of the district's parish councils have not been validated. Nor have other longstanding residents. In one household one spouse was validated, the other was not.

In addition, many people who live outside the district or come here to work would have been directly affected by the garden communities – by the traffic, the rail commuters, the competition for jobs, the loss of 5,600 acres countryside and the huge debt required.

Others do not live in the district but grew up here, have family here or have moved away temporarily.

Many people who signed the petition cannot find their name on the council list at all.

Finally, please note that due to lockdown, we were unable to petition in person as we would otherwise have done, hence the exclusive reliance on Change.org.

Whichever way you read it, it is clear that the council has tried to downplay the petition and the strength of feeling, and appears to be attempting to discredit me.

However, that is not the point of tonight's discussion. I will follow up separately with a complaint. Tonight, you only have 30 minutes, and I urge you to debate **the issues set out in the petition. You will let down your voters if you waste your allotted time on who signed the petition.**

Now I would like to explain why I am presenting this petition.

Residents feel ignored, let down and angry. That so many people responded to the petition, and so quickly, reflects this anger and frustration.

It saddens me that it has come to this. I would far rather engage constructively with a council which listens to residents and plans with us, not against us.

So why does the petition single out your Leader?

Whilst I note Councillor Butland's lengthy public service, it was he **alone** who chose, on 23 July 2018, to use delegated powers. **He** took a decision which has since had huge ramifications for every resident of the district, which was to continue to pursue the exact same garden communities.

Councillor Butland made this decision even before a response from the inspector to questions raised by officers in a letter only three days before. This demonstrated a predisposition and predetermination. Councillor Butland led the council inexorably to its current situation.

What is it that is so bad about that situation?

- The Local Plan has been found unsound, for a second time, by one of the government's most experienced and respected inspectors. Both the new towns in the district failed, for reasons which residents warned about repeatedly. The cost to taxpayers, including appeals, is not known.
- The result is and will continue to be, speculative development applications across the district, due to the direction the Leader drove the plan.
- And, NEGC Ltd, the delivery vehicle of which Councillor Butland is a director, is being wound up. It spent £8m. Braintree's contribution was £1m. Yet NEGC delivered nothing but evidence which the inspector singled out as unsound and a shambolic and premature PR exercise last autumn. NEGC Ltd did not deliver a single land contract, let alone a house.

Councillor Butland continually ignored evidence showing flaws in the proposals. Time after time, he refused to answer legitimate questions or to address concerns.

When he said ten days ago at the Local Plan meeting that councillors, not officers, are to 'blame', he unwittingly pointed the finger himself. The rest of you were removed from decision-making by Councillor Butland two years ago.

It was your Leader alone who ignored the sensible option 1 that the inspector set out in July 2018 as the preferred one. Under that by now we would

probably have a Section 2 plan in place, would have prevented speculative development and have saved millions of pounds of tax-payers' money.

Instead, we were left with a second unsound ruling and still no local plan.

The Leader has shown no understanding of what it is like for residents to live under the cloud of the new town proposals. Nor has he apologized that we have had to spend many thousands of pounds and hours of time fighting our own council.

So tonight, I ask Councillor Butland to do the only honorable thing. He should apologise to residents for the harm he has done to the district and he should resign. We need someone at the helm who listens to residents and takes on board their concerns.