

## **LEVENS RESIDENTS' GROUP – Land Allocation - Alternative Sites consultation – Submission to SLDC – 19 Sept. 2011**

### **1. Introduction – Survey of Parishioners' Opinions**

This submission has been written by the Committee of Levens Residents' Group (LRG) and seeks to reflect the opinions of the wider community in Levens parish.

The Residents' Group have surveyed Levens parishioners for their opinions about five of the nine alternative Levens sites put forward for public consultation by SLDC in the consultation period 29<sup>th</sup> July 2011 to 9<sup>th</sup> September 2011. The other four were covered by LRGs' submission to SLDC dated 14<sup>th</sup> April 2011, concerning the “Emerging Options” consultation. SLDC have stated that it is not necessary to repeat comments made in previous consultations, so LRG has not sought to repeat the survey for the following sites:-

RN123  
R680LV  
RN127  
RN295 (see note below)

For ease of reference, a summary of the results for this four is reproduced in Appendix 3.

Note - in the 'emerging options' submission the site now called RN295 was covered by responses regarding RN121M & 'part of' RN121.

Accordingly, Levens parishioners were invited to comment on potential employment site EN45 and the four housing sites numbered as RN282, RN291, R105 and R142.

In addition to the specific sites, parishioners opinions were sought on two additional questions posed by SLDC:-

1. Should the Land Allocation plan cover a shorter period than one ending in 2025?
2. Should the smaller villages & hamlets be in the Land Allocation plan, or be covered by some other process?

The LRG committee was very much of the opinion that it is SLDCs' job, not the parishioners' to decide these two issues: Furthermore, due to the complexity of the issues and the lack of explanatory information (the government 'Draft National Planning Policy Framework' document is 65 pages long and was only published on 25<sup>th</sup> July), the LRG committee felt that 'don't know' should be an allowable response in each case. As it happened, we worded the second question badly on our survey form and believe that this skewed the results regarding the treatment of smaller villages and hamlets etc.

We are confident however that we have gained an accurate impression of the parishioners' opinions on all the other subjects we surveyed.

For the survey the LRG delivered a 2 page document to all households in Levens parish (c530 houses). This document had a map showing the various sites on one side and explanatory text plus boxes for parishioners' comments on the other (see Appendix 1 for samples). Residents were asked to complete the form and return it to a ballot box in the

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Central Stores, Levens, by Friday 26<sup>th</sup> August. The form stated that each individual was entitled to fill in their own response and that extra forms could be obtained from the Central Stores or could be downloaded from the village website. In addition, the form publicised SLDCs' own response process and encouraged respondents to use it.

Follow-up publicity was in the form of reminders in the Levens column of the Westmorland Gazette's "Community" pages and by 30 posters put up round Levens village. An email address list of c130 addresses was used extensively to encourage parishioner's to respond. The page in the "Have Your Say" section of the Levens village website, entitled "SLDC Planning Strategy for Levens" has been continually updated with details of the process including links to relevant documents on SLDCs' website, urging residents to respond to SLDC, and explaining how to do so.

At this point it is important to mention two issues with the context of this consultation:-

1. Unlike the 'emerging options' consultation, it was carried out without knowing the total number of houses SLDC proposes to allocate to Levens in total, or how many to each site put forward by SLDC. Some respondents felt that lack of information about what was being proposed for large sites meant they could not respond appropriately.
2. That one site (RN291), about which many villagers are very sensitive, is the subject of Story Home's proposal for a 70 house development may have led some respondents to think that total development of all the sites is contemplated. We were surprised by the number of responses received from people who had not responded in the emerging options consultation: It is possible that these people did not fully grasp the relation of the Land Allocation plan to the Local Development Framework.

That development of RN291 is opposed by most respondents regardless of their proximity to it and is seen as a village amenity, might have influenced people, who had not previously been involved, to respond this time.

SLDC should take note of the fact that the LRG also carried out a publicity campaign (leaflets, posters, website) to encourage parishioners to participate in the "South Lakeland Housing Survey 2011" in June. The results of this are unknown as yet so we cannot comment as to how relevant this Land Allocation consultation is to Levens housing needs, if they differ from those revealed in the 2008 Cumbria Rural Housing Trust survey, on which the Village Plan was based.

## **2. Results of survey**

As stated above, forms were distributed to c530 houses, and a total of 217 responses have been received. This rate of response is c41%. Three people responded from each of two addresses and 2 from each of 26: The response rate per dwelling being therefore 187, or c35%. We believe these figures to give a credible representation of the opinions of those parishioners who are interested in the survey's subject.

In order of decreasing unpopularity of any sort of development, the responses for each site

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are as follows, given as percentages of those who gave an opinion:-

|       |                  |
|-------|------------------|
| RN291 | opposed by 82%   |
| R142  | opposed by 64%   |
| RN282 | opposed by 59%   |
| R105  | opposed by 49%   |
| EN45  | supported by 59% |

The responses to the question as to whether the Land Allocation should cover a shorter period than one ending in 2025 are equally distributed between 'yes', 'no' and 'don't know'. With “don't know” being the largest category in the responses to the question about the treatment of hamlets etc.

See appendix 2 for the summary of the results plus transcriptions of all responses.

### **3. Site-by-site comments**

**RN291:** The survey responses were as follows: Of the 210 respondents who commented on this site, development was opposed by 82%, supported by 8%, and part supported by 10%.

#### **Issues raised by possible development of this land include:**

The site far too large. Totally outside Village Plan 2008- no to large developments.

This site would contravene 2 of the key issues in the “Emerging Options” for Levens: preserving landscape & open space & maintaining views from the village. One resident has suggested the area would make a good Village Green.

In 1996 this land was the subject of public inquiry. SLDC refused to sanction building on this land following strong community objection. The Inspector declared it to be “a landscape of County Importance.” Nothing has changed.

It is the one green space in the village, which people want to see preserved. It is still felt to be far too visible & if built on would ruin the village. Seen as a Village Amenity- enjoyed by many residents & visitors alike. 73% objected to one field in the last consultation. In this consultation 3 fields are included- but with more than 3 times the impact.

The site is highly visible from Lyth Valley, Lake Hills, Whitbarrow Scar, Lord’s Plain, the village itself & from the LDNP.

The new proposed boundary of the LDNP would be 100 metres away.

It is viewed as agricultural land, which should stay that way. We need to support food production.

It creates a natural, historical boundary between Levens, and the hamlets of Cinderbarrow, Cotes, Underhill, Beathwaite Green etc., which are supposed to be upheld in the LDF.

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The same issues regarding utilities, especially sewerage, which affect RN282, also apply to this site.

Development of this site, more than any of the others, attracts opposition from parishioners who do not overlook it. It is probably regarded as the last place in the parish where anybody should be allowed to build anything, ever.

**Examples of respondents' specific comments from the survey.**

“Far too visible- village would be ruined.”

“ An open space like this should not be considered it would put a blot on the landscape. I feel to use RN 129 would be a regrettable mistake & that alternative places should be considered- do we need so many homes?”

-“ Oppose for the same reason that 73% objected to R682LVM.” ( Field next to this site- now grown to all 3 fields in a swathe.)

“No!!! Development of this would ruin the character of the village. Not an option!”

“Greenfield development like this in an area with neither local employment nor public transport to speak of goes against every kind of environmental consideration & is totally unsuitable.”

“ Development on this & the adjoining site would destroy one of the best vistas in the area.”

“Far too many houses for village needs & that view should be preserved for posterity. Another Ruskin View.”

“The only green space in the village.”

“Levens landmark. Loved view & open space. (Rural Village Needs.)

“ Suitable infill site in accordance with emerging Options.”

“fairly central with alternative road access.”

It should be noted here that when a resident was recently conversing with Tim Farron M.P., beside the site, Mr. Farron saw the traffic congestion on Brigsteer Road for himself, and acknowledged it.

**R142:** The survey responses were as follows: Of the 206 respondents who commented on this site, development was opposed by 64%, supported by 11%, and part supported by 25%.

**Issues raised by possible development of this land include:**

The site far too large. Totally outside Village Plan 2008- no to large developments.

The site is far too visible from many viewpoints, both miles away & locally.

There is very little enthusiasm for development of this site. Those respondents who do not oppose developing this site cite in its favour access to/from the A590 without going through the village, but generally stress that any development should be small scale.

Most opponents think development here would ruin the ambience of the village.

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There are concerns over:

- potential number of houses,
- access off a single track road,
- the increased traffic,
- the spoilt profile of the village,
- the capacity & capabilities of the utilities & the infrastructure to support any further development.

It is currently agricultural land. We should be seen to be supporting the production of food. It is felt that this site would go against the 3 key issues for Levens, in “Emerging Options”- preserving landscape & open space, maintaining views from the village & noise from the A590.

Historically, said to be the largest field in Westmorland- known as 100 Acre Field.

Very visible from Village & A590.

**Examples of respondents' specific comments from the survey.**

“.. building on it all would ruin Levens close knit village community. It is important that the school remains open & does not become surrounded by houses. It helps the children feel like they have more space as well as offering educational & sporting opportunities.”

“ too big an area. Bad access. Spoil profile of the village, far too many houses.”

“Spoil look of village, sites available in contained already used boundaries.”

“Doesn’t fit with Village Plan.”

“Too large an area, would destroy village life & become a suburb of Kendal.”

“ green-field development like this in an area with neither local employment nor public transport to speak of goes against every kind of environmental consideration & is totally unsuitable.” (Travelling from Levens to work elsewhere out of necessity, increases carbon footprint.)

“Much too large a site & development would change the character of the village.”

This would be an inappropriate vista for a village placed at the gateway to the proposed extension of the LDNP boundary. A large number of homes would increase the light, traffic & noise pollution & contribute to a loss of rural habitat & biodiversity.”

“Don’t spoil our village.”

‘Easy access. Avoid narrow points leading in and out of village.”

“...excellent access in and out...with minimum impact on the rest of the village.”

“My preferred option – would seem to have less negative impact on village...”

**RN282:** The survey responses were as follows: Of the 207 respondents who commented on this site, development was opposed by 59%, supported by 16%, and part supported by 25% .

**Issues raised by possible development of this land include:**

The site far too large. Totally outside Village Plan 2008- no to large developments.

Development here would go against at least 2 of the key issues in the “Emerging Options” for Levens – preserving landscape & open spaces & maintaining views from the village.

It is a greenfield site- now used for agricultural purposes. We need to support food production.

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This site forms a natural, historical boundary, between the hamlet of Cotes & Levens Village itself.

Unless there were to be major road improvement access would be a huge problem via the identified routes: 1 out onto single track road- Hutton Lane- & between existing properties with limited space for a road. The other would be out onto Cinderbarrow Hill- again single file road with a blind corner above & below access point. No alternative to move entrance/exit, in order to avoid corners, as land is not owned by the same land-owner. Winter weather conditions have meant the road has been unusable in recent years.

Site would be immediately adjacent to the new proposed boundary for the LDNP & would be highly visible from Whitbarrow Scar to - a NNR of International Status and to the west.

There are significant worries on the capabilities of the utilities- electricity, drainage & particularly sewage.

**Examples of respondents' specific comments from the survey.**

“Opposed from every point of view, access, amenity, visual.”

“The proposed sites are part of the most beautiful views from Levens across the valley.”

“The view from Brigsteer Road is one of the finest panoramic views in the district- a popular walk & cycle route for both residents & visitors.”

“Too intensive, too many houses, valuable open space in already intensively developed village giving village its character & position overlooking the Lake Hills. Housing on this site would be totally unsuited to the existing character of the village.”

“Historical issues. Landscape issues.”

“..no mains sewage system, electric goes off in storms ( 3 different phases already in village) no infrastructure. Road can't cope with bad weather. Too narrow. In ice & snow road un-passable.”

“Discreet area of village for building houses, would be able to build houses here without feeling overcrowded.”

“An ideal site unobtrusive and accessible and should provide all the required number of affordable housing.”

“On outskirts of village and minimum impact on traffic through the village.”

**R105:** The survey responses were as follows: Of the 196 respondents who commented on this site, development was opposed by 49%, supported by 21%, and part supported by 30%.

**Issues raised by possible development of this land include:**

Totally outside the Village Plan- specifically, no large developments in Levens.

Comments in favour of this site tend to be in terms of it being the least objectionable (to those respondents) of all the sites in this consultation, on the grounds of it being in a less visible location and adjoining an existing estate.

Building here would certainly extend a large 1970s current housing estate, making a salient

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which would protrude into the surrounding landscape.  
Currently agricultural land & it should stay that way. We need to support food production.

This site along with those in the first consultation would make possibly the worst choice for housing due to the very limited access to them, through an existing estate. There are worries about increased traffic through existing estate. Even 25 houses could reasonably be expected to generate 50 + vehicles.

Limited parking space for residents of Beathwaite Close and part of Greengate Crescent already results in parking in the roadway, making access difficult for traffic from/to the northern side of the village, and even now, emergency vehicles could easily struggle for access.

Any extra traffic from any additional properties would have a significant, direct & detrimental effect on current estate residents.

The main exit from the existing estate comes out onto the junction nearest to the School & Playing Fields. There is a 20 MPH speed limit on the roads around the school for the safety of children, parents and staff, especially at drop-off/pick-up times. The road is very congested at school times & for all sporting activities on the Playing Fields. There is no designated car park so vehicles HAVE to park on the road, causing reduction to single file traffic, even where the road can take 2-way traffic.

**Examples of respondents' specific comments from the survey.**

- “Would simply extend current housing estate.”
- “No access to this site except from a single track lane.”
- “This is land that is currently in agricultural use for animal feed.”
- “I cannot see where the proposed occupants are going to work..”
- “We strongly oppose.”
- “Would not look right or blend with the overall aspect of the village.”
- “Would make Greengate too big an estate.”
- “The only access is through an area of dense housing.”
- “The only access is through an already busy estate, causing traffic congestion on narrow roads.”
- “This site is good. Does not interfere with village traffic – Extends Greengate.”
- “Access roads already in place – traffic should not affect rest of village. Seems most logical area.”
- “better access – flat ground more suitable for building. Close to school and shop – making safer environment for increase in cars and pedestrians.”

**EN45 (Employment):** The survey responses were as follows: Of the 202 respondents who commented on this site, development was SUPPORTED by 59%, opposed by 19%, and part supported by 22%.

**Issues raised by possible development of this land include:**

Some concerns as to traffic in & out on single track lane, which is also part of the National

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Cycle Route. The nature of this lane imposes severe restrictions on the development of the site. The lane is very narrow, bounded by deep drainage ditches and 'floats' on top of thick peat which causes it to subside, which it is clearly doing. It contains three narrow stone-arched bridges and has acute angled entry points, it is not suitable for additional traffic.

Further concerns for any additional future development in the Lyth & the site is visible from surrounding areas.

(NOTE: This area will be in the LDNP IF the new boundary proposals are accepted. It is on a flood plain.)

Some see it as a good idea. But for some others approval would be conditional on what the site is to be used for and the scale/type of development undertaken.

The site is not generally seen as being detrimental to village.

For employment, people could access the location from a bus on the main road.

The site is already in use. Extension for further employment in the area is seen as a positive.

Agricultural land so employment should be agriculturally based.

**Examples of respondents' specific comments from the survey.**

“Any scheme creating jobs is a good thing in present climate!”

“It is important for local businesses to be able to expand, especially if it brings more employment opportunities to the area. If this does not include significant industrial buildings, otherwise part- support.”

“Provision of more employment can only be good for the village.”

“Already in similar use.”

“Limited road access should deter excessively intense use of site.”

“This is agricultural land so employment should be agriculture based.”

“Strongly oppose. This is agricultural land on a flood plain. Unsuitable for workshops or tractor parks. Visually abhorrent.”

“...it is also very close to the main watercourses of the Lyth Valley and therefore a site at risk from any pollution from industrial use, including increased road salting, spillage. Vehicle emissions, accidental chemical spillage, washings etc..”

“No more building in the centre of the Lyth valley – before long there would be a business park, would ruin the valley.”

**4. General Issues**

**All 5 sites subject to the survey have common issues**

e.g. - too many houses, all sites for consideration are too large & don't comply with a the Village Plan, (which consulted every household in the community), worries about increased



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traffic, loss of village amenity, loss of agricultural land, over-stretched utilities, single track arterial routes in & out of village.

Inadequate roads and over-stretched utilities are not 'straws in the wind' issues seized upon as a pretext to oppose development. The village has grown over a long period, and utilities have been cobbled together as & when each growth spurt took place. They may still function and their providers may not yet receive many reports of outages, but there is a widespread view that they won't cope with the increased demand from large developments.

The issues of traffic, road safety and congestion are all related and the fact is that the village is accessed over narrow roads which have single track pinch points and no room for pavements to separate pedestrians from traffic. The school entrance and the route to the bus-stop by the A590 are prime examples of these shortcomings.

Although it is obvious that the main difference between most individuals is about how much development there should be, there is a threshold for each person, which when once crossed, the place ceases to be 'my village' and becomes just a large housing estate amongst fields & no longer a 'community': Which is something they do not want to happen, and which is given expression in a whole range of seemingly unconnected objections.

**Lyth Valley Drainage** – On of the likely impacts of large scale development will be to increase the run-off of surface water into the Lyth Valley. At a time when the Environment Agency is to cease to be responsible for valley drainage, which will fall on a Drainage Board composed of local landowners, the burden of additional run-off is an undesirable imposition.

**Examples of general comments from the survey:**

“The latest proposals would potentially increase the size of the village by 50% giving rise to unmanageable traffic congestion & surface water drainage problems. There is no local demand for such expansion which would undermine the local environment & would probably result in a large number of 2nd homes. The original allocation had an expectation of modest infill, which could facilitate in part, affordable homes.”

“The whole nature of Levens is being threatened. We are not a service centre as we have little employment, one shop, a limited bus & P.O. Any large housing development will overwhelm village roads which are often single lane, utilities, parking etc. and ruin the quality of village life. Small pockets of housing would be much more suitable as proposed by the Parish Council & supported by residents in the Village Plan. Levens has already had considerable increases in its housing stock over recent years & is not suitable for any large scale development.”

“The infrastructure of Levens is at present inadequate to cope with large scale housing developments. It also applies to its demography, ambience & environment generally.”

“All villages (Inc. Levens) should be protected from building too many houses, we like being the size we are.”

“Levens is already over-developed.”

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“Ensure all services are adequate- drainage, sewage- safe access-landscaping-use of local materials- buses- a consideration to village residents etc. This plan should be scaled down.”

“Any building anywhere should be for permanent homes. There is no point building houses for 2nd homes.”

“Inadequate village infrastructure, narrow village pavements, already present a danger to pedestrians & the wheelchair uses. Traffic already a danger to children & disabled.”

“Don’t ruin the ambience of Levens-on-the-Hill, either from inside village or as seen from the distance on most surrounding roads. Building more houses would be sacrilege & put extreme pressure on all roads & amenities. Remember, production of food is very important, therefore keep the fields for farming- i.e. cattle, sheep, grass, silage & hay.”

“The village status is a very precious one. Large scale expansion of the population puts that at risk.”

**5. Topics not covered in this submission but dealt with in previous one.**

Please refer to the LRGs' submission to SLDC dated 14<sup>th</sup> April 2011, concerning the “Emerging Options” consultation (EO consult), for representations about the following.

1. Sites RN123, R680LV, RN127, RN295 (site now called RN295 was covered by responses regarding RN121M & 'part of' RN121). See EO consult. Section 2, transcripts of responses.
2. Relevance of Village Plan. See EO consult. Section 2, p4 & 8, appendix 9.
3. Demographic issues and opposition to large scale development. See EO consult. Section 2, pp 6 to 8.
4. Levens Residents' Group. See EO consult. Section 2, pp 3 & 4.

**6. Concluding observations.**

The LRG are keen to maintain a spirit of co-operation with SLDC to find a way to obtain some housing, on suitably sized plots, which is acceptable to the village & reflective of the Village Plan. To this end the LRG have tried to keep well informed on SLDCs' Local Development Framework, to find out parishioners' opinions on it, to make sure they are heard by SLDC, and to encourage community participation in the consultative process . We look to SLDC to reciprocate by taking on board in the LDF the grass roots basis of localism and are supported in this attitude by Tim Farron M.P. who has written to the SLDC Chief Executive (See Appendix 6).

The results of this consultation will be made available to Levens Parish Council and to the parishioners of Levens as well as to SLDC and our local MP.

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