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Date 23 March 2016  
Department Planning Policy Team  
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Dear Sir / Madam,

## **Response to: Brentwood Borough Council's draft Local Plan Consultation Document**

Please accept this letter as the formal response from Basildon Borough Council in relation to the consultation on the Brentwood Borough Council draft Local Plan Consultation Document.

Thank you for inviting Basildon Borough Council to provide comments as part of Brentwood Borough Council's consultation on its draft Local Plan Consultation Document. Basildon Borough Council is a neighbouring local planning authority (LPA) to Brentwood and there are a number of strategic issues, such as housing and infrastructure, which operate at levels greater than a single LPA area and which concern both Boroughs. It is important that such issues are addressed through collaborative working and meaningful discussions in accordance with legislation, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), and the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG).

Basildon Borough Council has the following comments to make on the draft Local Plan under the following section headings.

### Housing Needs

The report entitled *Objectively Assessed Housing Needs for Brentwood, Moving towards a Housing Target* (December 2014) suggests that Brentwood has an objectively assessed housing need of 362 dwellings per annum. Brentwood Borough Council has stated that it fully intends to meet its objectively assessed housing need (OAN) within the Brentwood Borough boundary. Basildon Borough Council supports this approach to housing growth. However, the OAN report was produced prior to the release of the 2012 sub national population projections (2012 SNPP), or the more recently published 2012 based CLG Household Projections. The Planning Practice Guidance is clear that these more recent projections should form the starting point for calculating the OAN for housing in an area. Additionally, the calculations of OAN has not given consideration to changing patterns of out-migration from London, which could reasonably be expected to be considered in any sensitivity testing of demographic forecasts, as required by the Planning Practice Guidance, in those areas surrounding London. Changing migration patterns could seriously impact on the need for housing within Brentwood Borough going forward. It is therefore expected that Brentwood Borough Council carry out further work to re-assess the OAN to include the most recent ONS sub-national population projections and CLG household projections, and should the need for housing change in light of this, Brentwood Borough Council should seek to revise the target accordingly and to continue to fully meet their OAN.

It is noted that the recently published evidence (*Assessment of Potential Housing, Employment and Mixed Use Sites in the Green Belt and their Relative Contribution to the Purposes of the Green Belt*

*Designation* – March 2016) states that ‘An update to the 2014 SHMA is currently being undertaken by the Council in light of subsequent amendments in national policy guidance’. This suggests that Brentwood Borough Council recognise the deficiencies in their evidence regarding the objectively assessed need for housing in their borough, and it is therefore expected that the matters raised above will be resolved prior to the Brentwood Local Plan being progressed to submission. Basildon Borough Council would be pleased to be engaged and kept informed of the progress with this work as it is progressed.

### Housing Market Area

*Brentwood Strategic Housing Market Assessment* (SHMA) states that: ‘Brentwood can be considered to be a single housing market area’. This is based on the 2001 Census data which looked at household movements and revealed that self-containment is 82.4% in Brentwood. Further data from the 2011 Census is now available, and should be reviewed to assess whether this is still the case.

Work on the South Essex Strategic Housing Market Assessment has included a re-assessment of the South Essex Housing Market Area to ensure it is still appropriately defined. The outcomes of this work are available to view in the Emerging South Essex Strategic Housing Market Assessment Topic Paper for Basildon Borough Council. This reaffirms South Essex as a housing market area.

In defining Brentwood as a single housing market area, the current Brentwood SHMA does state that ‘data suggests that Brentwood shares a housing market area with Chelmsford and Basildon and to a smaller extent Epping’. It therefore recognises that overlaps with surrounding housing market areas exist. As the proposals within the Brentwood Draft Local Plan propose a strategic housing site for 2,500 homes within close proximity of the Borough boundary shared with Basildon Borough Council, there may be implications for the future definitions of the Brentwood and South Essex housing market areas, which need to be given further consideration as the Brentwood Local Plan is progressed towards submission. Basildon Borough Council would be pleased to be engaged in such work in order to understand the implications this proposal would have for both the Brentwood and South Essex housing markets, and the extent to which development in this location would meet the needs arising from both housing market areas.

### Housing Land Supply

Past windfall trends for Brentwood Borough Council has accounted for 77 homes pa. Brentwood Borough Council have stated within their Draft Local Plan that this level of supply will continue into the future providing 928 homes over the plan period. However, there is no evidence that supports the ongoing supply of homes at this rate from windfall sites. In line with Government guidance, Brentwood Borough Council must provide compelling evidence that such windfall sites have consistently become available in the local area, and will continue to provide a reliable source of supply. Any allowance should be realistic having regard to the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment, historic windfall delivery rates and expected future trends, and should not include residential gardens. Supply from windfall sites should also be split down into categories to identify where the provision could arise from.

In relation to identified housing land supply, it would appear from the evidence base that Brentwood Borough Council has not carried out a *Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA)* since 2011. Basildon Borough Council made it clear in its response to Brentwood Borough Council regarding the *Brentwood Borough’s Local Plan Strategic Growth Options* in early 2015 that it would expect the SHLAA to be updated before a Local Plan for Brentwood is progressed. Brentwood Borough Council should update its SHLAA by undertaking land availability assessments to help inform the emerging

Local Plan, and review this on an annual basis. These assessments must review whether sites are suitable, available and achievable in both planning and viability terms, otherwise they cannot be relied upon to make up Brentwood's development land supply. It is not clear how any of the proposed housing sites included in the Draft Local Plan have been put forward and how the sites are justified as suitable without crucial supporting evidence which is missing including recent landscaping, ecology and open space evidence.

### Dunton Hills Garden Village

It is of concern to Basildon Borough Council that Brentwood Borough Council are looking to take forward development within the previously outlined Dunton Garden Suburb location. Basildon Borough Council do not believe that Brentwood Borough Council have provided sufficient evidence to show that development in that area would be the best location for new development, and that the scale of development proposed, over a third of the borough's entire housing provision for the plan period, could be supported by infrastructure.

The proposal included within the Brentwood Draft Local Plan departs from the proposal for a Dunton Garden Suburb insofar as it is a proposal for a stand-alone settlement to the south of the A127 and to the east of the A128 within the Brentwood Borough only. However, at this time the precise location and land requirement of this proposal is unknown, as are details such as access arrangements. It is therefore unclear as to whether these proposals will result in a stand-alone settlement or an extension to the Basildon urban area in the long-term. It is also unclear how this proposal will relate in terms of access and connectivity to the Basildon urban area in terms of highway impacts or demand for infrastructure and services within Basildon Borough.

The land which would form the Dunton Hills Garden Village does not appear to have been put forward in the most recent call for sites and has not been assessed within the Brentwood Council *Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment* (2011). The assessment of land availability is, according to the Government's Planning Practice Guidance (Ref ID: 3-001-20140306), an important step in the preparation of Local Plans and a requirement of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). It ensures that all land is assessed together as part of plan preparation to identify which sites or strategic locations are the most suitable and deliverable for a particular use.

As detailed above, a *SHLAA* has not been carried out since 2011. As it stands there is therefore no robust and credible evidence to demonstrate that the land required to provide the Dunton Hills Garden Village is available or suitable for the purpose to which it is proposed, or whether development in this location is achievable (viable). In the absence of such evidence, the proposals for Dunton Hills Garden Village are not supported by evidence, and it is not clear that they are deliverable. Consequently, Basildon Council is clear that without any further evidence to support this proposal Brentwood's Local Plan is unlikely to be sound on the basis of justification and effectiveness.

Furthermore, evidence which is available for consideration indicates that the proposal for Dunton Hills Garden Village may not be the most suitable option for meeting the housing needs of Brentwood Borough. The working draft of the *Assessment of Potential Housing, Employment and Mixed Use Sites in the Green Belt and their Relative Contribution to the Purposes of the Green Belt Designation* study shows that the Dunton Hills Garden Village location (referenced as Site 200) is classed as 'high' in terms of meeting the purposes of the Green Belt when reviewed for both housing and employment delivery. This initial evidence indicates that this area is not the most suitable location in terms of Green Belt impacts and should not be taken forward. It is questioned therefore as to whether this evidence of Green Belt impacts has informed the plan-making process in preparing the Draft Local Plan given that it was published part way through the consultation, and therefore Basildon Borough Council would

suggest that further consideration be given to its findings prior to the finalisation of the Brentwood Local Plan.

Having regard to the absence of evidence regarding the consideration of this site within a SHLAA, and also the evidence regarding Green Belt impacts set out in the *Assessment of Potential Housing, Employment and Mixed Use Sites in the Green Belt and their Relative Contribution to the Purposes of the Green Belt Designation* study, Basildon Borough Council cannot support the proposals for Dunton Hills Garden Village as it is not convinced that the proposals are justified, and present a high risk of the Brentwood Local Plan being found unsound.

#### Accommodating the needs of Gypsy and Travellers

Brentwood Borough Council have an identified need for Gypsy and Traveller pitches within the *Essex Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Assessment (GTAA)*. The Assessment established a need for 84 pitches for the plan period of 2013-2033. It is not clear where all of the proposed Gypsy and Traveller pitches would be located and further evidence of this should be provided.

The Brentwood Borough Council Draft Local Plan recognises the recent changes made to national policy relating to Gypsies and Travellers. Policy 7.10 and the supporting text does however detail that following these changes the pitch requirement, as set out in the GTAA (completed in July 2014), may potentially be reduced.

Basildon Borough Council has prepared a *Gypsy and Traveller Site Potential Study*, in order to identify the available supply of land for the provision of pitches for Gypsy and Travellers within Basildon Borough. This assessment was unable to identify sufficient land for such purposes, giving rise to an unmet need of 136 pitches as set out in the Council's Draft Local Plan which is currently out for consultation until 24th March 2016. In progressing their Local Plan, Brentwood Borough Council, as a neighbouring LPA to Basildon, is strongly requested to cooperate with Basildon Borough Council in helping to make provision for this unmet need, and is asked to give further consideration to evidence as to how this unmet need, or a proportion thereof, could be met within the Brentwood Borough area.

Basildon Borough Council will await the forthcoming review of the *GTAA* for Brentwood Borough Council which is being undertaken during 2016 in light of the national policy changes, and where the level of need for Brentwood Borough Council may be subject to change and potentially be reduced, Basildon Borough Council would ask for assistance in meeting the unmet need arising from Basildon Borough.

It is also noted that within the proposal for Dunton Hills Garden Village a requirement for a 20 pitch site is included. It is good practice that sites should comprise no more than 15 pitches in order to ensure a comfortable environment which would be easier to manage. Brentwood Borough Council should therefore re-consider whether this larger site allocation is the most appropriate.

#### Employment

Basildon Borough Council are generally supportive of the approach Brentwood has taken to identifying its employment land and job requirements. However, it is noted that the evidence only looks to 2030. Consideration should be given, at the least to annualising the employment requirement for the remainder of the plan period, or else looking to update the evidence base regarding employment and retail needs to cover the remainder of the plan period.

Basildon Borough Council do not however support the proposed location of new employment within the Dunton Hills Garden Village as set out in the above corresponding section, this area of land was not put forward in the call for sites and the land within the Green Belt is currently rated a 'high' in the *Assessment of Potential Housing, Employment and Mixed Use Sites in the Green Belt and their Relative Contribution to the Purposes of the Green Belt Designation* when considering the purposes of land within the Green Belt.

Brentwood Borough Council have set out to locate their employment land close to the strategic highway network. As detailed above a *SHLAA* does not appear to have been carried out since 2011, therefore the required changes to review economic land as part of the process have not been recently assessed along with any other form of review of suitable, available and achievable employment land. Consequently there has not been any evidence produced to inform the selection of employment sites for inclusion in the Local Plan. The suitability and availability of such sites is not therefore justified by the evidence currently available. Consequently, further evidence to justify the Dunton Hills Garden Village employment location, amongst others, is required.

### Transport

Brentwood Borough Council has produced a draft *Development Options – Highway Modelling*. This was done by independent transport consultants and it is not clear how Essex County Council, as the local highways authority was engaged in the modelling process. Consequently, Basildon Borough Council has concerns with regards to the way in which the modelling takes into account planned growth in neighbouring authorities, or planned improvements/changes to the current highway network. Furthermore, whilst the document looks at the changes in junction capacity arising from the four development options tested, it does not look at ways to mitigate the impacts of the development proposed in the Draft Local Plan.

Given that Brentwood Borough Council are looking to focus development around the key transport routes, including the A127 which runs through Basildon, it is important to understand the resulting effect any development along the A127 corridor would have on the Basildon Borough. Further work by Brentwood Borough Council needs to be undertaken to assess this.

Brentwood Borough Council need to consider relationships with neighbouring authorities when allocating growth areas. Basildon is most likely to be affected if growth is concentrated in the Dunton Hills Garden Village and Brentwood Borough Council should ensure collaborative engagement and continual working between local planning authorities, highway authorities, relevant agencies and transport providers occurs to ensure that strategic transport links are capable of accommodating the additional infrastructure and service pressures that are likely to arise as a result of future population growth in the area. It should also be noted that one of the proposed routes to the Lower Thames Crossing, Route 4, would alter the location of Dunton Hills Garden Village. Further consideration would need to be given to a revised location, especially in terms of impact on infrastructure.

### Infrastructure

It would appear from the information given within the Brentwood Borough Council Draft Local Plan that consultations with the NHS into healthcare facilities were carried out prior to detailed locations of development being identified. Therefore consideration to the proximity to the Basildon Borough and the shared facilities has not been fully considered and would need to be if development were to go ahead at Dunton Hills Garden Village.

The detail given in relation to schools also appears to be general and does not specifically detail the future requirements based on the development locations proposed. This would need to be evidenced further. Public transport requirements and discussions with Essex County Council are also stated as ongoing.

Given that Brentwood Borough Council are proposing development adjacent the Basildon Borough Boundary, and considering some existing services are already shared, e.g. hospital and schools, it is considered essential for Brentwood Borough Council to work with Basildon Borough Council to determine the impacts such development proposals may have on infrastructure and services in the Basildon Borough and how development options of this nature may need to support the upgrade of services and facilities in Basildon Borough should the Council continue to favour them through the Local Plan. At this time, Basildon Borough Council does not feel that enough work has been carried out to determine the relevant infrastructure requirements for the Brentwood Borough growth.

### General Observations

#### Duty to Cooperate

In order for the Brentwood Local Plan to be found to be procedurally sound it will need to take account of a broader range of issues and opportunities affecting neighbouring areas and the wider region, considering and addressing strategic cross-boundary issues. At this time, Basildon Borough Council is disappointed with the degree of engagement and fore-notice that has been provided with regard to the proposals set out in the Brentwood Draft Local Plan. The proposals for Dunton Hill Garden Village are a departure from the Garden Suburb proposals previously considered by both Council's, and are not supported by sufficient evidence, and do not include sufficient detail in order for Basildon Borough Council to fully understand the implications of the proposals on the highway network and other infrastructure and services within Basildon Borough.

Furthermore, it is considered that further engagement should be undertaken in relation to engagement with neighbouring authorities and the local highways authority in order to ensure that the highways modelling takes into account growth arising from other areas, particularly in relation to the A127.

Finally, as identified earlier, Basildon Borough Council is unable, as demonstrated by evidence to make sufficient provision for Gypsy and Traveller pitches within the Basildon Borough area, and Brentwood Borough Council is requested to consider making provision for at least a proportion of this un-met need within the Brentwood Draft Local Plan as it is progressed to submission.

#### Reasonable Alternatives

Brentwood Borough Council should also identify and consider reasonable alternatives when developing the Local Plan's spatial strategy, growth options, specific sites and policies to ensure compliance with national policy and Strategic Environmental Assessment legislation. At examination the Council would need to show that the Local Plan has been prepared in accordance with the Duty to Cooperate, and other legal and procedural requirements, and that it complies with the test of soundness. As stipulated in paragraph 182 of the NPPF, for a Local Plan to be found "sound" it should have been positively prepared, be effective including the plan's deliverability, be consistent with national policy and be justified insofar as being the most appropriate strategy, when considered against the reasonable alternatives, based on proportionate evidence. It is not currently clear from the published evidence how Brentwood Borough Council can demonstrate this.

## Evidence Base

Basildon Borough Council are disappointed that there is still a significant evidence base gap which has not been addressed following our last consultation response. The lack of evidence is felt to be a fundamental flaw to the Brentwood Borough Draft Local Plan. Basildon Borough Council therefore considers that the Brentwood Borough Draft Local Plan requires further work and that it is premature of a clear appreciation and understanding of the baseline context in the Brentwood Borough and the wider Essex area. It is difficult to see how the Draft Local Plan can be taken forward without the necessary evidence base having informed its development.

## Conclusion

Whilst Basildon Borough Council welcomes further engagement with Brentwood Borough Council to ensure that the points raised in this response are addressed and to continue working together on cross-boundary strategic priorities, it would need to be confident that the Dunton Hills Garden Village is the most appropriate location for growth based on evidence and supporting infrastructure mitigation in order to make an informed decision at a future date as to whether it can support this proposal.

I trust this response is of assistance to you in progressing your Local Plan. If however you have any queries regarding the matters raised please do not hesitate to contact the planning policy team using the details provided at the top of this letter.

Yours sincerely,



Matthew Winslow  
Service Manager – Strategic Planning and Regeneration Strategy