

The Editor
Dear Sir

Three hundred and sixty residents of Halton and Kellet Wards submitted a petition to Lancaster City Council which was debated last month. The preamble to the petition said that the petitioners expected the City Council to

- safeguard the sense of identity of village communities
- protect and enhance the social, economic, and environmental sustainability required by current and future rural residents
- respect the visual amenity associated with the landscapes surrounding rural settlements
- conserve the quality and character of village landscapes and the setting of rural villages
- recognise that landscape containing green spaces is an irreplaceable community asset
- ensure that local rural opinion informs City Council decisions that have an impact on local village communities
- promote city coast and countryside - without sidelining the countryside.

For more than sixteen years I have kept the Parish Councils and Parish Meetings in my Ward informed about the City Council and its activities - but providing information is not enough. As the representatives of local communities, these local councils in Kellet Ward and in the neighbouring Halton Ward want to engage with the City Council in tackling the issues involved in preparation of the component documents in the local plan - and the petitioners supported them.

The petition is not in any way a request for information: it requests respect for the work of local councils and asks for the opening up of a dialogue between Parish Councils and the City Council - and that is precisely what I requested in proposing a motion to Council on behalf of the petitioners.

Councillor Blamire's reported comment that "it is up to you to keep your residents informed" - as echoed by other Labour members - entirely misses the point. It is not within the gift of any individual City Councillor to secure the City Council's respect for the Parish Councils of the District - or to grant their request for Community Engagement. The sober and reasonable request from residents for the City Council to engage with Parish Councils on matters affecting their communities was rejected out of hand by the block vote of Labour Councillors.

The City Council defines Community Engagement as 'The involvement of citizens, through locally based representative bodies and individually, in influencing and shaping those decisions which directly impact on their local environment and the quality of their daily life'. Where else but at Lancaster would a City Council ignore its own policies relating to community engagement and refuse to open dialogue requested by the lesser councils in its district ?

Cllr Roger Mace
Kellet Ward
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