

2, Pleasant Street,
Walshaw,
Bury.
BL8 3AU.

Dear Sirs,

The Friends of Bury Folk are very concerned about the poor quality of the recent “drop-in sessions” run by the Council in relation to the current Consultation on the plans for Elton, Simister and Walshaw.

It appears that very little preparation had been made for these sessions, which, given the high impact of the plans being Consulted upon, is not only disappointing but totally disproportionate to the scale of the effect that they will have upon local residents. Not only was there very little advertising of the sessions, there was very short notice of their scheduling with less than a week’s notice of the first session at Radcliffe Market. This was insufficient time for word to get round, which is unacceptable given the high volume of public interest in this area. The event advertised as being held at The Elton High School was actually at “The Hub” which proved confusing to locate for those unfamiliar with the school. Bury Folk Keep It Green informed our 12,000 Facebook followers and the paying members of The Friends of Bury Folk about the sessions, and this was how the majority of those who attended had found out about them.

However, the main concern from those attending the sessions was the insensitive attitude and lack of engagement by those available to speak to. Given the controversial nature of the plans, Council employees should have been well informed and briefed to give accurate and honest answers to questions raised by residents. Many of those attending have commented that answers provided were vague, and questions were avoided or met with answers such as, “nothing is set in stone” or “it (the building) won’t happen for years, anyway.” Far from providing reassurance that their views were

being heard and their concerns listened to, such responses only served to heighten the general feeling that this was simply a “box ticking” exercise.

In addition, it appears that very few paper Consultation forms were available for residents to complete and no written record was kept of the number of attendees or of the comments made by residents at any of the sessions. If this is to be a meaningful Consultation, any feedback on the plans should be noted and considered. A failure to consider an alternative suggestion or proposal to the plans will render the decision process flawed and open to challenge. As it is, many residents were left feeling that their views on the plans are irrelevant and that there would be no consideration of alternative suggestions and opinions.

Materials used at the sessions were of poor quality. Those attending complained about the lack of a key on the maps to explain symbols and colours, and Council staff were unable to clarify these in some instances. The map for Walshaw erroneously included land that was owned by a private individual who was in attendance at the session and who made it clear that in no way was his land going to be used for allotments, as was indicated on the map.

There have also been complaints about the online Consultation, with residents commenting the difficulty of finding the Consultation on the Council’s website, the use of complex and technical language in the documents and difficulty in filling in the form.

Clearly, from the lack of time given to Councillors to consider the plans at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, this Consultation is being rushed through before the start of Purdah. However, merely “going through the motions” of public engagement is not acceptable given the enormous impact of the plans on the town. Both the *Gunning Principles* and The Cabinet Office Consultation Principles emphasise the need for proportionality in Consultation in relation to the potential impacts of the proposals being considered and that “real engagement” should be achieved above the following of bureaucratic process. Given the complaints outlined above, these directions are clearly not being followed.

We look forward to hearing from you with your suggestions about how you intend to improve engagement with the public and create a meaningful Consultation upon this most important of matters.

Yours faithfully,

Chris Russell

Chair, The Friends of Bury Folk

Stephen Cluer

Secretary, The Friends of Bury Folk