

Policy SP9 – Design and sustainability

- 4.115 (Page 52). “it is important to respect, retain and, where possible, enhance the existing character of both the urban and rural areas to maintain the quality of the District’s environment.

Strategic Housing Sites**Clothall Common**

One community affected by the addition of 520 houses at four sites (BA2, BA3, BA4, BA5) (page 138). 500+ dwellings = Strategic Housing Site status (Para 1.3, bullet point 2. Page 5). Clothall Common should have such status, particularly as the northern edge of Clothall Common will be further impacted by the development of a major industrialised area (BA10, BE2). Excuse the residents of Clothall Common if they feel ‘surrounded’ by development without any safeguards of ‘Strategic Housing Site’ status.

Last Plan – 1996

The last plan was adopted in 1996 – since then work has been going on to develop this plan. Bearing in mind the time NHDC has had to prepare it, why has it adopted such a reactive stance towards identifying potential sites? Surely planners should have looked at the District as a whole and, taking into account Policy SP9, determine areas of land that would be suitable for development, which would “respect, retain and, where possible, enhance the existing character of both the urban and rural areas to maintain the quality of the District’s environment.” Then NHDC could have PROACTIVELY approach relevant landowners to ask if they would consider putting their land forward (COMMONSENSE & PRAGMATIC). Never done.

Thus, we have a hotchpotch of sites, some of which, if developed, are likely to destroy communities and devastate local environments.

Green Belt

As you will know – Green Belt policy was implemented in 1947 and its prime purpose was to stop urban sprawl and prevent the coalescence of towns into massive conurbations. In 1945, LA & London were similar in geographic area. California no protective green belt legislation & has increased significantly in size. In

fact, today, if London had increased in size alongside LA, it would spread from Bedford in the north, to Brighton in the south. Don't say it couldn't happen here – it already is. The plan adopts a pragmatic approach to greenbelt and states that the size is actually increased. That is simply moving areas as a matter of expediency and is rather like building a football stadium in the middle of Dartmoor and recovering that lost moorland by designating a similar area in the middle of Exeter as National Park. It may look good on paper, but is unlikely to fulfil its original purpose.

North Baldock BA1

Looking at BA1, this site looks to provide 2,800 homes; it is far and away the largest single site in the Plan and is bolted onto the oldest and most historic town in North Herts. As it stands it will devastate the character and environment of Baldock and my first premise is that it is far too large to be sustainable. I have gone into this argument at length in my written submission, so do not propose to repeat it here.

But if you do consider the site should remain largely unchanged as far as its size is concerned, I invite you to consider the following:

The southern edge of the site BA1 currently abuts the northern part of the town, surrounding the Salisbury/Bygrave Road area and extending as far as the southernmost tip of Bygrave.

Why not move the whole site northwards, as far as Newnham Road, while retaining a similar area? This would create a ribbon of greenbelt between the Garden Village of North Baldock and increase the gap between the new development and Bygrave, enabling the greenbelt to do what it was originally intended to do – prevent coalescence of communities.

The new development would be superbly placed to take advantage of access to the A1 and A505, without tempting its residents to go through the already congested town of Baldock. NHDC have already publicly stated that they are in favour of introducing 'Garden Towns & Villages' into its planning strategy, which will be incorporated into the next Local Plan. Opportunity to do this now?

I have spoken to the owners of the land (Jonathan Northern) who tells me that they spoke to NHDC as long ago as ten years and stated that they would not speculatively put forward land for development, but were prepared to work with the Council to

enable development of their land, which would “respect, retain and, where possible, enhance the existing character of both the urban and rural areas to maintain the quality of the District’s environment.” (See SP9).

Unfairness

Baldock (Smallest, oldest & most historic town)

HOMES – 4,491

POP – 10,280

Local Plan – 3,590 (80% increase) (25% of the whole – 14,400)

Royston

HOMES – 6,800

POP – 15,781

Local Plan – 1,712 (25% increase) (80% = 5,440)

Letchworth – (Next largest town)

HOMES – 14,271

POP – 33,249

Local Plan – 2,190 (15% increase) (80% = 11,417)

Hitchin (Largest town in terms of homes, 2011 Census)

HOMES – 14,702

POP – 32,731

Local Plan – 1,647 (11% increase) (80% = 11,762)

We accept the need for development; but not at the cost of destroying communities like Baldock. Fair & equitable...