

Sustainable Settlements Review 2023 – Tatham Parish Council comments

Tatham Parish Council considers that the Review, the methodology it employs, and the recently received questionnaire, have very little relevance to the problems faced by sparsely populated rural parishes.

The *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF) states in paragraph 7 that “the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development”.

Paragraphs 78-80 of the NPPF deal specifically with rural housing, stating in para 78 that “planning policies and decisions should be responsive to local circumstances and support housing developments that reflect local needs” and in para 79 that “to promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities”.

The introduction to the 2018 *Interim Sustainable Settlement Review*, which forms part of the *Lancaster Local Plan*, states that the aim of the review is to identify ‘settlements which will provide the focus for growth for Lancaster District outside the main urban areas’.

Since the publication of the *Interim Sustainable Settlement Review*, it has been the experience of Tatham Parish Council that the “methodology” used has had the result of stifling – and indeed, almost completely preventing – new housing development in the parish. The Parish Council has therefore concluded that development – sustainable or otherwise - will not be permitted anywhere that is not designated a sustainable settlement, and regardless of whether the Parish Council considers it would “enhance or maintain the vitality” of its rural community.

It is not clear how references in the NPPF to “sustainable development” have led to the creation by Lancaster City Council of a separate concept, that of “sustainable settlement”. It is also unclear whether proper consideration was ever given to the inevitable indirect consequence – identification of “unsustainable settlements” – nor what that would mean for communities so classified.

The methodology, in dealing with matters of Population; Provision of Services and Facilities; Accessibility; and Employment Opportunities appears to overlook para 79 of the NPPF: “Planning policies should identify opportunities for villages to grow and thrive, especially where this will support local services. Where there are groups of smaller settlements, development in one village may support services in a village nearby.” It also seems to under-value rural employment opportunities created by the availability of fibre broadband and opportunities to work remotely.

The sustainable settlement methodology attaches great importance to transport issues. However, dependence on private car ownership cannot be a measure of sustainable rural life in an age of remote connectivity, and in a country where national government encourages private car ownership through subsidy and road-building, and continually reduces funding for public transport.

“Vitality” or community spirit cannot be seen and is hard to define, but it does exist in Tatham*, despite its sparse pattern of settlement, as evidenced by many community groups and events.

We ask that, in considering rural parishes, the review should change its emphasis to one of establishing how their sustainability can be maintained and enhanced. We believe that the Local Plan should support the NPPF by encouraging sustainable development in areas such as ours, which are clearly unsuitable for becoming ‘the focus for growth for Lancaster District’, but nevertheless need a certain amount of growth and change to maintain the vitality of the community. Without such a change of approach,

“unsustainable” settlements denied the benefits of sustainable development will be condemned to a future of decline.

**Tatham Parish has: two churches, a primary School, a pub, a Parish meeting room, a bus stop, a railway station, Tatham Fells WI, Tatham Tots playgroup, Friends of Tatham church, Friends of Tatham Fells school, Lowgill Village Society and Tatham History Society plus several other informal groups*

Tatham Parish Council

14th May 2023