

Hearing Statement re Matters 30 and 31, Nikki Hamilton

Firstly I apologise for not having finished highlighting sites and planning applications that don't seem to have been included in the local plan within North Herts but will get these in to you and the council as soon as possible and secondly I apologise for how this document has been compiled by myself. To be quite honest Mr Berkeley, I am totally confused by the extra modifications that seem to have been submitted during such a late stage of the local plan process and just before the Christmas break (around the time we were also trying to respond to a late submission by Picture SRL). We have now seen modifications to policies in which we have a limited time to get our heads around and try to respond to, not being a qualified planner - I am finding it very difficult to understand the changes to the wording in regards to SP14-SP19 – we are just residents standing up for our families and communities with some of us working voluntarily for local wildlife groups and I for one am currently trying to juggle 4 local plans so this response will be totally off the cuff.

Why are NHDC putting in 'Final Masterplanning Proposed Modifications in December 2020 when this local plan was first submitted 5 years ago and we have been in hearings since 2017 or 2018?

NHDC already removed the idea of a new garden city which had been investigated with even a site suggested and had all the support of MP's and communities within North Herts. The omission of this has had huge implications on the local plan which now has 85% being proposed on green belt which is simply not in line with government policy. It then amended numerous policies in regards to bio diversity and the environment for no reason what so ever, certainly not in response to anything that had been brought up at the hearings and now we have more modifications including a proposal to remove BK3 from the local plan.

I will keep this very short – there has been a huge emphasis for numbers to be met with arguments from NHDC for extra housing on top of what is needed in relation to the latest ONS, large percentage buffers as there is a likelihood that housing numbers would go up from the new algorithm that was put forward with the housing white paper; but as stated by Jenrick in an article www.building.co.uk/news 16 December 2020, “The government has abandoned an algorithm that would have dramatically increased housebuilding in the Conservatives’ southern heartlands.” He then goes on to advise how the focus for housing numbers will switch to the North and the Midlands and how there needs to be emphasis on brown field sites and rejuvenation within the towns. The government are even setting up a £100m brownfield fund to encourage housing to be built on previously used sites thus protecting our countryside/green belt. Not only do I still believe the plan is unsound and that the exceptional circumstances do not exist to remove 85% from green belt but NHDC are now considering removing the largest site from the plan that is not even on green belt and certainly does not have as serious implications as some of the other sites they are hell bent on keeping within the plan in regards to infrastructure and bio diversity. This simply does not make sense.

There was recently an extraordinary meeting set up by the Liberal Democrat Councillors to look decreasing the numbers of housing within the local plan – unfortunately many of the councillors also do not have experience of planning/local plans etc and have not been a party to the last 5 years as we have. I already raised my concerns in regards to this meeting in which a number of Councillors felt that 'project fear' had come into play as they were told that if they voted to have the numbers reduced it could result in large legal costs. With this in mind – why are NHDC not seemingly bothered that the removal of BK3 could result in legal costs and yet in the private part of the recent EGM, Councillors felt there had been 'scare mongering'?

By removing BK3 (not on green belt land) this would in my mind make the plan less sound and robust than it is already. The removal of this site seems to relate to 'primary education' and utilising

the site reserved if the primary education does not go ahead and if that housing can then integrate with the existing village; this is not the first time that 'educational needs' has been used in regards to a site. GA2 was doubled in size against the advice of a group that has worked with many local authorities so that it could incorporate a secondary school which would be needed if GA1 and GA2 were to go ahead, but as I have already highlighted – there is not going to be a secondary school which is why Picture SRL suggested they could build extra housing and 700 houses has already been quoted in recent correspondence. I am taking it from these latest proposals that NHDC are concerned regarding soundness in regards to this site but seem to be overlooking the fact that keeping GA2 within the plan makes it unsound for a number of reasons. In conclusion, they are also concerned in regards to numerous legal fights and costs by removing green belt sites from the plan but not so due to removing a site not on green belt. I simply don't understand NHDC's way of thinking right now; how can you demand so much destruction to the green belt by enforcing the need for supply of land for housing but then look to removing the largest site not on green belt?

In regards to Matter 31, as I have said – NHDC seem to have changed a lot of wording, doing away seemingly with master plans and implementing strategic master plans and I am not quite sure what has changed and what hasn't but unfortunately I have not been able to attend a zoom meeting with others who have the knowledge to advise me how these changes would actually affect some of the sites and the process; but this will have been the case by the time of the hearing. In regards to SP18 surely a strategic master plan should be prepared and agreed not just with the council and developers but also the key stake holders and parties such as the Herts & Middx Wildlife Trust and the Herts & Middx Badger Group as should there not be a net gain or a site could in fact go totally against the NPPF then planning permission should not be given. I am also awaiting advice in regards to the following: “Any application on part of the site will be assessed against its contribution to the Strategic Masterplan and will not prejudice the implementation of the site as a whole.” before I can respond but I wanted to raise this in my hearing statement so that I can raise any points necessary at the hearing.

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