

Bygrave Parish Council

11 Ashwell Road, Bygrave, Baldock, Herts. SG7 5DT

Planning Policy
North Hertfordshire District Council
Letchworth
Hertfordshire

2nd February 2015

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: NHDC Local Plan Consultation – Housing in Baldock/Bygrave Parish

I am writing on behalf of Bygrave Parish Council to respond to the NHDC Local Plan consultation. The Parish Council and residents have serious objections to the planned housing sites in Baldock and Bygrave Parish. The effect of the proposed development would be devastating to the residents of Bygrave, destroying prime agricultural land and rolling back the boundaries of the greenbelt that has existed for decades.

I would like to make the following points and ask NHDC and all the councillors who will again vote on these proposals to think long and hard about the effect on Baldock and Bygrave if they allow these sites to go forward.

The major consideration to the proposals is the unfair situation that Baldock and Bygrave find themselves in with regard to the distribution of the houses across North Herts. The NHDC press release issued on 16th October confirmed that there are to be 3591 houses built around Baldock which is nearly 30% of the total number supposedly required. Baldock is the smallest town in North Herts. Both Hitchin and Letchworth have 3 times the population but are only allocated 11% and 17% respectively.

In addition to the total number announced, there is to be a new development of 2800 houses on the Blackhorse Farm site in the parish of Bygrave. This will be a new settlement which will include a neighbourhood centre and at least a new secondary school, if not a new primary school as well. NHDC have stated in the past that any new houses built in Baldock would bring people into the town helping to boost the economy but these plans will create a separate competing economy which will do nothing for Baldock, and will potentially destroy many existing businesses.

The second major consideration is that there are alternatives to these sites. A new Garden City should be seriously considered, and there are a number of suitable sites in North Hertfordshire, including the site to the west of the A1M at Stevenage. This site would be a more suitable place for housing than creating a new settlement to the north of Baldock. The site is currently on the reserved list which means that it meets all the rules regarding development and should be in this first phase of sites for consideration.

The third consideration is the fact that the land in Bygrave, including the site of the “new” settlement is designated greenbelt. Government ministers have said greenbelt boundaries should only be rolled back in exceptional circumstances and this cannot be said to be exceptional. In a response from the Department for Communities and Local Government in November last year, a planning policy advisor confirmed that the policy for the protection of the Green Belt remains as set out in March 2012 in the National Planning Policy Framework in that permanence is an essential characteristic of Green Belt and a Green Belt boundary should be only altered in exceptional circumstances. It can hardly be argued that these are exceptional circumstances.

The fourth consideration is the destruction of agricultural land that has been worked by families in Bygrave for years. They will lose their livelihoods and their homes if the sites are confirmed. In a time when we are struggling to feed the population, it makes no sense to build on good agricultural land that has been feeding the populace for generations.

The fifth consideration concerns the infrastructure issues surrounding the proposals. I know that the land proposed is owned by the County Council and therefore they will say that they will be able to provide any infrastructure needs. However a major obstacle that the County Council cannot fix is the issue of the increased traffic that will use the A1M. This is already heavily congested in the morning, will have to accommodate an extra 4,500 – 6,000 cars per day. The road cannot be easily widened, meaning that it will become a ‘car park’ at rush hour and be a nightmare for all those who have to use it. In addition the increased traffic will cause other routes south of Baldock to be used and caused increased congestion at rush hour on these roads, many of which were not designed or created for this volume of traffic.

The sixth consideration is the lack of employment opportunities within North Hertfordshire. Although land has supposedly been set aside for manufacturing businesses, those are not the jobs people moving into this area want. Any person moving to live in these houses will commute out of the area for work, placing even more pressure on an already inadequate railway station and road network.

Bygrave Parish Council are not against reasonable housing development but the current plans are excessive and unfair. It would seem sensible, given the strength of feeling of the public to these controversial plans that the Council considers building housing on the less contentious sites, using the minimum greenbelt necessary in order to bring the housing stock up to the required 5000, and then reconsiders the plans for a new settlement and seriously examine the concept of a new garden city in a more appropriate location.

Yours sincerely,

Janine Paterson (Mrs)
Chair, Bygrave Parish Council