

**Examination in Public of North Hertfordshire Local Plan (2011-2031)**  
**Inspector Simon Berkeley BA MA MRTPI**  
**26<sup>th</sup> March 2018**

**Baldock (including Bygrave)**

*Meeting written up by Carole Anne Brown for the Baldock Society.*

NHDC was represented by Louise Symes and Nigel Smith and there were consultants and a QC on hand.

There were 9 local representors.

There were approximately 20 attendees quite a few of whom were from Baldock including Councillors Michael Muir, Michael Weeks, Jim McNally & Steve Jarvis.

From the Baldock Society Committee: Carole Anne Brown and Paul Taylor.

The session was organised so that each site was considered in reference number order. For Baldock, site BA1 (the 2800 unit site on North Road) had already been examined on 6<sup>th</sup> February. Sites BA2, BA3 and BA4 all of which are in Green Belt and on Clothall Common were taken together. Sites BA5 (on Clothall Common behind Hartsfield School), BA6 (Icknield Way at the end of Church Street), BA7 (rear of Clare Crescent and 68 London Road) and BA11 (Dean's Yard, South Road) were each considered separately.

The points for consideration were:

- Are all of the proposed housing allocations deliverable?
- Are they justified and appropriate in terms of their likely impact?
- Are they the most appropriate option given the reasonable alternatives?
- The reason for using Green Belt land and the impact this would have.
- Justification of the proposed settlement boundary.

Each point was put to NHDC for justification. When all the inspector's questions had been answered, the representors were given the opportunity to speak. No new points which were not contained in their written submissions were permitted.

**BA2, BA3, BA4:** Green Belt land on Clothall Common bordering Royston Road and the bypass.

It was confirmed that the land was available and that a planning application had been submitted by HCC who own the land to cover all three sites.

**Louise Symes (NHDC):**

Public footpaths run through the site and these would be respected.

Access would be via a southern link road from the Royston Road through BA3 to join Wallington Road and which would be delivered as part of the planning application. BA2 would have access onto the A507. These new roads would help to alleviate traffic problems and congestion at the junction on Royston Road / Clothall Road / Whitehorse Street / North Road by directing traffic away from the junction. The traffic strategy would encourage more sustainable modes of transport but there was no specific scheme for cycle paths or new footpaths (*this in response to a query from the Inspector*).

**Infrastructure: Education:** These sites would deliver approximately 500 homes which equates to a 1-form entry school. There is capacity at Hartsfield JMI School which could expand from 2-form entry to 3-form entry and there would also be capacity at Knights

Templar School for secondary pupils. The proposed secondary school on BA1 would make provision for the extra pupils and be up to 8-form entry.

**The Inspector:** queried the land set aside in BA3 for a new school which seemed to have been overlooked and was informed that NHDC could set aside some land for a primary school should it be needed. He also asked when the secondary school in BA1 would be available and whether the pupils from BA2, BA3 and BA4 would be reliant on capacity at Knights Templar School to which NHDC replied that these sites could be sustainable even if BA1 were to be refused.

The Inspector asked why the plan for BA4 appeared not to contain the whole site. The reply was that the western part is not in the Green Belt and is land reserved for a school site in the current Local Plan. A planning application for 47 dwellings was submitted recently.

He also made the point that the same points about congestion at the Royston Road junction apply to these sites as to BA1.

**Other infrastructure requirements:** There is sufficient capacity at the Letchworth Water Recycling Centre to accommodate the sites and existing sewage pipes would be able to take the additional sewage. There is no flooding issue but some surface water issues. Water courses cross BA3 and BA4 but there are criteria for dealing with these issues in the policy statements.

For BA2, the risk of contamination is represented as criteria in the policy statements.

No fundamental constraints to development had been identified.

**Environmental constraints:** There were very few. The sites are North Baldock Chalk Uplands and the landscape is of moderate sensitivity. Ecologically, no wildlife sites have been identified and so the sites are of low ecological sensitivity. The Weston Hills Local Nature Reserve is to the south of BA2 and not adjacent to it.

**Archaeological constraints:** there is a scheduled ancient monument between the site and Hartsfield School.

**Louise Symes (NHDC):**

The proposed housing allocations are justified in terms of the likely impact of the development.

**Andrew Wheen:**

**Transport:** The same problems that exist already and have been identified for site BA1 would be compounded by the new sites. An ACOM assessment suggested that the situation would improve slightly but that there would be a large increase in traffic using Clothall Road and the proposed link roads. This could create new pollution problems as would the huge amount of heavy building site traffic. This would not be a short-term temporary problem as building is scheduled to continue until 2031.

The northern link road would likely become a rat-run because it would link the dual-carriageway from Stotfold with the dual-carriageway from Royston which makes a mockery of NHDC's wish to keep heavy traffic to the A505. The artist's impression of this new road as single-lane with trees, few cars and pedestrians walkways is not compatible with the use of the road to divert traffic away from the Royston Road cross-roads.

The extra (projected 4000) cars would exacerbate local traffic congestion and the requirement to avoid this has been ignored. There is little employment in the town and so residents would have to travel out of Baldock to work. During rush-hour, car, bus and train travel would be nearly impossible. There is already insufficient capacity on the East Coast Mainline due to the Welwyn tunnels and viaduct and so the necessary increase in rail services would not be

possible and trains would be over-crowded. The transport assessment ignores this requirement.

These developments would seriously degrade the quality of life in Baldock.

**Steve Baker (CPRE Hertfordshire):**

A507 is an important cross-country route linking the A1 and the A10 and is heavily used.

This traffic would not re-route to the new link routes.

There would be a cumulative impact from the sheer scale of the developments in relation to the existing town. Most of the land which would be lost is grade 2 agricultural land. There would be a significant impact looking from outside Baldock into the town. It sits in a valley and development of BA4 would destroy this view because it would fill in open countryside. The proposal to develop BA2 right up to the bypass would have a similar effect.

**Jim McNally (NHDC councillor for Baldock Town):**

In September 2016, Govia Thameslink proposed time-table changes which would have reduced significantly the number of trains stopping at Baldock. In consultation with them, Baldock councillors found that they were unaware of the proposed developments. *(HCC disputed this with Sarah Clinch saying that they had been in contact with Govia Thameslink since 2013)*

NHDC had acted in isolation and failed to co-operate with other bodies over the Local Plan.

**Robert Hemmings:**

There is no indication of how NHDC proposes to resolve the problems because they just say that it is a statutory requirement.

There is no provision for “green corridors” to maintain birdlife. Birds are difficult to relocate.

He asked how NHDC would re-establish the wildlife after the completion of the building.

He expressed disbelief that the area was only of moderate sensitivity and enquired why the sites could not all be considered together to trigger a super-policy.

**Steve Jarvis (HCC and NHDC councillor):**

**Transport:** The link roads through BA3 and BA4 need to be designed and constructed with a view to their purpose to divert traffic away from the town centre and the Royston Road junction as well to serve the development.

**Cecil Elliston Ball (Greene King):**

The development very close to the bypass has the potential for increased air pollution *(not taken further because a previous session had been devoted to air pollution)*

**Adrienne Waterfield (SRB):**

The southern link road would be insufficient to solve congestion problems and would become a rat-run allowing drivers to cut across from Royston Road to the A1M via South Road and London Road. South Road is narrow and unsuitable for this volume of traffic. The link road would also be used inappropriately to access the A507 from the Royston Road.

**Nigel Smith (NHDC) / Roger Flowerday (HCC Transport):**

**Transport:** Not all traffic should be removed from the town centre and the Local Plan should offer the possibility for traffic to remain in the town. So far there is a strategic masterplan but this is for illustration only and it would be necessary to look at the detail and to see what function the link road should have. The possibility of linking BA3 and BA4 directly onto the A507 would need to be explored. A balance needs to be struck concerning the function of the routes. The aspiration would be to remove strategic traffic from the town centre and to leave options open. *(To which the Inspector commented that he did not understand what was meant)*

**Steve Baker (CPRE Hertfordshire):**

This would appear to be “planning on the hoof” which would have more implications than just leaving options open. A change of route would impact on the land near the route. If the idea is to effectively create a bypass right round the town, the implications have not been discussed and are not available. It would be unlikely that motorists would use the route because it would double the distance through the town.

**Andrew Wheen:**

It is difficult to object to a development which morphs into something else. It should not be possible for NHDC to keep amending the plans.

**Environment:** in the sites there are 8 of the 10 birds the RSPB lists as in significant long-term decline and these would need relocating which would not be easy. The loss of the green Belt would have consequences which would go much deeper than the loss of the countryside.

**Sarah Clinch (HCC / WYG):**

Land could be set aside and planted appropriately to guard bio-diversity.

In response to concerns about construction traffic, a traffic management plan would be required and the link road would have to be built before the housing.

There were no reasonable alternatives to these sites.

**Louise Symes (NHDC):**

The exceptional circumstances do exist to permit building on Green Belt. There are various criteria such as landscape and boundaries in the plan to try to mitigate the harm. The Green Belt Review that was undertaken assessed this area as a making *moderate* contribution to Green Belt. BA3 and BA4 score *significant* because of open countryside but *limited* in terms of preventing the joining of towns and historic significance (they do not link to the conservation area). In both sites, there are proposals to address the impact by site specific landscape assessments.

BA2 is to be removed from the Green Belt by pulling back the Green Belt boundary to the bypass which would give greater flexibility in the layout of the dwellings. There would not be an increase in the housing allocation (200).

**Andrew Wheen:**

Baldock has had imposed a far greater allocation of houses than anywhere else in North Herts. All the sites belong to HCC and other landowners have said that they were not given the option to bring their land forward for consideration (*NHDC dispute this saying that only HCC land was put forward*)

The scoring system has been used to downplay the significance of the Green Belt land. All the sites scored *significant* in some spheres but they were rated *moderate*. According to recent ministerial statements and government policy (White Paper) there must be exceptional circumstances (not merely additional housing) for building on Green Belt which should remain open and permanent.

**Steve Baker (CPRE Hertfordshire):**

There is insufficient evidence for the need for so much development in Baldock and no exceptional circumstances to allow this amount of building on Green Belt land. The proposed modification (to extend the BA2 to the bypass) is not a minor issue and the current boundary should not be changed. Extending the area is not necessary to meet the housing need and there would be no guarantee that HCC would not seek to build a larger allocation on the site.

**Sarah Clinch (HCC / WYG):**

HCC has social responsibility. All councils have been asked to look at land they own to help solve the housing crisis (White Paper). This could mean moving Green Belt boundaries.

**BA5 (Clothall Common behind Hartsfield School and off Yeomanry Drive)**

**Louis Symes (NHDC):**

The land is available and there are no access issues. There are footpaths and cycle paths. It is deliverable and there are no fundamental constraints. Flood water has been considered and would not be a problem. There are water courses which cross the site and would require infrastructure. The waste water infrastructure is in place.

School-age children would be accommodated by Hartsfield JMI School and Knights Templar School.

An assessment needs to be carried out in respect of heritage impact and an archaeological survey would be needed.

The ecological sensitivity is *low*.

All the above have been addressed through the policy.

**BA6 (Icknield Way)**

Just on the edge of the conservation area and so the design would have to be sympathetic. It is an employment area which has been vacant for a number of years. The landowner has confirmed availability.

The footpath across the site would need accommodating. There is existing waste water infrastructure but surface and flood water assessments would need carrying out. Checks would have to be made for contamination from previous use. The railway line runs behind the site on an embankment.

There are no ecological constraints.

**Jim McNally (NHDC councillor for Baldock Town):**

There is high density housing in the area and little off-street parking. Appropriate emphasis must be given to off-street parking for any new homes at the planning application stage.

**BA7 (Rear of Clare Crescent / 68 London Road)**

The land at the rear of Clare Crescent belongs to NHDC and consists of disused allotments while 68 London Road is a residential dwelling and garden in private ownership. NHDC is working to bring the site forward because the landowner is willing.

Access is via a narrow driveway onto London Road but a road off Weston Way could be opened up alongside Knights Court. The Inspector asked who owned the site access to which the reply was that it is associated with the flats and as far as NHDC representatives were aware there was ongoing discussion. The Inspector asked for a definite answer.

**Infrastructure / environment:** Low sensitivity in terms of biodiversity but there may be contamination from allotment use. An archaeological survey would be needed and flood and surface water risk would need assessing. It is open space because the allotments have not been used for a number of years but site access is limited. (*See ED16: the land was declared surplus to allotment requirements in 2011.*)

**Robert Hemmings:**

There is still one allotment holder and the site is largely disused because letting was discouraged and this represents an opportunity to get rid of some allotment land.

**BA11 (Deans Yard, South Road):**

This site consists of a garage business and a house which have a single owner who has confirmed the site is available for development. The leases on the site are short-term and there are no access issues. There is likely to be contamination from use as a garage and surface water run-off would need addressing.

It is opposite a scheduled ancient monument and at the edge of the conservation area so a heritage impact assessment would be needed and care should be taken over design aspects.

**Boundary to proposed settlement:**

**NHDC:**

The boundary along the bypass is considered appropriate and justified.

**Steve Jarvis (HCC and NHDC councillor):**

The boundary might be modified by modifications to the Local Plan such as changes in the exact position of the link road.

**Robert Hemmings:**

The Green Belt boundary is already being extended more than necessary.

*The session ended at 12.07*