



Clerk to Drayton Parish Council
c/o 12 Loddon Close
Abingdon
Oxon OX14 3TB

December 26, 2013

Dear Sir or Madam,

Neighbourhood Development Plan

The Ecological Land Co-operative (ELC) was set up to assist in the creation and continuance of sustainable rural livelihoods in the UK. Our core work is currently the creation of affordable holdings for new entrants to sustainable farming. Our holdings are then monitored to evaluate the extent to which we/they deliver on sustainable development. We also provide free planning advice to ecological producers and growers and have a small research programme. Our research to date includes into the financial viability of (organic) smallholding on 10 acres or less.

It has been brought to our attention that Drayton Parish Council is preparing a Neighbourhood Development Plan, and that the village survey identified a substantial interest in new smallholdings for the production of local food. We understand that the Parish Council is currently considering how to respond to this expression of interest in the Draft Plan. At the outset we should say that it is no surprise to the ELC that substantial numbers of people have expressed an interest in the production of 'local food' - including people not yet having had the opportunity to acquire or experience agricultural activities.

We would like to highlight that farming, including horticulture, is extremely inaccessible to

new entrants. It is government policy to encourage new entrants, largely on the basis that over the years 2010-2020 the sector needs to welcome 60,000 people into farming but also because new entrants are considered to bring invaluable innovation into the industry. The Government's Green Food Project Steering Group concluded in 2012 that the diverse range of skills that new entrants bring are particularly needed *"if we are to get to grips with the challenges facing us in food, farming and the environment"*.

Access to affordable land has been identified by Government, academics and industry as being one of the most significant barriers for new entrants to farming. Over the period 2005-2010 the average price of bare agricultural land more than doubled to £5,846 per acre. The most recent Royal Institute for Chartered Surveyors' report on rural land prices shows that land values have increased since then at a rate far outpacing inflation. Prices are expected to continue to rise. At the same time average house prices in rural areas are higher overall than in urban areas. Matthew Taylor MP in his review of rural housing for the Prime Minister found that, *"many of the people who work in the countryside increasingly cannot afford to live there, while the people who can afford to live there increasingly do not work there"*.

Through both our own experience and the work of others we are clear that affordable smallholdings can play a significant role in re-establishing a farming ladder to be proud of. In addition, labour-intensive low input growing that is characteristic of smallholding typically leads to an increase in crop and biodiversity, an increase locally in the consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables, and a reduction in both food miles and the use of agrochemicals.

The ELC would suggest that Drayton Parish Council could and should respond positively to both the results of the village survey and advice from Government by including a policy in its NDP that requires housing developers to sell or let land and housing affordably to be used in sustainable smallholding enterprises. The establishment and maintenance of smallholdings could be secured through a S106 Obligations and could be monitored through an organisation such as the ELC. ELC smallholders must operate within terms set out in their lease agreement. The lease allows us to ensure that the smallholdings are protected for ecological food production and remain affordable

We would be pleased to assist the Parish Council in its consideration of how any policy providing for smallholding would contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.

This could be in the form of Fact Sheets (with the necessary evidence base) covering the economic, social and environmental benefits that could arise from these initiatives.

The ELC is pleased to see that the Localism Act and Neighbourhood Planning has provided parish councils with this important opportunity to stimulate the growth of local food enterprises through affordable housing and land. Opportunities to do so on the edge of built up areas as opposed to the open countryside (where there are greater opportunities to buy land) should receive particular encouragement. The ELC would be pleased to advise Drayton PC on how any holding established through the Neighbourhood Plan could achieve the objectives required to be properly regarded as 'sustainable development'.

With kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Zoe Wangler'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Zoe Wangler for Ecological Land Co-operative