

Statement of Nicholas Rowe, 14 Shillington Road Pirton, on behalf of the Pirton Parish Council.

I am a resident of Pirton Village, and a Pirton Parish Councillor. I make this Statement on behalf of the Pirton Parish Council (PPC).

Broadly speaking, the PPC is supportive of the draft Local Plan. Where we have differed is primarily over the lack of acknowledgement or emphasis on the role of Neighbourhood Planning in the planning for and delivery of a new Local Plan.

Pirton Parish embarked on its journey to develop a Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) in 2013. We are the first Parish in North Herts to do so. Our Plan has now completed a successful Examination, and subject to some helpful amendments recommended by our Examiner, we hope to proceed to Referendum in or around March 2018.

In developing our NDP, the community moved from a position of “no housing development”, (Parish Plan 2013), to one where they accept not only the need for housing development but one where they feel more informed, and therefore more actively engaged in getting the right type of housing for Pirton.

You have asked why the proposed Local Plan does not allocate housing to Pirton. I believe you have been told that this is because Pirton already since 2011 has accepted significant housing development to meet its initially proposed allocation.

This is, indeed, the case. Since 2011 we calculate that 105 dwellings have been built, or have planning permission, including a single development of 78 dwellings. (This figure differs slightly from the NHDC figure, we believe because of slightly different counting periods). Additionally, within our proposed new village development boundary, which mirrors that proposed in the Local Plan for Pirton, we are aware of two proposals for sizeable development; one for 25 dwellings, and another for 9 dwellings. We expect other “windfall” development within the new boundary as Pirton historically has experienced small but steady new house building.

139 dwellings represent an increase in housing of something in the region of 26 %, since 2011, the start date for both our NDP and the Local Plan. In percentage terms, this is greater than the development planned for Hitchin or Letchworth, and pretty much on a par with Royston. It is all within the proposed new development boundary.

Our NDP acknowledges the need for Pirton to contribute not only to Pirton’s housing needs (assessed in 2010 as 11 affordable homes) but to the housing needs of the wider community.

We also considered our position as a Category A village; this is clearly demonstrated in our NDP. The categorisation, of course, must be considered in the context of each village, and its character, its facilities and amenities, and its overall environment. These elements, including social and economic issues, are all addressed within our NDP.

We therefore recommend the encouragement of NDPs across North Herts as part of the Local Plan, and recommend references to the Pirton NDP in relation to housing development for and in Pirton Village and Parish within the Local Plan.

The Inspector has also asked about the new development boundary. We worked closely with the NHDC regarding boundaries. Pirton has a unique place in the countryside of North Hertfordshire. It is bounded on the south side by the Chiltern Hills, an area of outstanding natural beauty; on the west by a scheduled monument and a number of listed buildings in Shillington Road, and then with extensive mediaeval remains in an HCC Archaeology Alert area; along West Lane by superb views across the Pirton Lowlands and high grade agricultural land; and on the North and East sides by high grade agricultural land which combine to give Pirton a very rural setting whilst being close to a significant urban centre. Our NDP envisages Pirton as a place that can contribute to the health and well-being of more urban residents by virtue of its proximity to Hitchin. The choice of development boundary, outside of which only exception sites will be permitted, is one agreed upon having taken into account housing development needs balanced with the preservation of setting of Pirton, which setting contributes substantially to its character and to the economic value that increasingly visitors can bring.

These considerations are all in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework. Further detail on the character of Pirton is described in the Pirton Character Assessment, a document clearly central to our NDP and to the Examiner's considerations of it. The NDP and Character Assessment can be found on the Pirton Parish Council website.

Nicholas Rowe