

District Councillor Report October 2016



I recently attended a meeting in Somerton for all Parish and Town Councils regarding the Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (HELAA). The role of HELAA is to provide a platform for landowners, agents, developers or anyone else who may be interested in selling land for housing to come forward and help South Somerset District Council (SSDC) identify and create a list of potential sites within the area which may be suitable for development.

From Curry Rivel's perspective the only identified site on the HELAA map, was extending the already approved 30+ dwellings at Stanchester Way, to provide further housing incorporating the entire field. However, other areas around the village which are known to been keen for development were not mentioned. Thus, the accuracy, and therefore the usefulness of the HELAA, is somewhat questionable. Unfortunately, SSDC can only provide information from those who have proffered it, whilst there will obviously be others who are not so keen to publicise their intentions. Yet, without a HELAA, SSDC cannot evidence how they intend to fulfil their five year housing land supply obligations and would be open to rogue developers with less amenable and robust plans. It is important to make the distinction that HELAA only creates a list of potential sites; it does not allocate sites for development. However, with the need for housing becoming more acute we can only wait to see how this affects our village in the future.

In mid-October the Full Council voted to accept a four-year settlement of central government grants even though the agreement will leave the Council with a negative Revenue Support Grant in the fourth year 2019/20 when £330,000 for local taxation will be returned to the Government for redistribution to other authorities. Members of all parties were united in the condemnation of the impossible position the Government had put us in in that they had made it very clear that all four years of the settlement had to be accepted and under no circumstances would any authority be better off by rejecting the offer. Thus, we were left with two unfair choices to the tax payers of South Somerset, finally opting for the one that gave us certainty to financial planning.

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