



A STATEMENT BY DISTINGTON BIG LOCAL

All of us involved in Distington Big Local have been shocked and dismayed by the recent campaign to stop our affordable homes project on the former Royal British Legion site in the heart of our village from going ahead. We have been particularly hurt and upset by the many personal attacks made on our Board and a member of our staff and the deliberate misrepresentation of both our work and our motives.

At a meeting of our Board earlier this week we unanimously agreed the following:

1. We intend to withdraw the planning application submitted by Distington Big Local in March 2021 for the housing development on the former Royal British Legion site.
2. All the current Distington Big Local Board members will step down in 28 days time, to allow enough time for new members from the community to come forward and take their place. This will enable Big Local to continue in the short term and remain in compliance with its legal, financial and Local Trust requirements.
3. If no new Board members come forward (or not enough to meet Distington Big Local's legal and Local Trust's requirements), the Community Benefit Society will be wound up. Our staff will be made redundant, the Legion land will need to be transferred to an appropriate alternative organisation in compliance with our rules and Big Local funding for current and future projects will end. Local Trust will offer all support possible to help with the formation of a new Board to ensure resident-led decision making can continue in the area.

Distington Big Local is a not-for-profit community organisation funded by the National Lottery Community Fund through Local Trust. With a £1.2 million budget, we have supported a wide range of community projects and programmes in the village since 2013 and we have £250,000 remaining in our budget.

The majority of our Board members are mostly in their 70s and have given many hundreds of hours of their time completely voluntarily over the past eight years for the benefit of the village in which they live. They have all worked extremely hard over the past four years to bring this housing scheme to fruition. Our partnership with Housing 21, a not-for-profit national housing association specialising in older person's accommodation, was set to bring more than £5.5 million of external investment into Distington, in addition to our Big Lottery funding, to provide new, state of the art affordable rented homes for people to live well in their retirement. These homes – in particular the much sought-after bungalows – have been designed specifically for people living with dementia. Priority for all the homes would have been given to local people in housing need.

That this nationally recognised housing scheme will not now go ahead, is in our view, a tragedy for our village and a huge, missed opportunity. Set alongside our other Big Local projects which may also now lose their funding and the two local residents working for Big Local who may lose their jobs, our view is that the campaign waged against Big Local will leave a legacy of lasting reputational damage to our village rather than the proud legacy which we had worked for.

Distington Big Local Board
16th April 2021 Version 2, 17.00pm