



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

**Formal response to updated matters, issues and questions on
North Hertfordshire District Council Local Plan 2011-2031**

I would like to submit my continued objection to the draft Local Plan that has been produced by North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC). I understand my previous objections will be taken into consideration and this submission must relate solely to the Inspector's updated schedule of further matters, issues and questions.

I remain opposed to the plan, as it is not positively prepared, justified, effective or consistent with national planning policy. I am particularly concerned with the lack of consideration to previous objections to the proposed developments in Knebworth, Codicote, North of Stevenage and Great Ashby.

I agree there is a need for housing in North Hertfordshire and have consistently supported a new Garden City to resolve that housing need. In terms of Matters 21 and 22, I disagree with the objective assessment of housing need, as it is not objective for the following reasons:

The numbers are based on a tickbox approach to have the plan approved. The proposed plan takes no account of the need for highways, social and affordable housing, education, health and potential social and leisure infrastructure that will be required in each community. A new Garden City located in NHDC could resolve all of these issues and create a wonderful place to live, instead of overloading small communities.

The North Hertfordshire New Settlement Study commissioned by NHDC and published in April 2016, stated a new settlement/Garden City is only way to meet housing need post 2031 and should happen now, but NHDC is incapable of delivering it. This is clear evidence that NHDC should stop focusing on process and start focusing on objectively assessed housing need with a new Garden City at the heart of an ambitious new plan.

In our current climate, COVID-19 has confirmed the need for open space alongside our continued commitment to the environment. A balance must be struck between development and preserving our green spaces. Green belt should only be used for development in exceptional circumstances, but it is often the easy option for NHDC.

Only in the last few weeks did NHDC, against mine and local objections, grant retrospective planning permission on a plot of land that is an area of concern for the Planning Inspector. It is raised under Matter 25 and asks for a variety of evidence before the plot can be released from the Green Belt. This planning decision directly prejudices the Inspector's decision and raises the question of the validity of North Herts District Council's Local Plan process.



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I agree and share the Inspector's concern that a 13% buffer does not illustrate exceptional circumstance when advocating the release of green belt for development. I believe the supply of housing sites in the Local Plan should be reduced accordingly with particular focus to minimise coalescence. The site known as NS1, North of Stevenage, is dependent on the development of Forster Country inside Stevenage Borough Council (SBC) boundaries. Sadly SBC removed this area from Green Belt in their Local Plan and it is now the subject of another planning application after I had the Secretary of State intervene on the first application. NS1 will coalesce these two areas together into one large estate and even NHDC accept they have no solutions for suitable transport infrastructure. Sites GA1 and GA2 continue with this same vein of coalescence, lack of transport infrastructure and huge pressure on educational, health, social and leisure facilities.

I stressed previously the impact on the villages of Knebworth, and Codicote being forced to accommodate hundreds of homes each and massive expansions in their population in actual and percentage terms. These are on increasingly dense sites and NHDC must accept they are physically constrained sites and not tickbox exercises to hit a target number. These villages cannot objectively take these levels of development without severe impact on education, health, highways, social and leisure facilities.

The five-year housing land supply para 22.2 has seen the council use the 'Liverpool method', spreading the shortfall in delivery since 2011. This is concrete proof NHDC are unable to supply the demands of the Local Plan and reconfirm the housing supply should be reduced to reflect a more deliverable plan. Furthermore, the planning applications being submitted to Stevenage Borough Council, which is in the same Housing Market Area as NHDC, makes it impossible for developers to build and supply almost twenty thousand homes on top of each other in the next ten years. There is no factual evidence the council can ever meet these levels of supply and therefore a reduction in the deliverable numbers is necessary.

Finally, I fully support all the objections from the various community groups and parish councils in my constituency. They have done a lot of research into the objective assessment of housing need, supply of land, suitability of sites and submitted their findings to this inquiry. I urge the Inspector to consider their findings in detail.

In conclusion, the Local Plan is not positively prepared, effective, justified, deliverable or consistent with national policy. It has a disproportionate impact on the villages. NHDC must withdraw this Local Plan as they cannot deliver the housing they claim is required in the final ten years. They must give greater consideration to the development of a new Garden City to meet future housing needs, but not at the expense of the current communities. Instead, NHDC have undertaken a tickbox exercise to hit unrealistic targets by adding onto the edge of communities where public services are already being fully utilised.

Stephen McPartland
Member of Parliament for Stevenage

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