

Dear Secretary of State

As representatives of Standish Voice, the neighbourhood forum for Standish, in Wigan, we would like to express our immense disappointment at the decisions of planning inspector David Prentis concerning the planning appeals APP/V4250/W/14/3001130 (land adjacent to Lurdin Lane and to the west of Chorley Road, Standish) and APP/V4250/W/15/3003142 (land to the south of Rectory Lane, Standish, Wigan).

While we respect the appeal process and note the comprehensive evidence and detailed conclusions that Mr Prentis arrives at, we believe that it is directly at odds with planning inspector Kevin Ward, who, in 2013, adjudicated that Wigan's Core Strategy should permit "approximately 1,000" new homes on safeguarded land within Standish.

The allowing of these appeals by Mr Prentis means that approximately 1,410 homes will now be built on this safeguarded open space within Standish, with a further 150 homes also having been given outline permission for brownfield land in the village, which was not taken into account during the appeal hearing. Together this represents approximately a 30% increase in homes in our community.

Before changes to the Core Strategy ordered by Mr Ward, Wigan Council originally wanted no house building in Standish as it believed current infrastructure was inadequate. Many people who live in the village were also, and still are, of this view.

Wigan Council acknowledges that in the light of the new housing, substantial improvements to infrastructure is needed in Standish to allow the current community, and the new population we will welcome, to cope.

Standish Voice was formed in July, 2014, after 1,050 homes were given permission in outline, to prepare a neighbourhood plan which would give local people a say in how this new infrastructure is delivered, and to shape the future of the village.

Over the past year, we have been successful in persuading the local community that change can be positive and that, as well as challenges, new housing and the funding which will come from it can be beneficial.

We firmly believe that the neighbourhood plan can be a good way to bring residents together behind a new vision for our community, can solidify flagging civic pride and help to integrate a new population.

More and more people have joined Standish Voice as they have become convinced that a neighbourhood plan can give them a real say in the future of their community.

We recently concluded a very successful consultation programme, with 782 responses to a highly detailed questionnaire, the results of which will be the foundation for the policies we will bring forward in the neighbourhood plan.

However, the allowing of the above appeals has hit our cause hard. Residents are questioning the effectiveness of a neighbourhood plan if, as they see it, a planning inspector can agree to development which goes against Wigan MBC's Local Plan and a previous planning inspector's decision. Many people who were being persuaded that the neighbourhood planning and general planning process was worth engaging in are now disillusioned.

We are extremely concerned that Mr Prentis totally disregarded residents views, and has used the cover of five year supply of housing to allow granting of more housing and profit for the developers. The entire issue of housing supply is down to developers land banking sites - gaining permission, not developing sites speedily and then using the argument of five year supply to gain additional planning permissions regardless of the Core Strategy and the ability of our community to sustain such a high degree of development.

We would respectfully urge you to look at the planning decisions involving Standish as a matter of urgency as there are a number of other developers currently looking to bring forward planning applications for remaining safeguarded land in the light of the recent appeals.

We would like to take this opportunity to extend an invitation to yourself to visit Standish to meet us and see the situation at first hand, to look at how our preparation for a neighbourhood plan is progressing (we were the first neighbourhood forum in Wigan MBC) and to visit other interesting community projects.

We still passionately believe that neighbourhood planning can empower our community, improve democracy and engage people in local government, but it is hard to persuade people of the necessity of a neighbourhood plan if we cannot rely on planning inspectors to respect the parameters of the borough's Local Plan.

Yours sincerely,

Gill Foster

Chair person, Standish Voice

Paul Ogden

Vice chair, Standish Voice