

CAS Copy

Stansfield Parish Council
Stansfield
Sudbury
Suffolk

3 October 2022

FAO: Christine Abraham – Chief Executive
Sarah Mortimer – Manager Community Engagement

Community Action Suffolk
160 Hadleigh Road,
Ipswich. IP2 0HH

Subject: Stansfield Housing Needs Survey

On 16th August 2022, the five Stansfield Parish Councillors (Sarah Hopkins, Fay Gridley, Julie Ghirardani, Wendy Johnson-Houghton and Martin Slater), who now form the Housing Needs Survey working party, met to discuss the Housing Needs Survey (HNS) conducted in October 2020. It was their unanimous opinion that the inconsistencies and errors of considerable concern contained in the HNS report and results from this survey conducted by Community Action Suffolk (CAS) mean that it cannot be relied upon for any purpose whatsoever. This opinion was subsequently ratified by a decision taken at a full Parish Council meeting on 3rd October 2022.

Stansfield Parish Council (SPC) will, therefore, be writing to West Suffolk Council (WSC) with a copy of this letter to instruct them to destroy and officially nullify the HNS report, which was recently given to them and to ensure that no part of the information contained in it is used by anyone for any purpose, including the new WSC Local Plan.

We further request a refund in full from CAS of the fee paid for this survey.

The reasons for these decisions and instructions were discussed by SPC councillors with CAS and WSC on 11th July. On 19th July Sarah Mortimer of CAS wrote to SPC with two suggested options for moving forward. Neither of these options are acceptable to SPC.

To re-confirm, the detailed reasons for our decision include the following significant points:

1. At the outset, CAS promised a flexible and adaptable survey that could be tailored to Stansfield Parish needs. This was in actuality resisted by CAS and did not happen; there was only the minor, small addition of the word NONE in the options of Question 16.
2. CAS promised that they could separate out additional surveys they gave out from those given to each household in the village. CAS misled SPC on this. This did not happen, and CAS now says they are unable to do this, which has led to duplication of data.

3. Point 2) raised doubts about the HNS validity when one household was given two extra questionnaires which CAS supported. The implications of this error eventually came to light when the HNS results were examined by Stansfield councillors.

4. SPC have requested additional information about types of housing need identified in the survey which SPC wished to release to residents; this was refused by CAS. CAS insisted on a secrecy clause in the contract which SPC was obliged to sign. This secrecy is counter to the Rural Housing Alliance (RHA) Core Principles for HNSs which state that results should be "publicly available" and that "all residents should be able to access the results" (points 6 and 8 of the core principles), even though there is a need for the actual data to be "anonymised and kept confidential" (point 5). These RHA principles taken together do not add up to the same meaning as the total confidentiality claimed necessary by CAS.

5. CAS stated to SPC during the survey process that they sought to take a commission from any development that might take place as a result of the survey report and its recommendations. This means that CAS could be perceived as not acting independently and to be biased in favour of development. This is contrary to RHA core principle 2 which states:

"Housing Needs Surveys are independent and balanced and seen to be so." In the light of this, SPC rejects CAS's whole approach to its commission-seeking procedure.

6. Throughout the past two years since the survey was conducted, SPC asked for errors to be corrected but even requests for corrections to be made to clerical and typographical errors were met with resistance from CAS, which significantly contributed to the length of the process.

We look forward to receiving a full refund of the amount paid, being £2,288.55 plus VAT at your earliest convenience.

Signed:

Sarah Hopkins

Sarah Hopkins

date

5.10.22

Julie Ghirardani

Julie Ghirardani

date

5th October 2022

Fay Gridley

Fay Gridley

date

5.10.22

Wendy J Houghton

Wendy Johnson Houghton

date

5th October 2022

Martin Slater

Martin Slater

date

5th October 2022