

## **Statement: Tysoe Parish Council (PC)**

### **Re: Resignation of Tysoe Neighbourhood Planning Group Steering Committee (NPG)**

The PC received notification from the NPG on Monday 16<sup>th</sup> November confirming that all its members wished to resign, with immediate effect. This followed an informal conversation with Chairman of the PC on Friday 13<sup>th</sup>; and a follow-up email advising the Chairman of this intention. This was both a surprise, and very saddening.

The notification was accompanied by a note outlining the reasons for the resignations. In light of the comments made in this note, the PC considers it appropriate to outline its views about the matters raised, and to provide a record of decisions and actions it has taken, for the avoidance of any doubt there may be.

1. It is difficult to understand how the PC has, in the NPG's resignation letter's words, been 'obstructive'; and in what way it has made objections to the progress of the Neighbourhood Plan (NP); and in so far as there may appear to have been 'objections' in what way these are 'uninformed or irrelevant'.
2. It is difficult to understand how the PC has been undemocratic. It is the duly elected body for the Parish. It is publicly accountable to this community, and its members take their obligations to this community very seriously. The NPG is accountable to the PC, and needs to be held to the same standards, obligations and codes of conduct as those that apply to the PC; and as governed by the Terms of Reference (TOR) agreed with it.
3. It is difficult to understand how there can be the claim made in the resignation letter that a "small number of people who have now effectively taken control of the NP's progress via the PC and brought it to a halt by being continually obstructive." The PC acts a body, and any decisions or requirements affecting the NPG are made by the PC as a whole. To suggest otherwise is a very regrettable impugning of the PC's and its' Councillors' integrity.
4. It is further very regrettable that in the NPG's letter of 26<sup>th</sup> October it saw fit to impugn, by name and in person, the integrity and work of a Councillor as demonstrating 'scant consideration'; suggesting alleged motives ("seeking to place himself so central to the formation and control of.."); alleged judgments ("why he feels those members are failing") and alleged decisions ("remove people from current roles") without any evidence or knowledge of this intent. This Councillor was appointed by the PC to represent it in the NPG, and he has conducted his responsibilities in this capacity with the full knowledge and support of the PC.

As to the substance of the NPG' letter of resignation, the PC has the following comments:

5. The NPG was officially formed in June 2014, not February 2014, as agreed in TOR dated 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2014.

The NPG had existed in an unofficial capacity before this date, comprising a group of Tysoe residents whose principal activity had been to oppose the proposed development on the Oxhill Road, Tysoe by Gladman Developments Ltd. In so far as this group had foreseen that the existence of a Neighbourhood Plan (NP) might aid the objections to this development, this group had, with the informal support of the PC, taken steps to initiate the creation of this NP.

From June 2014 the PC formally agreed in the TOR to create a NP for Tysoe, and to establish the NPG as a steering group whose aims were: "to oversee a process that will result in the preparation of a draft plan which will be put to a public referendum". The TOR also detailed the principle aims of the NP, and provided the rules under which the NPG would undertake these delegated responsibilities on behalf of the PC.

6. Over the period since 2014 it is acknowledged that the NPG consulted with Stratford District Council (SDC) to have Tysoe designated for an NP, undertook research, held public meetings, produced and circulated a Survey, held consultations with residents, external consultants and interested bodies, and produced 2 drafts of the NP. The PC has on numerous occasions expressed appreciation to the NPG for the work that this involved.
7. While a representative of the PC was present at many NPG meetings in 2014 and early 2015, the NPG was entrusted with its responsibilities with little or no intervention from the PC. This trust was evidenced by the PC's willingness to overlook conflicts of interest which members of the NPG had in also being members of the 'Rule 6 group' involved as parties to the Appeal in the Gladman development. This was in direct contravention of the TOR.

8. In January 2015, immediately after the NPG had produced the 2<sup>nd</sup> draft of the NP, it sought approval from the PC for this draft to be submitted to SDC. It was felt by the NPG that this might support evidence produced to the Planning Inspector responsible for the Gladman development Appeal.

Notwithstanding that neither the PC nor residents had had opportunity to be consulted on this draft, it was agreed by the PC that the draft could be sent to SDC, on the clear understanding that this was to be for checking, and that proper consultations could follow. In subsequent correspondence with the PC in early February 2015 the NPG gave the PC advice of the wording needed to give effect to the submission of the draft.

Reliant on this advice, the PC incorrectly and mistakenly submitted the NP to SDC with wording used only appropriate when an NP is being sent as a 'Final Submission' for examination by SDC, not as agreed and approved by the PC. This wording was re-confirmed by SDC's Planning Officer, and as the draft did not meet those required of a Final Submission, it was rejected. This was a significant embarrassment to the PC.

It was subsequently established that SDC's Planning Officers had written to the NPG in January 2015, sometime before this submission, with significant reservations about the content and policies contained in the draft. This was not brought to the PC's attention until the PC made its own communication with SDC about the NP in May 2015.

9. From February to March 2015 this 2<sup>nd</sup> draft NP was, formally, open to consultation and comment from residents and other parties. It is known that a number of residents expressed concern to the NPG and the PC at the length and complexity of the draft; that some of the policies that appeared in it did not appear to have been agreed by the PC; and that they did not appear to reflect residents' aims for the NP, as disclosed in the Survey or in other communications.
10. From February 2015 until the election of the new PC in May 2015 little progress was made with the NP. A 'mapping project', begun in 2014, was continued by the NPG. Presentation(s) of its aims were made in the village hall, to a limited audience, during mid-2015.
11. At a presentation of this mapping project in September 2015, members of the PC who did attend were informed by the NPG that this project was still being developed; and its relevance for the NP had still to be determined. The mapping project has apparently not yet incorporated national or SDC planning requirements to ensure its relevance to the NP; and SDC has not been consulted on it, so far as known.

The PC did not impede the NPG in any way during this period, other than to encourage the NPG to engage more effectively with residents. The PC's main concern, apart from the need for more consultation, was to insist that Minutes of meetings and other documents of relevance to the development of the NP be published on the NP website so that a record of progress and consultations would be readily available to residents. Many of these have still not been published, despite several requests from the PC. This is in contravention of the terms of the TOR.

12. From the date of its appointment in May 2015, the new PC immediately started a review of the NP to determine what decisions it needed to make to allow progress. The NPG stated at meetings that it was unable to make further progress with the drafting of the NP, but it was unclear to the PC what prevented further draft(s) being produced. A proposal made to the PC and NPG in June 2015, suggesting a reorganisation of the NPG to improve communications and consultations, was not acted on.
13. The PC invited a Planning Officer of SDC to meet the PC in July 2015 to give it clarification on progress with the NP; and specifically the housing policy proposed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> draft. It was clear from this meeting that this policy in the draft had not been agreed by the PC, presented to residents, explained by the NPG, or would meet the NP requirements of SDC. Specifically it appeared that the housing policy that had been proposed in the draft NP would need to be re-examined and potentially materially changed.
14. In order to maintain community interest, the PC arranged and assisted in the production by the NPG of a Newsletter for residents in September 2015. It was further clear from the PC's examination of the NP over July/August 2015 that it potentially involved significant changes to the status of Tysoe as a 'Local Service Village'. The PC requested that the NPG arrange a working party to examine the NP proposals for a change to the Local Service Village status of Tysoe. The report produced by this working party has still not been published by the NPG, for comment by residents.

15. In October 2015 the PC approved a recommendation for a change to the housing policy to be adopted in the NP. It appeared to the PC that the NPG was too reliant on the expertise of a small number of individuals for the next stages of its progress; and that it would improve the effectiveness of the NPG to add more, and different, skills. This is a key recommendation of the Guides to NP management. The NPG had remained essentially unchanged since its inception as a group involved in the opposition to the Gladman development, and changes seemed appropriate.
16. A proposal was made to the PC at its Meeting of 5<sup>th</sup> October for the reorganisation of the NPG to add extra skills and resources, to enable individual members of the NPG to focus on apparent interest and strengths, and to avoid potential conflicts of interest. The proposal offered to consult with the NPG Chairman about his own role, and the proposed changes. This offer was not taken up. The PC agreed instead that the NPG could make its own counter-proposal.
17. The NPG counter-proposal was substantially similar to that proposed by the PC, and was largely accepted by the PC. It was not, as the resignation letter states, rejected by the PC. The PC's qualified approval differed mainly in its insistence on the PC being involved in the reorganisation of the NPG, as provided in the TOR; and to insist that the author of future drafts of the NP must be separate from the person who acts as Chair of the proposed NP draft sub-group. There has been no explanation as to why this was unacceptable.
18. It is regrettable that the entire NPG has chosen to resign. It is also regrettable that the NPG has chosen not to hear the appreciation and thanks given to it for its work throughout the period since its appointment; and has chosen instead to view the PC's initiatives as threats to its independence, or as criticism; rather than as expressions of the PC's need to ensure that it is fulfilling its responsibilities to the community it represents. For the PC to do otherwise would be for it to be negligent of its duty to this community. The PC has no intention of failing in this duty.
19. The PC, with regret, accepts the NPG's resignation; and will now liaise with the former NPG to ensure an orderly hand-over of all materials it holds in relation to the NP. The PC will prepare a plan for the resumption of needed activities to allow the NP to make progress, involving and consulting with the community, and all other interested bodies. This plan will be prepared and submitted to the PC for approval as soon as practically possible.