

Response of Mark Johnson, Independent candidate for Macclesfield

The proposals for development in the Greenbelt are very concerning because of their impact on traffic congestion, air quality, noise and lack of community amenities.

The National Planning Policy Framework is very clear:

“Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances...When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. ‘Very special circumstances’ will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

I am not at all convinced that these very special circumstances have been made out in every case.

The decision on whether to allow development to proceed rests in the hands of the planning committee (on which elected Borough Councillors sit), acting on the expert advice of the planning officers. That system does not appear to be working well at all in Cheshire East. Decisions seem to be rushed through without transparency, there is a lack of continuity in officers and plans are not joined up. What are the ‘very special circumstances’ which call for whole areas of Greenbelt in SW Macclesfield to be safeguarded? What has happened to the long-promised sports pitches, club house for football, cricket and other sports facilities on Congleton Road. You have to wonder who stands to gain most from the decisions to allow development to proceed or to safeguard land for future housing developments. What have they promised in return?

I would like to see a Neighbourhood Plan adopted for Macclesfield, in which contentious questions about the location of new developments are settled properly and subject to full and transparent consultation (other towns and settlements are way ahead on this (e.g. Sandbach and Poynton). We also need to accept that brownfield development is not always practical – the cost of remediation can significantly increase the price of building – so public subsidy may need to be made available to counter this. Also even where is a demonstrable need for additional housing, there will always be people who feel aggrieved about new development which affects their own property. In a democratic society, the elected local Councillors are supposed to weigh up the pros and cons of the decision and reach a decision on the merits, without fear or favour.