

JB/1250/ng

1 October 2013

Planning Policy Team
Brentwood Borough Council
Town Hall
Brentwood
Essex
CM15 8AY

Dear Sir or Madam

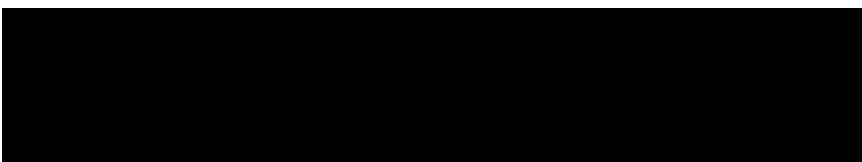
Brentwood Borough Local Plan 2015-2030: Preferred Options Consultation

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the emerging Local Plan. This letter represents our response to the Preferred Options Consultation.

We are extremely concerned with the direction of the Local Plan. We believe the Council is failing to recognise the scale of housing needs in Brentwood. The plan fails to meet the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) with respect to meeting the full range of 'objectively assessed' housing needs and as a result, the Local Plan is unsound. The Plan is planning for a significant shortfall in homes over the 15 year period of the plan. With little information provided on how the needs of those residents will be met, we can only assume a future scenario of increased unaffordability, overcrowding, homelessness and pressure on neighbouring authorities to meet Brentwood's unmet housing needs. This approach is therefore inconsistent with the objective of the NPPF to promote sustainable development.

Evidence produced by the Council demonstrates a need for 4,960-5,600 additional homes from 2015-2031. This would represent meeting the full range of housing needs. However, Policy S2 of the consultation draft proposes to deliver 3,500 additional homes during the same period. This represents an under-provision of approximately 1,500 homes. The reasons given for the preferred housing target are to resist pressure on existing services and infrastructure; to not worsen congestion in Brentwood Town Centre; and to protect the rural character of the Borough. According to the Council, Green Belt sites would need to be released to meet the shortfall which would risk 'irrevocably changing the rural character of the borough'.

It is our opinion that the reasons given for setting a lower housing target than would meet the Borough's housing needs are insufficient and unsatisfactory. No evidence has been provided by the Council to support the claim that an additional 1,500 homes would worsen traffic in Brentwood Town Centre or require significant investment in infrastructure and services. We do not support the argument that this additional development would 'irrevocably change' the rural character of the borough on the grounds that 1,500 homes represents a very small increase in the housing stock in Brentwood. Approximately 73,000 people live in the Borough within a housing stock of approximately 32,000 properties. 1,500 additional homes on top of the 3,500 homes planned for, represents an increase of 5% of the total housing stock.



We also raise question as to how the 3,500 additional homes housing target was derived. From our experience of recent Examinations in Public a simple step-by-step approach to setting a local housing target is advocated by the NPPF. The steps are as follows:

1. Identify the objectively assessed need for housing;
2. Consider how this can be accommodated; and
3. Where it cannot be accommodated, investigate the options to meet this need by locating development in adjoining local authority areas, through the Duty to Co-Operate.

We are not convinced these steps have been taken. Setting a target driven solely on land availability is unsound and inconsistent with the NPPF. The proposed housing target appears to have been set on this basis. 3,500 equates exactly to the results of the Council's land availability evidence. The Government has been clear that at times of slow economic growth, Council's should be using their planning powers proactively, to promote opportunities for growth and 'build our way out of recession'. Housing targets should be deliverable as well as aspirational and should be expressed as minimum to be exceeded. The housing targets should not be used as a tool for restricting housing growth. Paragraph 47 of the National Planning Policy Framework states:

To boost significantly the supply of housing, local planning authorities should:

- *use their evidence base to ensure that their Local Plan meets the full, objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing in the housing market area, as far as is consistent with the policies set out in this Framework, including identifying key sites which are critical to the delivery of the housing strategy over the plan period*

Should a Council be planning for a lower target than would meet housing needs, they are required under the Localism Act's 'Duty to Co-operate' to work with neighbouring authorities to plan for meeting housing needs beyond borough boundaries. Paragraph 179 of the NPPF states that: '*Joint working should enable local planning authorities to work together to meet development requirements which cannot wholly be met within their own areas – for instance, because of a lack of physical capacity or because to do so would cause significant harm to the principles and policies of this Framework.*' Evidence showing how the Council has met its duty to cooperate is not available.

Chelmsford City Council recently reported to its Development Policy Committee (19 September 2013) seeking agreement to submit strong representations to Brentwood Borough Council's Preferred Options Local Plan consultation highlighting their objections to its preferred Spatial Strategy, Site Allocations and Evidence Base. Agreement was achieved and we suspect the objection lodged on the grounds that:

- The strategy does not seek to accommodate its full housing need;
- The approach of looking to neighbouring authorities to meet unmet need;
- The deliverability of sites, such as the strategic allocations in West Horndon; and
- The publication of the plan for public consultation prior to key relevant evidence base documents being made available.

Based on Chelmsford's response we can only assume the housing needs not being planned for won't be met by the neighbouring boroughs and therefore the question is how and where will those needs be met?

The Council is placing a significant policy priority in favour of protecting the Green Belt which we believe is unnecessarily restrictive, and fails to recognise the potential for some Green Belt sites to deliver sustainable development. Not all Green Belt sites are unsuitable for development. The development of some Green Belt sites which are available, suitable and achievable and would not compromise the character and openness of the rest of the Green belt should be supported. We acknowledge the political sensitivity of the Green Belt, however in a borough where 80% is designated as Green Belt, we struggle to believe the few sites identified for release by the Borough are the only suitable sites. The Council should therefore comprehensively consider how the Green Belt can be used to help meet the housing need challenge. We recommend that this should be in the form of a full Green Belt review. Small scale, high quality development in appropriately located Green Belt sites should be explored and supported by the Council. A limited level of Green Belt release is proposed by the Council but this is more of a token than any real consideration of the Green Belt.

The Brentwood Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) should provide a useful assessment of all potential sites including those in the Green Belt. However, there are a number of inconsistencies between the SHLAA potential sites and the site allocation in the Local Plan consultation draft which have not been adequately justified and explained by the Council. The SHLAA identifies a greater potential for some Green Belt sites than the Council has identified in the Local Plan consultation draft. In particular sites assessed in the SHLAA as unsuitable and unachievable appear as site allocations, whilst other sites assessed as suitable, achievable available were left out of the site allocations with no justification as to why this was the case. Other than saying in Para 2.33 of the Consultation draft *'The SHLAA identifies more land than would be required to meet housing requirements, although not all potential sites meet broader policy considerations'*, the Council should be justifying why some sites were chosen whilst others were not. We acknowledge the SHLAA is only part of the evidence base but the evidence base should be supporting, not contradicting the policies in the Local Plan. The inconsistent and contradictory evidence base needs to be refined and updated. We have also reviewed the Interim Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and failed to find any assessment of alternative site allocation which should form part of the appraisal. We can therefore only assume no alternative sites were considered by the Council which is contrary to national policy. Transparency should be at the heart of the process and failure to fully explain why some sites were chosen and others not, and to test alternatives, raises serious concerns over how the Plan was prepared.

What is clear from the above is that Brentwood will not meet their housing needs over the plan period unless additional land is identified to meet the need for increased delivery, which will include assessing the potential for additional Green Belt release. Releasing appropriate Green Belt sites should not automatically be assumed to be an unsustainable and unfavourable outcome.

We are acting on behalf of a land owner who has interests in a number of Green Belt sites in and around Ingatestone, four of which were put forward to the Council during the SHLAA call for sites requests. Appendix 1 provides the location details of the sites and the submitted SHLAA call for sites information and Appendix 2 contains copies of the submitted call for sites forms. Site 1 on the Appendix map, identified in the SHLAA as 'the site south of the flyover on Roman Road', was assessed as being suitable, available and achievable, yet was excluded from the list of site allocations in the Local Plan consultation draft. The site is located adjacent to the existing settlement of Ingatestone, has good access onto and off the

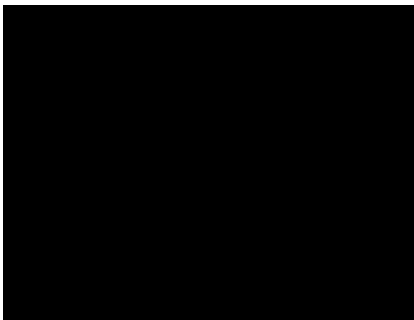
site and according to the SHLAA, the site has the capacity to deliver 41 homes. The site according to the Council is *'Suitable for development as it is located on the edge of the settlement and there are already residential properties adjacent to the site. The site is within an attractive residential location'*. Despite this positive conclusion, the site was not taken forward by the Council. We strongly believe this site has a housing potential and agree with the conclusions of the SHLAA. We believe that there is very clear evidence of the need for an increase in housing delivery and this site could sustainably help narrow the gap between identified housing needs and the proposed housing target. Our client is very committed to developing this site and the site could be delivered within the first five years which would be a positive contribution to the Council's five year land supply requirement.

The other three sites, identified on the map in Appendix 1 as sites 2, 3 and 4, were all discounted from the SHLAA. We do not agree with the conclusions of the SHLAA and we believe these sites could provide opportunities for sustainable development and would help narrow the gap between identified housing needs and the proposed housing target. Our client is committed to carrying out further work on the sites to help the Council realise their potential. We would like the opportunity to discuss these sites with officers. We are exploring options which include a care home, community facilities and possible employment uses. The sites are sustainably sited close to the existing settlement and are available now. Although part of the Green Belt, the sites are washed over but separated from the wider Green Belt, and it is our professional opinion that developing the sites would not compromise the rural character and openness of the Green Belt in and around Ingatestone. The development would also assist in safeguarding the countryside; preserve the setting and special character of the historic town; and would assist in regeneration.

We provide these representations constructively. We do not wish to unnecessarily slow the Plan making process. We support the need for an up to date Local Plan for Brentwood but we believe the Plan should be sound and comprehensively evidence based. We believe that there is very clear evidence of the need for an increase in housing delivery in Brentwood. We urge the Council to take a responsible approach when considering the issue of housing needs and to plan for the benefit of the whole of the future population in setting an ambitious housing target through the Local Plan which is consistent with national planning policy.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our representation with officers at Brentwood. We have excellent experience of recent Examinations in Public where issues such as these were raised and explored. We would also like to present our client's sites to you which we believe were excluded without the necessary consideration of their full potential.

Yours sincerely



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