

REPRESENTATIONS ON:

The Brentwood Local Plan 2015 - 2030
Preferred Options for Consultation (July 2013)

Policies:

DM23 Housing Land Allocations - Major Sites

DM31 Protection & Enhancement of Open Space,
Community, Sport & recreational Facilities

REPRESENTATIONS MADE ON BEHALF OF
THE TRUSTEES OF THE URSULINE SISTERS, BRENTWOOD

September 2013

The JTS Partnership LLP

Chartered Surveyors • Chartered Town Planners

URSULINE SISTERS, BRENTWOOD

Client: The Ursuline Sisters, Brentwood

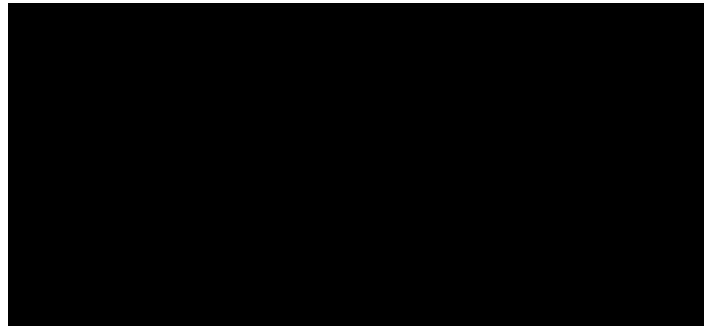
Our Ref: JPG/DAM/mac/4567

Prepared by: James Govier MRICS

Canterbury -

Brentwood -

Leeds -



www.jtspartnership.co.uk
service@jtspartnership.co.uk



Introduction

- 1.01 The following representations have been made on behalf of **The Trustees of The Ursuline Sisters, Brentwood** ('The Sisters'). The Sisters are a Roman Catholic Charity whose key Charitable objective is furthering the provision of educational opportunities. They have resided in Brentwood since 1900 and occupied The Grange on Queens Road, as a Convent, since the 1980's.
- 1.02 The Sisters have historically worked in the wider community and in particular within The Brentwood Ursuline Catholic High School. Such associations with the school are now much reduced, largely due to the aging demographic of the order, although connections are maintained at a more administrative level.
- 1.03 They retain a number of land holdings across the Brentwood area, as a legacy of their past involvement in the provision of education, and as a Charity they are required to proactively and prudently manage these assets. In doing so they are able to ensure the Charity's continued presence in Brentwood and provide the ability to look after their congregation.
- 1.04 These representations address Brentwood Borough Council's (BBC) preferred approach for the provision of sufficient housing for the Borough. The main policy is **DM23: Housing Land Allocations – Major Sites**. There are 22 sites identified as appearing to fulfil the appropriate criteria for inclusion in Policy DM23. A supporting document entitled Individual Site Allocation Maps provides some limited contextual information related to the allocated sites, but the Preferred Options document of July 2013 does not appear to contain a Borough-wide map to allow for easy appreciation of those sites in the context of their locality.
- 1.05 The task of assessing whether the 22 identified allocated sites represent the best sustainable opportunities is made more difficult than it ought to be. ***Accordingly, it is recommended that a further plan be produced which identifies the 22 allocations (together with Alternative Allocations) in the context of the existing settlements within the Borough.***
- 1.06 On Pages 129-130 of the Preferred Options document reference is made to an alternative approach for fewer sites, which BBC has rejected. Similarly, 'highlighted' however is another section dealing with 'Alternative Allocations'. There are seven specific sites identified together with two generic forms of Council

controlled landholdings (garages and sheltered housing) which could be considered suitable in addition to or instead of the sites set out in Policy DM23. The third identified site listed is “Land at Priests Lane”. The reference to the address is number (044). That reference number accords with the entries in the draft Sites Assessment supporting document at Pages 25-30. The BBC undertook a SHLAA exercise in 2011 which notated the Priests Lane site as G012 on a number of its maps. The site is shown in the context of the built up area between Brentwood and Shenfield on sheet 4 of the Borough Wide Plans: Borough Central East. The site is also to be found at a larger scale in the context of the Brentwood Urban Area Northeast and Southeast SHLAA Plans. (See map in Appendix A with these representations - land at Priests Lane).

- 1.07 Although the highlighted material at Pages 129-130 suggests the Land at Priests Lane would make for a reasonable alternative residential site (with public green space), its specified reason for such a conclusion is relatively sparse:-

“Reason:

Existing Protected Urban Open Space, but private land shut-off from public use. Further assessment to look at whether this might be appropriate to provide some residential with retention of some green space for the public”.

- 1.08 In addition to the brief reference to a reason for the Alternative Allocation set out above, all allocated and alternative allocation sites are addressed in the Sustainability Appraisal produced to assist in the determination of which land ought to become a housing site.

- 1.09 Insofar as it appears that BBC wishes to undertake a further assessment whether the site could provide a mix of residential and public green space (see reason above), it is considered that some of the material contained in the Sustainability Appraisal might benefit from additional clarification. The next part of these submissions will therefore seek to enhance the material available in order that the Authority can better deduce that the land at Priests Lane would indeed make a highly sustainable and preferred alternative to other sites included in Policy DM23.

Comparative Sustainability Attributes of Land at Priests Lane –V- Policy DM23 Allocations.

1.10 At paras 4.93 and 4.94 (Page 131 Preferred Options doc), BBC sets out the basis for site selection against a range of criteria which broadly translates as having regard to the material collated in recent years in connection with the SHLAA exercise, the Sustainability Appraisal, and the draft Site Assessment Tables produced in July 2013 as a supporting document to the emerging Local Plan.

1.11 In the SHLAA exercise at Page 109 the site carries the reference G012. The availability and achievability ‘tests’ are both ‘passed’ thus:

‘Available’

“Yes. It is understood that the site is surplus for school playing field purposes and is therefore available”.

‘Achievable’

“Yes. The site is considered to be achievable if the policy issues can be overcome and access can be derived from Priests Lane”.

1.12 Unfortunately, the examination related to whether the site is ‘Suitable’ recorded a negative outcome. Thus,

‘Suitable’

“No. The site comprises a disused private school playing field and is designated as Protected Urban Open Space. If the site was not required for open space, residential development would be suitable in this location. However, the Council’s Open Space audit values the site’s contribution to open space provision with the area”.

1.13 The site is analysed at Pages 25-30 of the Draft Site Assessment supporting document to the Local Plan wherein the SHLAA comments are incorporated together with further material, much of which reappears in Appendix III of the Sustainability Appraisal – Housing/Mixed Use Site Option 25 (on Page 84 of the Appendices).

1.14 When all the information set out in these three main evidence sources is examined, it becomes apparent that there are some matters which require further clarification. Such clarification would, in our view, greatly enhance the merit of the Priests Lane site in preference to other sites listed in the Preferred Options document.

(i) Protected Urban Open Space Designation

- 1.15 In the Local Plan, Preferred Options/ **Policy DM31** deals with the protection and enhancement of open space, community, sport and recreational facilities (see pages 153-156). These representations relating to the Priests Lane site advocate that the land is suitable for housing within the settlement boundary, rather than using Green Belt sites, furthermore opportunity would be presented to greatly enhance the provision of usable open space for the wider community. In accordance with the material set out below it will be shown that the presumption against development involving loss of open space ought to be set aside because the open space provision which will result from developing part of the site will achieve the objective of the policy to promote better quality and more convenient facilities than has otherwise been available at this site.
- 1.16 The Protected Urban Open Space designation for this site stems from the Open Space Audit 2007 wherein the site was defined as “amenity green space”. As such, the land is considered worthy of informal recreation value to serve as a meeting place and focal point with a secondary function related to the visual benefit of open space. Accessibility to such Amenity Green Spaces (AGS) are also considered to be key within the audit. The audit prioritised the provision of new AGS’s in the East and West of Shenfield. The subject site falls outside these areas being in the South-West. Moreover, in the audit summary Shenfield was identified as an area where just three sites cater for a very large residential area. The subject site was not one of those sites.
- 1.17 Insofar as the Priests Lane land is in private ownership and has never afforded general public use, it does not meet the stated functions of an amenity green space and, therefore, fails to be worthy of Protected Urban Open Space designation. Also, considering that the site is bounded by the railway line, a school and the rear gardens of a small number of dwellings, the visual contribution to the wider community is virtually nil. This is reinforced by the fact that the site has a narrow, low key frontage onto Priests Lane and the land-holding beyond is not appreciated from the street scene.
- 1.18 It must also be borne in mind that the locality of the site is in a particularly affluent part of the Borough, characterised by the majority of housing having large gardens which reduces their immediate need for Amenity Green Space Provision. The

Inspector on the Replacement Brentwood Local Plan Review incorporated into his report the Trustees representations that the site served little or no contribution to the visual amenities for the benefit of the wider public.

- 1.19 An important consideration in terms of the residents close to the site is that this part of Brentwood/Shenfield can very easily take advantage of formal and informal play/green spaces comprising facilities at Shenfield Common, King George's Playing Fields, Thorndon Country Park and whilst not publicly accessible, land either side of Middleton Hall Lane and the area near the War Memorial provides a relatively open green aspect. This latter area is in frequent use for sports related activity associated with Brentwood School. More of their land, fronting onto Priests Lane, accommodates the Brentwood School athletic track, which is used as a shared facility with the Brentwood Ursuline School.
- 1.20 Whereas the current situation is one where the site makes no contribution towards a functioning and useable green open area, it would be entirely feasible for the site to make a valuable contribution to the provision of useable open space in the area as part of a residential scheme. Clearly, residential development would have needs generated by the development itself for a certain level of Open Space Provision. The opportunity exists, however, for that provision to be enhanced in a manner which would serve the wider community, and ultimately perform for the first time as envisaged in the Open Space Audit.

(ii) Proximity to Facilities

- 1.21 The site is situated approximately one mile from both Brentwood and Shenfield stations (opposite directions – 15-20 minutes' walk). The shopping facilities at Brentwood and Shenfield are nearer than either railway station. Although the prime part of the Brentwood town centre is approximately 15 minutes' walk from the site, Ingrave Road traffic light junction is approximately half that distance and this means that North/South bus routes on Ingrave Road are relatively close. East/West bus routes on Shenfield Road can be reached through the residential area (or via Middleton Hall Lane). The Brentwood County High School is close to the Ingrave Road traffic light junction but the alternative secondary school (Shenfield High) is on the far edge of Shenfield, more appropriate for cycling to/from.

- 1.22 The primary school situation could potentially be extremely convenient. The Hogarth Primary School is very close to the West edge of the site. If, as suggested, the western end of the site was to incorporate some open space/amenity facility, it would present the Council with an opportunity to encourage the neighbouring land owners to facilitate direct pedestrian access between the Priests Lane site and the Hogarth Primary School. Failing that, the routes between the sites and the school can be undertaken along roadside footpaths without having to cross a busy highway at any stage.
- 1.23 There are General Practice Doctors' Surgeries at the eastern end of the town (conveniently accessible via Middleton Hall Lane) together with other GP's Surgeries in Shenfield.
- 1.24 In terms of economic and activity, including employment, the site's location between the main employment locations in the Borough (i.e. Brentwood and Shenfield), together with their respective railway stations, means that the site will have excellent proximity to a complete range of employment opportunities. Relatively close proximity to the railway stations will create greater opportunities for residents in this part of the Borough when the Crossrail connection is completed. Vitaly, unlike most of the rest of the wider area, residents at the subject site will be able to take advantage of Crossrail without requiring the need to park their private cars near the station.

(iii) Miscellaneous Matters

- 1.25 The site is owned and controlled by The Ursuline Sisters as Trustees. The Trust obliges the Trustees to contribute to primarily education related provision (which often has a wider community aspect). A mixed residential and open space development at the site would potentially generate funds which would ultimately be expended in ways which would benefit the educational/community well-being of Brentwood.
- 1.26 The Sustainability Appraisal suggests that the site has a potential for providing 178 dwellings at a density of 40 dwellings per hectare. Whilst such a provision would be achievable, that might preclude the opportunity to make a 'meaningful' contribution to formal or informal open space.

1.27 It is considered advisable that when the subject site is examined in the context of the Local Plan that BBC ought to envisage that there will be somewhat less than 178 dwellings (perhaps nearer 100 units) together with an appropriate amount of open space.

“Accordingly, we recommend it would be appropriate to identify the land at Priests Lane, Brentwood as a Major Housing Site Allocation which will incorporate an appropriate proportion of the site for open space/non-development purposes”.

1.28 If BBC agreed with this re-designation, it might seek to re-appraise other major sites hitherto identified. If that was to be the case, then there are less ‘qualified’ candidates which have been identified in Policy DM23 which ought to be the subject of a reduced level of BBC support at this time. The next section of these representations will briefly examine those sites.

(iv) Potential Re-designated DM23 Sites

1.29 Comments set out below, in regard to Policy DM23, are made in the context of the very high sustainability level achieved by the Priests Lane site. Accordingly the land in Priests Lane ought to be making a greater contribution to the list of housing allocation sites, rather than remaining an Alternative Allocation. Promoting the Priests Lane site would properly recognise the sites sustainability and comply with BBC’s chosen approach to make best use of sites within the settlement boundary of Brentwood and use them for development in advance of allocating Green Belt designated sites.

1.30 On Pages 131 and 132 of the Preferred Options document, there is some discussion at para 4.97 regarding the selection of Sites 20 and 21 in the Green Belt. Both sites are described as ‘brownfield’. Reference to the Council’s draft Site Assessment supporting document, however, reveals at Page 79 (regarding Site 21 – Ingatestone Garden Centre, Roman Road, Ingatestone, Ref: 128) that the site has a total 3.25ha of which approximately 0.6ha is brownfield. On Page 80, the Green Belt designation is confirmed and notwithstanding that, in effect, less than 20% of the site is brownfield, the document states that “..... *the site might be appropriate for redevelopment in order to protect other greenfield Green Belt land*”.

1.31 An alternative conclusion might be that placing a residential development on a Green Belt garden centre would merely serve to encourage other such similar

Green Belt activities to pursue residential development. (Site 20 being a case in point). Site 21 is included at Page 80 of the Sustainability Appraisal wherein it is evident that there is no facility described as being closer than are detailed for the Priests Lane site (Railway Station/GP/Shops/School etc.). The Ingatestone site is, however, recorded as in a Special Landscape Area and concerning flooding, there are “*potentially small areas of less susceptibility to the north of the site*”. (It is not entirely clear whether this is recording a problem for flooding on the site or in close proximity to the site). There would appear to be strong grounds for determining that a development of the Priests Lane site in the manner described above would be more sustainable and less injurious to Green Belt interests. Seeking to achieve those aims is central to the BBC’s overall Local Plan objective.

- 1.32 The Council has cited another brownfield/green belt garden centre for inclusion in its Major Housing Site Allocations List at No. 20: Sow & Grow Nursery, Ongar Road, Pilgrims Hatch (on Page 8 of the draft Site Assessment Supporting Document, the site also carries the reference 010).
- 1.33 As with the previous example at Ingatestone (on Page 8 of the document), the brownfield land in the Green Belt (garden centre) is claimed might be appropriate for redevelopment to “..... *protect other greenfield Green Belt land*”. The concern has already been raised that rather than protect other Green Belt land, the Council’s approach is more likely to encourage more such attempts at redevelopment in the Green Belt.
- 1.34 Indeed, the Ongar Road, Pilgrims Hatch Site 20 is adjacent to public allotments (Council owned). It is a fact made in passing that a considerable number of the Major Housing Site Allocations are on land owned by the BBC or ECC. Moreover, it should be noted that the Alternative Allocations approach set out on Pages 129-130 of the Preferred Options document specifies that various other sites comprising garages and older persons housing are both the subject of reviews to determine potential for residential redevelopment. With a green belt development at the Nursery in Ongar Road being supported by BBC as part of its Major Housing Allocations Policy DM23, it is not too fanciful to imagine that the Council could, in time, focus attention on the adjoining green belt allotments for a similar housing use. It is by such a process that the integrity of the green belt becomes damaged.

- 1.35 According to the Sustainability Appraisal, set out on Page 79 of that document, the Ongar Road Nursery at Pilgrims Hatch is approximately twice the distance from most of the identified community facilities/functions as the land at Priests Lane. (Railway Station/Shops/GP/Schools). The Sow & Grow Nursery site is marginally closer to a Post Office than the Priests Lane land, however, it is recorded there is insufficient capacity at the local primary school (Larchwood Primary) and therefore developer contributions would be required. Site 20 is recorded as having no public sewers available and subject to small areas of less and intermediate susceptibility to flooding.
- 1.36 Given these circumstances, it is again questionable whether the best interests of green belt protection and enhancing sustainable development will be secured by pursuing residential development at the 'Sow & Grow Nursery' (Site Option 20). The land at Priests Lane would appear to represent a more desirable replacement Alternative Allocation.

Conclusion

- 1.37 The Site has remained unused for public open space for a considerable time and makes no real contribution to the visual amenities of the wider area. This situation would change to the benefit of the residents in the locality and beyond by part of the site becoming accessible to the general public as an Amenity Green Space.
- 1.38 The simple mechanism to achieve this outcome would follow the allocation of the site as a major site in terms of Policy DM23.
- 1.39 The virtues of elevating the site from being an Alternative Allocation would be because BBC could avoid using other sites in the Green Belt.
- 1.40 At the present time the Local Plan Preferred Options does not seek to achieve objectively assessed housing need due to its stance on protecting the Green Belt. By recognising the acceptability of the subject site, the Council would be better able to achieve their aims.
- 1.41 The site at Priests Lane is highly sustainable and within the settlement boundary of the existing urban area, placed very conveniently between Brentwood and Shenfield. Thus access to a wide range of facilities is easily achieved.

- 1.42 A number of key objectives within the Local Plan would be achievable by BBC supporting a residential development together with appropriate amenity green space provision on the land owned/controlled by the Ursuline Sisters on Priests Lane.