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Saltford Village Expansion Concerns

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Nestled between Bath and Bristol, Saltford is a quintessential English village, its 4,000 residents cherishing the quiet charm of riverside walks, a golf course, and tennis courts. The village sustains itself with a modest array of amenities: a Tesco supermarket, a Thai restaurant, a volunteer-run library, a car dealership, and a nursery. Its medieval church, lovingly maintained, stands as a testament to its history. Yet, a cloud hangs over this idyllic community as plans for significant expansion threaten its character.

The Bath and North East Somerset (BANES) Council's Local Plan review has proposed 1,300 new homes on Saltford's green belt, split between 'West Saltford' (500 houses) and

‘South Saltford’ (800 houses). Two of the five options in the review prioritise housing growth in and around the village, sparking unease among locals. Dawn, a cleaner who has lived in Saltford for nearly 40 years, expressed mixed sentiments when we met outside the church: “It’s a friendly, lovely place, but there’s a saturation point. We need housing, but we also need to protect our green spaces.”

The Labour government’s introduction of the term “grey belt” green belt land deemed of “poor quality” has added fuel to the debate. Bryan, a 95-year-old retired councillor, voiced his concerns: “I don’t think we need to develop anymore. These so-called ‘grey areas’ worry me. They’re still part of our landscape.” His scepticism reflects a broader distrust of the government’s push to meet ambitious housing targets, which many see as poorly thought out.

Phil Harding, head of Saltford Environmental Group and a resident since 1991, is more direct. He calls BANES’ plans a “knee-jerk” response to Whitehall’s demands, arguing that new housing will damage the green belt, burden already congested roads, and bring residents to an area with few local jobs. “I’m not against new housing,” Phil said in a recent interview, “but it’s about putting it in the right place.” He controversially suggests that Bath, Saltford’s UNESCO World Heritage neighbour, could absorb more development, even proposing that Bath relinquish its prestigious status to ease restrictions on building. While radical, his view underscores the depth of local frustration.

Saltford’s community has a history of resilience. When the village’s library and post office faced closure, residents rallied to save them. Chris, a volunteer librarian who has lived in Saltford for 35 years, recounted: “Nine years ago, our Community Association worked tirelessly to keep this place open. Now it’s thriving, open 9 to 5 most days.” Similarly, a disused public toilet was transformed into a charming coffee house in 2015, showcasing the village’s knack for reinvention.

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