

INTRODUCTION

Lord Mayor and Members of Council, thank you for the opportunity to make this address to the chamber.

My name is Chris Sidle, and I am representing Bardsey Parish Council, and here today making a joint deputation with Corina Kettlewell and Sophie Wreathall on behalf of the Bardsey Action Group (BAG).

We are here to draw your attention to a looming democratic and physical threat that would cause irreversible damage to our environment and the faith that residents of Leeds have in the power and determination of its elected representatives to uphold its principles of transparency and accountability. We share your democratic objectives and place our trust in you to help avoid this damage from happening.

We asked for this opportunity because of deep concern and frustration that months of attempted dialogue has destroyed Bardsey residents faith in the proscribed communication processes with the Council, that officials are being forced to withhold providing us with information, but are unable to justify why and to bring to your attention facts that you should be made aware of.

For 25 years the Parish Council and the independent Bardsey Action Group have unanimously supported Leeds City Council's green belt policy. The Parish Council has undertaken numerous consultations with residents – from design statements to the recently adopted Bardsey Neighbourhood Plan, all of which affirmed the need to find alternative solutions to our village housing need than the green-belt destructive proposals submitted by developers and landowners. BAG was formed in 1992 to reflect the residents concern about threats to the green belt during the lengthy Unitary Development Plan processes, and as these threats have re-emerged, is co-ordinating a joint response.

We share with Leeds City Council, our MP and our ward councillors a common purpose. To prevent development sprawl along the A58 between Leeds and Wetherby that would create a new suburb, one much loved by housebuilders but that would fail to address the real housing need in Leeds.

We therefore recognise the efforts that you as Councillors have made over the last decade to try to defend the A58 villages and landscape from the deluge of planning applications that seek to take advantage during the painstaking process of planning that you have gone through.

I began by highlighting two threats- physical and democratic.

So firstly, I will deal with environmental and landscape issues.

Like other communities in Leeds and West Yorkshire, Bardsey and its nearby neighbour Collingham have suffered from flooding. The impact for those most directly affected is devastating, and now Leeds CC is the main agency in partnership with the Environment

Agency working to address the risk, including the impact of housing development. If the risk management process was subsequently found to have overlooked a relatively small piece of information, and the omission led to a disaster, then the community would seek to hold those responsible to account.

The complex process of assessing risk, interpreting data and planning preventative measures is the preserve of experts. Simple observation, local knowledge and the collection of visual evidence of what were once rare occurrences now happening more frequently, is the preserve of residents. The combination of the two would create the best chance of avoiding the damage that can so easily ruin lives.

We ask the Council to audit how the flood risk liaison between its agencies and other public bodies is working and to meet with us to explain how they plan to address our detailed concerns that are probably not unique to our village.

The second subject of this deputation concerns the democratic process that allows the public to be consulted about all issues that directly affect them, and to be given as much information that allows them to come to an informed view as to the decisions to be taken in their name. We know that there are times when it would not be safe to provide public access to security intelligence, public health threats and a wide range of issues which most people will not be able to fully comprehend. But national and local government are committed to be fully transparent in carrying out their respective responsibilities, and to apply the powers invested in them to protect the public interest.

Again, I draw your attention to the impact of a blip in those processes. Despite its resolve to abide by its transparency principles. Leeds City Council can be forced into backtracking thus preventing public scrutiny. This can occur purely because of a clash between case law, statutory law and national and local guidelines, where only the legal implications are considered. The impact can be irreversible and at the stroke of a pen what you and residents have fought to avoid becomes a reality

My Lord Mayor and Members of the Council.

These are not fanciful projections, they are current and real, and we want to work with you and your officials to prevent them from becoming reality. Even if this seems impossible, we can work together to persuade Government to urgently look at the guidance that is at the heart of the problems and by so doing confirm the trust that residents have in the power of its elected representatives to protect the communities it serves.

We thank you for this opportunity and hope to meet to discuss our deputation.