

## **Formal Complaint – Invalid and Intimidating Consultation Process at Chapeltown Methodist Church & St Marks Church, Grenoside**

To: Sheffield City Council – Planning Department, Chief Executive, Sheffield City Council, Marie Tidball (Local MP)

CC: Local Councillors

23<sup>rd</sup> June 2025

To whom it may concern

I am writing to lodge a formal and serious complaint regarding the recent Sheffield City Council consultation events held at Chapeltown Methodist Church and St Marks Church at Grenoside as part of the Local Plan process.

This consultation event has now been proven to be fundamentally defective, intimidating, misleading, and invalid both procedurally and legally.

### **Failures of the Consultation Process:**

#### **1. Intimidating Security Conduct**

The presence of multiple security guards stationed inside the church doors was wholly inappropriate and intimidating. One elderly resident felt so intimidated she turned around and went home. Another brought peaceful placards stating 'Hands Off Our Greenbelt' which one of the security guard attempted to remove. Only after the resident firmly warned the guard not to interfere with his property did the security guard step back. This exemplifies a highly charged, oppressive atmosphere that should not occur in a democratic consultation.

#### **2. Harassment and Interference with Residents**

One attendee intervened politely to support a distressed resident whose family farm is threatened by these proposals. Instead of allowing legitimate public support, staff approached him and advised him not to get involved — further inhibiting open participation.

#### **3. Junior and Uninformed Planning Officers**

The majority of staff present were very junior, poorly briefed and unfamiliar with the local area. Several admitted they had never even visited the development sites they were presenting on, and inconsistent and even contradictory information was provided to several residents asking the same question of different planners.

- When asked detailed questions about brownfield exhaustion, flood risks, cross-border sites such as Dearne Valley Parkway, or Sheffield City Region options, they could not give coherent answers.

- Instead, residents were repeatedly told the stock phrase: 'We need more housing,' offering no evidence that all alternatives had been exhausted.

#### **4? Patronising and Dismissive Behaviour by Council Staff**

- One resident was told by a planning officer: 'You just don't understand, and you're not listening,' when raising valid concerns.
- Residents were left feeling ridiculed and patronised rather than consulted.

#### **5? Highly Unprofessional Conduct of Michael Johnson**

The behaviour of Council Officer Michael Johnson was entirely unacceptable and unbefitting of his public role:

- Disinterested when speaking to residents.
- Dismissive and condescending to several attendees.
- Walked away mid-conversation when challenged, requiring repeated requests to engage.
- Actively denied publicly available facts until evidence was presented.
- Left the building at the end while making childish gestures and smirking at residents.
- This behaviour was witnessed by multiple attendees, including at least one councillor.

#### **6? Lack of Transparency and Structure**

- Maps were technically present but poorly displayed in a way that made viewing difficult. Some of these maps also portrayed incorrect information
- No presentations or proper explanation of proposals.
- No Q&A forum or opportunity for community dialogue.
- Staff wore no name badges and when asked names, some refused to provide this thereby avoiding personal accountability.

#### **7? Offensive Use of Sacred Venues**

The use of our local churches for such an intimidating and disrespectful process is deeply offensive to many members of our community. It also alienated other members of the community who were of different faiths or no faith

#### **Legal Position: Consultation Process Is Invalid**

This consultation process violates the principles of:

- The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- Sheffield's own Statement of Community Involvement
- The Equality Act 2010 (vulnerability & intimidation of elderly and distressed parties)
- Public Law as applied in:
  - R (Coughlan) v North and East Devon HA [2001] EWCA Civ 2001
  - Save Britain's Heritage v Secretary of State [2021] EWHC 1521 (Admin)

Tokenistic, intimidating or misleading consultation renders any related planning process legally invalid.

## DEMANDS

We now formally request that Sheffield City Council:

- 1☐ Withdraw this consultation event entirely from the Local Plan process.
- 2☐ Issue a formal public apology to affected residents, Chapeltown Methodist Church and St Marks Church Grenoside
- 3☐ Open an immediate independent investigation into Council officer and security staff behaviour.
- 4☐ Conduct a fully lawful, inclusive consultation including:
  - Full disclosure of alternative brownfield assessments.
  - Properly briefed, named officers in attendance.
  - Public question and answer forum.
  - Independent moderators.
  - Conducted in a neutral, accessible, non-threatening venue.
- 5☐ Confirm in writing how this complaint is logged, investigated and formally actioned.

### Next Steps If Ignored:

Failure to properly address these issues will leave no option but for this matter to be escalated to:

- The Local Government Ombudsman
- The Planning Inspectorate
- The Secretary of State
- The Equality and Human Rights Commission
- Judicial review in public law

This consultation is legally unsound and cannot be relied upon in any Local Plan proceeding.

We await your urgent and complete response.

Yours faithfully,

Jo Tunstall

Chapeltown Ward

Secretary of Save our Greenbelt Chapeltown, Ecclesfield & Grenoside Campaign

Savechapeltowngreenbelt@gmail.com