



Amanda's story - Mourning a lost community

It is with great sadness that I have to report on the death of a community, namely my street and alongside that, my village. Ok, so not a death, maybe more an amputation, or a choking or a severing of an artery. So, what do we do in any type of emergency....and the obvious answer is act quickly. This looming death has been long in the making, but recent world events have increased the speed of the decline.

A street of 28 houses and only 10 used a primary home. It hasn't always been this way. Only one when I moved here 28 years ago, and this has been replicated around the whole village, in the older areas of the village, in streets built 20 years ago and now whole swathes of new builds. We now have in excess of 65% not lived-in homes - the balance is tipped in favour of second homes and holiday lets in residential streets. Interestingly, this has happened despite a national holiday park developing over the years to provide more camping pitches, more static caravans, luxury lodges and even glamping. Likewise, the somewhat historic Unison Resort has undergone extensive investment to provide varied and modern accommodation. So how do we stem the loss of community and why should you want to? Well, not everyone who ever lived here actually worked here and not every household took a seasonal lodger - but many did. However, this cannot happen with second homes or short-term holiday lets, so the housing stock is depleted despite more residential homes built over the years. This is exacerbated by some letting agents forcing owners to commit to 12-month contracts, preventing even 6-month winter lets for locals out of season, just in case a holiday booking comes in. For this reason, we now reap the painful reward of not having enough lifeguards to fulfil the annual RNLI quota, not enough rooms to rent for seasonal hospitality workers, problems recruiting locally based community First Responders and Coastguards, not to mention the elderly lady with no permanent neighbour in the four houses beside her, who knows no one will hear her shouts if she should fall. Then there is the primary school with falling numbers, often a fluctuating scenario, but a lack of families living here does not bode well. This is a balance that needs to be redressed, an emergency that needs to be tended to before the life force is lost. This area is a tourist hot spot and for that reason, dedicated tourist accommodation needs to be celebrated and given fair treatment. However, this is not the case. Anything, from a small cottage to a luxury new build, can set up as a small business and, whilst draining the community, it also competes with genuine, law abiding tourist accommodation without any need to apply for change of use from a residential home, adhere to any health and safety regulations or contribute to council tax or business rates (can be reclaimed). Everything is weighted in favour of the second home/ holiday let and yet it poses a threat to the very core of communities and businesses in tourist areas.

Given all of this, I ask that, as a matter of urgency, you consider an immediate implementation of council tax in excess of 300% on all second homes/holiday lets. This could be followed by legislation to require planning consent for use of residential homes as holiday businesses, plus a cap to ensure that an agreed ratio is never exceeded. In addition, planning requests for any building work should be more mindful of the impact of holiday lets in residential streets e.g. a two-bedroom bungalow becoming a five-bedroom, four-bathroom house filling a small plot with parking for one car (as similar to a recent property in Sandy Way). The lack of parking, use of the property and subsequent price hike are all detrimental to primary homeowners who should be able to, within reason, live a quiet, working (or retired) existence in a residential street where tourists enjoy holidaying/ hot tubs and late nights in nearby dedicated tourist accommodation and, in return, the community thrives and supports the essential services that every town and village rightly deserves. Please do all you can to resuscitate our dying communities.