



Weds 2nd Oct 2024

Dear Anna,

Thank you for your time last Friday, for your honesty, and for your preparedness to listen. We were grateful for the opportunity to speak with you about the plight of *Packsaddle Community Fields*, and to explain some of the challenges our community has faced.

In summary, it is our position that Somerset County Council's decision in March 2022, made entirely *without* community engagement, was built on flawed and flimsy foundations. It was founded on a comprehensive misrepresentation of the nature and importance of the site. This misrepresentation was either wilful, cynical and expedient, or it was utterly ill-informed. Since then, we have worked tirelessly (and, I believe, effectively) to demonstrate the site's true value, so ignorance is no longer an excuse.

We do not dispute that a Council is at liberty to divest itself of assets which it deems superfluous. We recognise, too, the dire financial circumstances which have accelerated that decision-making. We do, however, as Somerset residents, expect the decisions made on our behalf to be taken carefully and thoughtfully, with probity and propriety. We expect there to be impeccable fairness, transparency, impartiality and accountability in the process.

It is abundantly clear that these standards have not been met in the case of *Packsaddle Community Fields*. The community which we represent understands the Council's financial predicament, and we are not without sympathy. It is *our* Council, after all. *Our* county. However, that pecuniary predicament does not justify poor decision-making. It does not excuse the Council's dismissive, disdainful attitude to our community. It does not relieve the Council of its obligations.

Plainly put, LiveWest's Planning Application is being determinedly enabled by Somerset Council. The plans are not being subjected to the appropriate rigour and held to the requisite standards. Instead, driven by a desperate desire for 'capital receipt', an intransigent policy of 'the end justifies the means' is being doggedly

pursued. The Council's clandestine conduct has not been commensurate with the noble spirit and lofty standards it publicly espouses.

The conduct of our community, in contrast, has been unfalteringly positive. Hundreds of residents have supported and volunteered for fundraising events, donated money, and attended public meetings. They have baked, knitted, written letters and painted pictures. Recently, as you know, People for Packsaddle has made a substantial offer to buy *Packsaddle Community Fields*, and it's set-out a positive vision for the site, in our *Brighter Future* document. Our pockets may not be quite as deep as LiveWest's, but our love for the site is immeasurably deeper.

We do not wish to be in conflict with our Council. Quite the opposite, in fact. Our preference would be to work *with* our Council, to engage with it constructively, and to deliver a sustainable, aspirational, achievable vision for *Packsaddle Community Fields*, as explicated in the *Brighter Future* prospectus. Together, for *Climate, Conservation and Community*, we could achieve something truly special. It's not too late for the Council to change course, and I hope your involvement might encourage them to pause and reflect.

In closing our meeting last week, it was agreed that we would construct a letter for you to 'top and tail', asking a number of questions on the process and the decisions made. In the course of writing the letter, it became clear we had a great many points to raise and detail to share. More importantly, we didn't want to strike the wrong tone, as it is going out in your name. As requested, we've concentrated on a few key points which highlight our main concerns with the Council's conduct. Some of these concerns also relate to material planning considerations. We are more than happy, of course, for you to edit and amend the tone of the letter, to suit you and the relationship you have with the recipients. The recipient list itself is a matter for your discretion, too.

I also attach some supporting documents, publicly available on the Somerset Council Planning Portal, which may be useful reference.

Again, I express sincere thanks on behalf of our community for your willingness to contact Somerset Council. If you have any questions or require any further information, you must of course feel free to contact me.

With best regards,

Toby Culff
People for Packsaddle