



Green Party

for the common good

High Peak Green Party

Autumn 2016

Sustainable housing

The High Peak Local Plan commits the council to pursue sustainable housing policies that provide for new building of affordable housing, while respecting the landscape and the natural habitats of this beautiful region. But, faced with shrinking budgets and weak planning laws, does our council have the means to halt unsustainable development?

More housing is definitely needed across the UK, but the method of planning that the government has imposed on councils isn't the right way to go about it. The National Policy Planning Framework (NPPF) allows for the adoption of a local plan and for people to organise in order to submit neighbourhood plans. But despite plans being approved by government inspectors, the council have little power to uphold the plans when rejected applications go to appeal.

Large building and speculative interests can wreck the democratic process by employing expensive legal representatives against which most councils cannot respond. Why? Because the government has more or less bankrupted most authorities, and how can you justify expensive legal costs when you have schools and adult care to consider?

The NPPF doesn't work very well to deliver the housing we need. There's no obligation on developers to actually build the houses once the permission is obtained. Foot-dragging keeps the supply of houses well below demand, raising the price developers can obtain per unit built.

Delivery of built houses is well short of what is planned for and the government response to this – the Housing Delivery Test – is a classic example of trying to solve the wrong problem.

Councils that don't meet targets are forced to release more land for development – which is more likely to be on green-field sites than the original allocation. So, instead of being penalised, foot-dragging developers are rewarded by being given access to land not previously available for building!

Paul Waring

Save Spencer Ward

Spencer ward at Cavendish Hospital Buxton provides greatly valued care for older people with mental health problems. It recently was awarded a gold star for the quality of care. But it's threatened with closure in a review of mental health services in North Derbyshire.

The plan is to introduce a Dementia Rapid Response team to support care at home. Though care at home is obviously a good thing, there will still be times when admission to hospital is needed and the really bad news is that inpatient care for patients with dementia will be transferred to Chesterfield. So, vulnerable people who are confused and frightened will be taken away from familiar surroundings and their families will have to make a long and costly journey to visit them.

Mental health professionals at Cavendish hospital fear that patients with acute problems will be admitted to general hospitals such as Stepping Hill which are not equipped to deal with this type of illness.

Some local rehabilitation beds will be retained though it's unclear where they will be, probably in privately run care homes. This will provide a fragmented service of variable quality, with the cost of assessing quality falling on the NHS.

Even more worrying is the news that these changes are necessary because funding is falling behind increasing running costs by 4% per year. How long will it be before the new service is cut back?

We need an NHS that is publicly owned and properly funded. The NHS reinstatement bill (www.nhsbill2015.org), originally introduced by Green MP Caroline Lucas, aims to stop the creeping privatisation and underfunding of our precious NHS. The second reading of the bill is on November 4th. High Peak MP Andrew Bingham says he's against the closure of Spencer ward. Ask him to vote for the bill to save Spencer ward against this and future threats to care in our community.

More than a Food bank

The High Peak foodbank has been providing emergency food parcels to people in need in the local community since 2007. But it hasn't stopped at that. HPF found that the roots of poverty are unemployment and issues with benefits and they took action, offering clients the use of the internet and telephone to make claims or resolve issues with benefits, advocating for those not able to deal with statutory organisations themselves. This reduced the need for people to return to the foodbank for help. In 2015, HPF was awarded European Social Funding to start a work and skills programme which grew into Zink Employability – programme that provides work coaching and tailored work experience for long term unemployed people. More than 60 people have been through the programme with nearly half

finding work within three months. Work coach, Jane Kirk-Bagshaw explains:

“Work coaching is about a new set of eyes looking at a person's situation and where they want to get to, what job they want, then guiding them to plan how to get there. I help clients to get things in place and to be in the right frame of mind to think positively about a future in which they have a job.”

In contrast to work experience programmes where people are placed in whatever job is available, the Zink programme helps people develop the skills they need for the job they want

One of the challenges that people face in the jobs market is lack of qualifications. The foodbank recognised this and in March 2016 became the first UK foodbank to offer City and Guilds qualifications as part of the Zink programme. Seven people have achieved a certificate so far and five of those have started work.

From September 2016, the foodbank are offering one to one tuition for adults on English and Maths courses. Having these at GCSE standard can lead to better employment opportunities and is a gateway to other qualifications.

The Zink Employability programme was celebrated in an All Party Parliamentary Report in December 2015 and since then it has been advising other charities and social enterprises on setting up similar schemes.

For more information, visit www.highpeakfoodbank.co.uk and www.zink.org.uk.

Paul Bohan

Want to know more about the Green Party?

National Party

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Contact <https://www.greenparty.org.uk/contact.html>

High Peak

email highpeak@derbyshiregreenparty.org.uk

website www.derbyshiregreenparty.org.uk