

HIGHAM PARISH COUNCIL

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Response from Higham Parish Council to the Local Plan Review Consultation

Higham Parish Council (HPC) has the following comments about the Local Plan Review. These take into account the feedback from meetings and discussions with Parishioners:-

It is essential that Gravesham Borough Council (GBC) challenges the Government housing target of 8000 dwellings. Infrastructure within Higham is already at full stretch, utilities are at near capacity, the village school is oversubscribed and the A2 trunk road is at full capacity. The impact of the new Lower Thames Crossing on the A226 and other roads within the village is still to be clarified. It seems unacceptable to build more homes in an already crowded area. There does not appear to be evidence that the additional homes are needed. Our view is that Brexit will result in a diminished number of migrants requiring homes within the Borough.

Currently poor Air Quality poses a serious threat to health. Large scale housing development in neighbouring Boroughs as well as in Gravesham will make things worse. Planned additional homes in Medway (e.g. Hoo Peninsular), Ebbsfleet, along with the construction of the Lower Thames Crossing and the potential Theme Park at Swanscombe will all increase the levels of air pollution in North Kent.

It is the view of HPC that GBC must challenge the Government-imposed target of 8000 new homes within the borough and continue to plan for the original figure of 6170 units identified from ONS Gravesham Population figures. HPC urges GBC to ensure that priority is given to

providing housing for local people. Existing infrastructure is under-funded and is often unable to meet the needs of existing communities. The investment required to meet the needs of residents living in the new homes is not guaranteed. As the provision of new and upgraded key roads, schools, health facilities and water supply/waste treatment plants, are not the responsibility of GBC, HPC strongly urges GBC to continually and persistently make the case to national government to ensure that funding is secured to provide the necessary infrastructure. Whilst building on Brownfield sites could meet the original target figure of 6170 homes, it is recognised that the annual dwellings target build rate since 2011 has not been achieved. This potentially increases pressure to erode the Green Belt. It is the view of HPC that GBC should robustly challenge and lobby the Government to introduce measures to force developers/builders to deliver the planned dwellings. This should include steps to make sure that the already agreed social/affordable homes are built at the same time as market homes. HPC is aware that recent announcements by the Government include funding allocations for affordable housing and we urge GBC to explore opportunities to explore ways to access this funding for the Borough. When sites are not being developed as agreed and they remain un-utilised, there is a false, increased pressure to erode Green Belt land. Any loss of Green Belt land is totally unacceptable.

The Green Belt is a fundamental barrier to urban sprawl and it must be protected at all costs since any loss would be permanent. We understand that Green Belt boundaries can be changed in "exceptional circumstances." We do not accept, just because Developers say that it is not economically viable to build on brownfield sites, that these are exceptional circumstances. The Green Belt fulfils a key function in maintaining separation between the large urban areas and defends the identity and diversity of our villages and rural settlements. Erosion of farm land poses a threat to food supplies which may be even more vital post Brexit.

Whilst understanding that GBC is concerned that the Planning Inspectors may attempt to force development in certain areas in the Borough, HPC understands that the Inspectors cannot force Green Belt releases - they can only recommend changes and the decision about whether to adopt a Local Plan sits with local planning authority. In summary, Higham Parish Council views are as follows: GBC must robustly challenge the Government on the target of an additional 2000 homes and they should go forward with planning developments using the figure of 6170 dwellings. Higham Parish Council wholly opposes the use of any Green Belt land. Brownfield sites must be fully redeveloped instead of eroding the Green Belt. Social/affordable homes must be built at the same time as market dwellings.

Linda M. Camell

Clerk to Higham Parish Council.

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