

Dear Members

Firstly, welcome to new members. There has been increased interest in our group following the recent publicity about the local housing plans, which has been prompted by Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) exhibiting their first draft design of the possible new developments around Baldock.

It is quite complex, but here is the current situation

HCC owns the land North and east of Baldock on which the developments have been proposed and are proactively making plans about how the land could be developed. This is alarming to local residents as they are being presented as a fait accompli, which they are not. HCC have stated that they will be maintaining ownership of the land throughout the process and therefore manage its development more closely.

Any plans that HCC draws up will have to be submitted to North Herts District Council (NHDC), who act as the planning authority for the area and will assess HCC's Planning Application against the Local Plan, any Neighbourhood plan that exists at the time of the assessment and any other relevant considerations (like national policies). As the land in question is still part of the Green Belt, which can only be released for development if the Local Plan is passed, these assessments cannot start until then. This is not likely to happen for another 12 to 18 months. HCC are following a very aggressive timetable to draw up their planning application to be sure that their plans receive early attention when/if the Local Plan enables the Green Belt to be released.

This group has been set up to create a Neighbourhood plan against which the HCC Planning applications and any other development proposals can be tested. **So, whatever HCC are suggesting there is still time for local residents and businesses to record their wishes and influence details of the development. But time is short and we need to put our effort where it can be most effective.**

So, how are we getting on? Back in February of this year, we submitted an application to NHDC to designate Baldock Town, Bygrave Parish and Clothall Parish as one combined area for purpose of producing the Neighbourhood Plan. To meet the rules of Neighbourhood Planning, Bygrave Parish Council (as the only Parish Council included in the designated area) must act as the responsible body for the whole Planning area. On 25 July, NHDC Cabinet voted unanimously to approve the application. This is good news and enables us to move on to the detail of the plan.

When the committee return from the summer break, we will be drawing up a schedule of activities for the Autumn, which will include completing our study of the background evidence already accumulated for the Local Plan, community activities to develop ideas already gathered from local residents and businesses and drawing up more evidence to support the proposals that we will be making in the Neighbourhood Plan.

Meanwhile the committee has met HCC and drawn attention to particular concerns about their early planning suggestions and we will continue to liaise with HCC to put forward the views of the local community as much as we can. Thank you to everyone who has contributed their views so far.

In terms of the HCC timetable, we understand that they will be hosting another round of public consultation early in the autumn. We will try to publicise dates as soon as we know them. We would like to encourage as many people as possible to take the opportunity to complete the consultation questionnaires. You can also speak to your local District Councillors and, of course, help us to complete the Neighbourhood Plan. It is important to remember that nothing has been agreed yet. The Local Plan is still be assessed by the Inspector.

Detail of HCC's first version of their proposals can be found at www.baldockconsultation.co.uk .

As part of your continued support and interest in the future of Baldock, you may be interested to know that Alessandro Marsili from Affinity Water will be presenting information on the Ivel Springs Head water and the water supplies for the extra 5000 plus houses proposed for Baldock and Letchworth. Water supply and waste management treatment are very important considerations for the new development. The presentation is part of the regular Baldock Town Talk organised by the Councillors on 4 Sept 2017 at the community centre. The Town Talk starts at 6.30pm, in advance of the Area Committee meeting scheduled for 7.30pm.

We look forward to meeting and discussing ideas for the area with you over the coming months

Yours sincerely

Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall Planning Group committee