

Dear Julia

Please see my response to John Slater regarding Mike Skinner's submission to him on Friday.

Kind regards

Ned

----- Original Message -----

From:

To:

Sent: Sunday, February 16th 2025, 13:53

Subject: Mike Skinner comments

Dear Mr Slater

I am delighted to welcome you as examiner of Hurst Green's neighbourhood plan.

I am a Hurst Green parish councillor, and I can see that I have just been accused by Mike Skinner of misleading Rother's planning meeting when it met to vote on Cooks field on 5 September 2024. He says that I misrepresented the parish council's position when I said "the draft Neighbourhood Plan had been abandoned."

I reject his accusation and draw your attention to the following timeline and facts.

On 11 March 2024 the parish council wrote to Rother DC about the Cooks field application (see planning portal RR/2023/2540/P) and included an update on the status of our neighbourhood plan.

The relevant passage in our objection letter is this: “The applicant makes much of the draft Neighbourhood Plan. It should be noted this is a work in progress and has not gone to referendum. Judging from the strong public opposition to the Burgh Hill site being developed, great care should be taken regarding all references made to the Neighbourhood Plan. Paragraph 48 of the NPPF states that “Local planning authorities may give weight to relevant policies in emerging plans according to: a) the stage of preparation of the emerging plan (the more advanced its preparation, the greater the weight that may be given); b) the extent to which there are unresolved objections to relevant policies (the less significant the unresolved objections, the greater the weight that may be given).” We would argue that the Neighbourhood Plan is not at an advanced stage of preparation (it has been suspended for two years and the make up of the parish council has changed). More importantly, there are now significant unresolved objections to policy HGSA1 in the form of widespread opposition from residents of Burgh Hill. As things stand, the neighbourhood plan is unlikely to be passed at referendum.”

Mr Skinner should have familiarised himself with our position.

I have reviewed the video recording of my speech on 5 September in which I developed the argument above, among other points. You can see my testimony here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sqm8M9xqZxw> (I appear at 21:20 on the video.)

I said “we have no neighbourhood plan” and “it’s a question of democratic legitimacy. Only five people [in the 2021/2022 consultation] commented positively on the prospect of Burgh Hill being turned into housing development, that’s five out of 1400 people [in the village]. We don’t feel there is a legitimate democratic basis to go forward with the draft neighbourhood plan so we have abandoned that and we will pick it up next year when the dust has settled.” In other words, there will be a neighbourhood plan in 2025 but it will be different from the 2022 version.

Before the Rother planning committee meeting, originally planned for June 27, I sought clarification from our parish chairman Graham Browne about the status of our neighbourhood plan, specifically about the need to exclude Cooks field from a revised version, and the line to take with Rother. Graham told me (telephone call, 12 May) that he and Andrew Brown, the parish council's co-head of the neighbourhood plan steering group, felt there was no need for the parish council vote to exclude Cook's field from the neighbourhood plan, because there was no neighbourhood plan and you cannot exclude something from something that does not exist. I relayed exactly their thoughts in a whatsapp message to Corinne Stuart, a concerned resident of Burgh Hill, two weeks later on 3 June. Please see the attached screenshots of that whatsapp exchange.

So when I said on September 5 we had no neighbourhood plan I did so in good faith. When I said we had abandoned the 2022 neighbourhood plan, that was also true. It had been suspended for two years – we had made that clear in our council-agreed letter of 11 March. But I also made clear to Rother on September 5 that our policy of having a neighbourhood plan had not been abandoned and we would be coming forward with a revised version next year (in fact it came forward a couple of months sooner than I anticipated.)

Mr Skinner also seems to think I don't support the idea of a neighbourhood plan. That is wrong. I do, just one that commands wide public support. I am afraid he has been misinformed by Andrew Brown on this.

Kind regards,

Ned Pakenham