

SRB additional written statement for Public Examination

These comments are written to augment the comments made in the original SRB representation which is included as the background document attached to this email

All comments made in this representation relate to policies 8 and 14 (SP8, SP14).

Other references are described where relevant.

Summary:

The production of the Masterplan has illustrated the difficulties of creating a viable traffic design and proves that the site North of the Railway is not viable in the current proposed size.

SP6 , Areas BA1, BA3, BA4, Roads and Traffic

There remains a lot of concern about the traffic flows in and around Baldock. Since the public consultation the following points need to be made:

1. Whitehorse Street/Station Road Junction

There has been inadequate assessment of the traffic flows in and around Baldock, for both the current situation and the impact of the local plan proposals in the future.

The recently published "North Herts Transport Strategy"(NHTS) quotes information in the local plan and the IDP, which itself does not reflect the true picture.

The Whitehorse Street/Station Road junction is identified as a bottleneck but the proposal for improvement is limited to improved traffic light controls at the junction. This is unlikely to make any significant impact on the existing and future traffic issues in this area. Page 97 of the NHTS states that the delay at the junction (referenced as HM3) is 2 mins. This is a gross underestimate. It often takes 15 minutes even from the Salisbury Road junction and traffic is frequently queueing back up North Road well beyond where the current 30 mile an hour speed limit starts, North of the Salisbury Road junction. It can queue back as far as the 40 mile an hour speed limit signs much further up the road towards the services.

2. Link Roads

HCC have put forward a proposed **Masterplan** for Baldock which fails to adequately address how the new link roads are to be used. There is a conflict between the two stated purposes of the roads (i.e (a) to redirect traffic away from the existing bottlenecks at the Whitehorse Street junction and (b) as local service roads for local traffic). These roads have not been categorised as either A roads or B roads adding to the lack of clarity about their intended usage.

2a. Southern Link Road

This is designed for access to the new houses built in the South East Baldock site but it will become a rat run as drivers attempt to avoid the junction referenced above. The road joins on to the Royston Road and hence with the Northern link road.

The route will be used

- (i) to cut across from the Royston Road to the Tesco roundabout, via South Road, and also on through to the A1, via London Road to get to the A1M.
- (ii) to cut through from the Bypass and Royston Road to get to the Buntingford road as this road is not accessible from the bypass
- (iii) to bypass the bottleneck junction when approaching from the North via the Northern link road, using the Southern link Road and again South Road and then out of the town via London Road.

Besides attracting a large amount of traffic along the Southern link road itself, it will cause heavy traffic at the Clothall Road/South Road roundabout and along South Road, which is a narrow residential road, not designed for such use.

2b. Northern link Road

This links the B656 (Royston Rd) to the A507, north of Baldock.

One suggestion is that this road will alleviate the traffic travelling from the North down the A507 as it will enable traffic to access the Royston Road without passing through the Whitehorse Street junction. As stated above, the A507 is already heavily trafficked and suffers frequent congestion at the traffic lights especially at rush hours but also throughout the day. There could be a high demand for this type of usage even for traffic wishing to travel South or West through Baldock as they try to avoid the trouble spot. Significant amount of this traffic is medium and large capacity commercial vehicles.

The second and conflicting use for this road is as an access road for the houses and new neighbourhood retail area.

The HCC plan suggests that it could become a boulevard style road with central green way.

This road is highly likely to become congested, significantly reduce the air quality of the residential area and be unsafe for pedestrians.

3. Weight limit proposal for the A507

The "Safer A507" campaign has proposed that the categorisation of the A507 between Buntingford and the services North of Baldock be changed from A to B to discourage its use by large commercial vehicles. Whilst this proposal has not yet been adopted, there has been an agreement to apply a weight limit on the road. This was passed unanimously on 22 June 2017 at the HCC Highways Cabinet panel. We do not believe that this will, on its own, alleviate the traffic due to its reliance on effective policing and the fact that many vehicles will have to use the road for access to points along the road.

Many vehicles fall below the weight limit threshold. This is illustrated by the Department for Transport's Counting Information, on the DfT website, which shows an increasing number of light goods vehicles. (approximately doubling in the last 16 years)

(Incidentally, Network Rail has informed the "Safer A507" campaign group that the Baldock Railway bridge has been struck 32 times since 2012, at a cost of £433,631.)

4. Travel between the North and South sides of the Railway line

Besides the proposal to create a new road bridge across the railway on the eastern edge of the town (as part of the Northern Link Road) there is no other route for cars to cross from one side of the railway to the other. The masterplan makes a very strong emphasis on the use of cycles and walking to move from one part of the town to the other. Whilst this may work for some (and it should be encouraged) there will remain a high demand for car usage. The distance from the middle/far points of the Northern development area to the town centre will be too far for many to consider walking. Car usage will remain an important part of the transport needs, for commuting to work, accessing the shops and, for some, transporting children to/from school.

The number of houses (and hence cars) proposed for the North development area will put a very heavy strain on the existing A 507 (Station Road), which, as observed above, is already very heavily used.

A particular example is that if schools are built toward the south of the BA1 site then Clothall Common will be in their catchment area and this will generate additional traffic flows across the railway.

SP6 Areas BA1 BA3, BA4 Railway

The Masterplan fails to make adequate provision for parking at Baldock station.

SP7, BA1, BA3, BA4 Infrastructure

The provision of services and amenities has been inadequately covered in the HCC Masterplan. It is proposed that Baldock be expanded into a large town which would need many more leisure facilities such as Community hall, swimming pool, to bring it up to the standard of Royston Letchworth and Hitchin. The provision of infrastructure (besides the necessary Doctors surgery and schools) has not been adequately assessed.

D4 Air pollution

It has been widely reported that tyres and brakes are a big source of air pollutants and the new link roads would take this pollution into the new developments. If the northern link is built as shown in the masterplan, then it will be too slow for lorries and heavy traffic who will prefer to use A507. If it is fast enough for lorries etc it will be dangerous and polluting and divisive for the development.

The issue of the dangerous air quality in Hitchin Street (identified in the NHTA) has not been addressed.

SP4 Town Centre

If the Local Plan is endorsed then an attractive and fully functioning historical market town will be swamped by new housing which will destroy its character and culture.

The Masterplan has not adequately addressed the issue of **transport bottlenecks** between the two parts of Baldock across the Railway line. Only walking and cycling have been adequately catered for. Although given the potentially high levels of pollution that will result from the increased traffic, there will be health issues for pedestrians and cyclists.

The attempt to integrate Baldock as one town is highly likely to fail.

BA1 Green Belt

The debate about whether building should take place on Green Belt continues at the National Level.

There is a lot of opposition to changing Green Belt designation within North Hertfordshire through the campaign Group "Save our Green Belt in North Hertfordshire".

SP3, BA10 Local Work opportunities

3,200 jobs have been assumed to be available in Baldock at the BA10 site. It is not clear how the number of businesses needed to generate these jobs will be attracted to the town as opposed to other larger centres in the area. Work opportunities will be needed otherwise the residents will seek work elsewhere. This will increase the number of people commuting out of the town, adding to stressed roads and railway and limiting the contribution being made to the local community. It will also raise house prices beyond the means of many local families.