

Section / Policy / Development Site

Dear NHDC Planning department,

I strongly object to NHDC Local Plan 2011-2031, which was recommended by the main eight NHDC Councillors in the Cabinet meeting on Nov 24th, and subsequently voted through by 44 of the 49 NHDC councillors at the full Council meeting on Nov 27th 2014.

Some of my reasons and objections to this Local Plan are given below :-

Number of Houses

I believe the number of houses proposed to be built as part of this plan are excessive, in terms of supplying houses for the local population. Where you say 'The CLG figures and the results of the SHMA both came up with a figure of around 12,100 dwellings..... Came up with? Around?.

I believe the number of houses for the local population growth is nearer 5000 houses.

History of Baldock

The history, character and ambiance of Baldock has not been taken into consideration.

Building 3500 new houses would change the character of Baldock forever, from a quiet market town, to something similar to Letchworth, with its empty shops. Residents experiencing a difficulty with travelling into Baldock will go elsewhere, where there is easy access to adequate parking. Likewise residents commuting by road & rail to their place of work will return late to find the local shops closed.

Proportion of houses to Baldock

The number of houses allocated to Baldock is very excessive, compared to the other towns.

Baldock will have to take 45% of the houses, with the rest spread across Hitchin, Letchworth, Royston and rural areas. This is the easy option and will just continue the ribbon development along the Railway / A505 corridor. A caring considerate Council would adhere to the green belt principle, and leave open spaces between developments. NHDC's councillors ideas of green space seems to be one field.

Clothall Common, built in Baldock in the 1980's has 800 houses.

Building 3500 houses is the equivalent of building over four additional Clothall Commons in Baldock.

Major disruption during the development of the new houses

There will be major disruption to Baldock and the surrounding areas during the long period of development required for such a large undertaking.

Pressure on Doctors Surgery

There is already a three week wait for non urgent appointments with a doctor. This would only increase with the large development proposed for Baldock.

Pressure on Schools

Baldock Schools are already crowded. With more children, some will have to be bussed out to other areas to complete their education. This travel time is time that will be lost for each child's recreation, homework and general development.

Employment opportunities in Baldock for residents living in extra 3500 houses

It is hard to identify employment opportunities for the residents of the new 3500 houses. This means they will have to commute to places of work, either using the Railway to London or Cambridge, or driving on already crowded / congested roads. This will exacerbate the pressure on the crowded roads and railway.

Transport Plan (in relation to Baldock Site BA1)

Roads

all traffic into Baldock will merge at the White Horse Street traffic lights.

Increased Traffic from the Bygrave Common west houses exiting onto North Road, and vehicles exiting Bygrave Road will queue to pass under the railway bridge.

New traffic lights will be needed at the Bygrave Road / North Road junction at peak times to prevent road rage by owners of Bygrave Road vehicles trying to push out into the North road traffic.

Traffic from the Bygrave end of Bygrave Common (east) will use the new road bridge over the railway to the Royston Road / Bypass roundabout, and then turn right onto Royston Rd, and thence to the Whitehorse traffic lights. The congestion at the Whitehorse Street traffic lights will be similar to the traffic levels before the Bypass was built.

Vehicle and noise pollution

With such a large number of new houses (3500 in Baldock), there will be an increase in noise and air pollution from the additional vehicles. This will have a detrimental affect on the quality of life for Baldock residents.

Railway

There will be an increase in the number of commuters using the Station.

Trains will be even more crowded at peak times.

The Baldock station is limited in size by the Larkins Close development, and cannot be extended to take the 12 carriage trains (according to the Baldock Station staff).

There is limited parking at the Station, causing more pedestrians to walk to the Station.

Pedestrians

There is already a danger to pedestrians passing under the railway bridge on narrow footpaths.

This is especially true for people in wheelchairs, and mothers with push chairs and toddlers.

Additional traffic under the Baldock Railway Bridge will greatly increase this danger to pedestrians.

Water supply

Will there be adequate water for all the additional houses. Ivel Springs has already dried up several times. Building houses will prevent rain water soaking into the ground to replenish the ground water levels.

Some residents in outlying areas have already spoken of problems with low water pressure. This large development will only exacerbate their water pressure problems.

Gas & Electricity supply.

It seems that the NHDC planning department are assuming there will be no problem with supplying adequate gas and electricity supplies for the new development. There does not seem to have been an investigation into this.

Waste collections and landfill availability

Have NHDC fully investigated the impact re collecting and disposing of the waste from an additional 3500 houses in the Baldock area.

Foul water / Sewage.

Foul water flows to the Baldock Pumping station at Ivel Springs, where it is pumped up to Norton in a pipe passing under the football ground and across the motorway bridge.

It is probable that these will need to be doubled in capacity to take the increased effluent from 3500 new houses.

At Norton the Foul water (Sewage) descends by gravity to the Letchworth Treatment works just north of Standalone Farm. Again the capacity of both the pipe and the Sewage works will need increasing, especially if 1000 houses are built on Letchworth Grange (near

Norton).

Alternative Land

The land opposite George 4th pub, on Weston Way, was in the Local Plan in Mid 2014.

This land owned by Letchworth Heritage Foundation has been withdrawn from the current Local Plan. Why?

There is land around Odsey & Ashwell Station which could be used for a new Settlement. This has excellent links to the A505 main road, and to the railway at Ashwell station, which could accommodate longer trains.

NHDC planners have said that South Cambridgeshire, who own this land, will not do this.

If North Herts has to make provision for Luton housing requirements, why will Sth Cambs not make provision for Nth Herts requirements. Has this been actively investigated further?

There is land opposite Ashwell station that could be used for a new settlement.

Have the NHDC planners actively investigated this land properly (if at all).

HCC own land north of Hitchin, at Holwell, west of Ickleford.

Have NHDC planners actively investigated this land for a new settlement.

Members of the NHDC planning department do not seem to have been pro-active in seeking out new land with other landowners for development. They just seem to want to use the HCC land wherever possible. They seem to have formed a coalition / cartel, to make life easy for themselves.

Land North of Baldock (site BA1)

There is a brochure in Baldock Library entitled 'HCC Rural Estates - a Century of Achievement'.

It has a Foreword by Jane Pitman of HCC, saying the Rural Estate is part of a 50 year Master Plan, and would be managed in a way to protect its agricultural value, and exploit the environment potential, whilst providing areas of recreation.

It explained how HCC bought a lot of land in 1919, as part of the 'Land fit for Heroes' directive from the government Board of Agriculture & Fisheries. The land was bought by HCC to provide a livelihood for the soldiers returning from the First World War.

Some of this land was bought with a Green Belt Covenant, to prevent sale or development without consent from the Government. This was

based on Ebenezer Howard's vision of having towns with an insulating area of open countryside between them. I believe this applies to the HCC land in North Herts.

Regarding the Green Belt land north of Baldock, I understand HCC has given NHDC the authority to change the land status from Green Belt to non-green belt land. The brochure mentions that at the time of publication, HCC Rural Estates held 10,000 acres (4000 hectares) of land.

Loss of productive Agricultural land

The land to the north of is good quality agricultural land, used in 1919 to provide accommodation and a livelihood to soldiers (and their families) returning from the first world war. This livelihood, on historic strip farming land, would be lost by the present tenant farmers and their families.

Encroachment along the railway / A505 corridor

Building houses on the land north of Baldock would extend the conurbation of houses from Hitchin, through Letchworth to Baldock and Bygrave, with only a single field (if that) between them. So much for the NHDC Councillors & their Planning Department's attitude to Green Fields principles.

Financial Benefits of 2800 houses on 174 hectares to the north of Baldock

Of course there will be winners from this very large development on 174 hectares of land to the north of Baldock. HCC will sell the land to builders who will then apply to the NHDC planning Dept to build the 2800 houses. At an estimated land value of £400k per acre (£1m per hectare), HCC will receive approx £174m for the sale of HCC land. The builders of the houses will make a nice profit, say £50k per house, which would be £140m, some of which would be returned to NHDC as section 106 money.

Once the houses are built, then NHDC will be able to levy a housing tax. At say £1500 for each of the 2800 houses. The housing tax would earn NHDC over £4m per annum.

One positive benefit would be the additional NHDC councillors required for the extra residents in Baldock.

At least Baldock would have a larger representation in the NHDC Council and Cabinet meetings.

Other users of the area North of Baldock.

Will the NHDC planner ensure that they serve a Notice to the Airmen who fly the Army / Airforce helicopters East to West over Bygrave

Common land, on a regular basis.

Will they also inform the drivers of the unmarked Police cars who occasionally drive at high speed down North Road, that there will most probably be an increased amount of traffic ahead.

To summarise, I am against the over development of Baldock.

With all the additional development, Baldock will no longer be a quiet Market town and some residents may chose to either move away from Baldock, or just shop elsewhere.

Albert Sillwood

Baldock resident since 1977.