Response Of Clitheroe Civic Society to Ribble Valley Core Strategy 2008-2028 with particular reference to The Local Housing Plan

Historical Context of change in Clitheroe

Clitheroe Civic Society's brief is to represent Clitheroe and not the entire Ribble Valley. All comments are therefore pertinent to Clitheroe alone. For fifty years we have shown our interest in and concern for the preservation, development and maintenance of the fabric of the town.

Historically, the growth of Clitheroe has been slow, covering many centuries. It has not changed greatly in layout. The population growth has been driven in the past by the needs of industry, cotton mills, quarrying, service industries etc. Thus the growth has been organic. The infrastructure of roads has been maintained by only limited radical action e.g. moving the trans-Pennine route out of the town and making a start on a ring road. The bridges across the Ribble have been widened in the past but still form inadequate links to the north.

Schemes to develop the town centre have been generated for many years and Clitheroe Civic Society has contributed to numerous proposals to improve the town centre in recognition of the changing needs of the population. Recent years have seen an increased number of schemes presented for discussion, with increasing involvement of expensive consultants and developers. Not one of these schemes came near to being implemented.

One possible reason for these failures could be attributed to lack of need. The fact that nothing has been done could be construed as a good thing. Has non-development caused any reduction in the quality of life of the people of Clitheroe? Perhaps not, but then Clitheroe has grown slowly. Things that were a cause of concern in 1997 e.g. traffic congestion, are still a cause of concern today, but people obviously get used to a slow pace of change.
Core Strategy

This densely-factual tome seeks to predict the future needs of the Ribble Valley, not through the input and views of local inhabitants, but through the input of far-away professionals with a computer programme; people who, most probably, have never been to the Ribble Valley, but then they do not need to in the “virtual world” they are adept at creating. No professing computer expert could predict the housing needs of Clitheroe in stable times. How much less sound then will be the predictions given the current torrid economic conditions.

Of the entire Core Strategy, it is the Local Housing Plan and the vital infrastructure behind it which are the cause of our deepest concern for the future of our town...“an historic market town”, a description of Clitheroe frequently favoured by Ribble Valley Borough Council.

Local Housing Plan

We are mindful of the Tests of Soundness provided by Ribble Valley Borough Council and conclude that without a sound infrastructure plan, the building of 1,670 additional houses in Clitheroe would be a disaster to the character and environment of the town and the quality of life of its inhabitants.

The plan expects Clitheroe to absorb 42% of the entire new build for the Ribble Valley. As the population of Clitheroe makes up 25% of the Ribble Valley population, we should be expected to absorb only 25% of new development.

Utilities: There is no guarantee that water and waste water services can be provided for such a substantial development as 1,670 houses. Developments in Whalley are facing the same problem. On this basis, and a total lack of specific forward plans, the Local Housing Plan is unsound.

Health Service: The current, local health provision has until recently been of an extremely high standard, delivered by caring professionals and easily accessed. This situation has begun to change rapidly. The health service provisions in Clitheroe have now changed dramatically and residents already have to travel to Blackburn and Burnley for many services, which means an increase in our carbon footprint. The proposed development of new homes in Clitheroe equals 4,024 more people living here, all seeking medical care. The proposed new hospital for Clitheroe has not been confirmed in the health service organisation shake-up. There are concerns as to whether there would be money to staff a new hospital even if it were to be built. In the Housing Plan, there are no plans to increase
new hospital even if it were to be built. In the Housing Plan, there are no plans to increase GP practices. On the basis of these facts, and a lack of specific forward plans, the Local Housing Plan is unsound.

Transport: According to government guidelines, a Transport statement and a Travel Plan should support all developments. Ribble Valley Borough Council’s response contains NO significant highway improvement. Lancashire County Council will be developing a Local Transport Plan over the next few years. Road surface conditions on local roads are atrocious. In the centre of Clitheroe, Parson Lane has totally disintegrated because buses use the lane and it has received only cheap repairs in the past. The bottom of Church Street is the same and....and...all around the town.

Whalley Road is a DEFRA “Quality Air Management Zone” due to high levels of nitrogen dioxide yet this is precisely the side of Clitheroe which Ribble Valley Borough Council (RVBC) favours for a proposed Standen Village. The travel plan for this development appears to be to create a cycle strategy for the town. The same totally unrealistic plan was put forward by Gladman developers on their Henthorn Road site. Will people REALLY cycle in to town from these areas? NO. Yet the government inspector for the Gladman/Henthorn appeal swallowed this cycle plan and the development has been allowed.

Most telling of all is the fact that RVBC have no plans to increase public car parks for the extra 2,269 cars, despite the fact that current parking provision is abysmal and RVBC refuses to tackle the issue, relying instead on supermarkets to provide some parking spaces. This matter has been an ongoing and pressing concern to the inhabitants of Clitheroe for decades yet RVBC has never implemented a plan. It is therefore self-evident that the infrastructure plan on transport is unsound; it is based only on vague promises for the future.

Education: Clitheroe has an acknowledged excellent provision for education. RVBC indicate there are significant implications at the Standen Estate site for education but do nothing except point out that Lancashire County Council (LCC) is responsible for providing adequate Primary School places. LCC point out that government funding for education is only known until 2014. So, the current inhabitants of Clitheroe have no means of knowing the precise effect of the housing expansion on their families. Land at Standen Estates will be available for a primary school but there are no plans to build one. The same thing happened at the Calderstones development in Whalley and a school has never been built in spite of developers’ promises.
The 1,670 new homes in Clitheroe will bring over 300 children of Secondary School age. RVBC states there are numerous secondary schools in towns outside the Ribble Valley. LCC has set a 25 mile radius for travel to secondary school placements. This is totally unacceptable to existing residents of Clitheroe who value the tradition of local schools of outstanding quality which generations of families have attended. It is abundantly clear that the infrastructure plan on education is totally unsound as it is NOT “positively prepared, nor justified nor effective” which are 3 of the 4 criteria for soundness.

So, do we need a large influx of people to maintain the sustainability of the town? The answer is clearly no. The only reason for accepting the plan is if the sustainability of the town could be shown to improve after 2025. A proportion of the proposed new homes will be in the “affordable homes” sector but how many of these will be reserved for local people is unclear.

Clitheroe Civic Society is of the firm opinion that the above points clearly demonstrate that, according to the given criteria of soundness the Local Housing Plan is UNSOUND on the basis of inadequate infrastructure surrounding Education, the Health Service, Leisure, Transport and Utilities. The number of houses to be allocated to Clitheroe should only be 25% of the total.

For and on behalf of Clitheroe Civic Society

[Signature]

(Chairman)

Chairman: Pauline Wood, 13 Derwent Crescent, Clitheroe BB7 2PW. 01200 429187 pauline.wood1@talktalk.net