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3rd February 2015

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

BRENTWOOD BOROUGH COUNCIL
STRATEGIC GROWTH OPTIONS CONSULTATION

Dear Sirs

I am writing to you with regard to your strategic growth options consultation.

As you can see I live in Harold Park which borders Brentwood and I do all my shopping etc in the Brentwood area and spend a good deal of time there. I very much enjoy travelling to Brentwood usually on public transport, and seeing the countryside and areas of green belt which surround both Harold Park and Brentwood. This is one of Brentwood's greatest assets, it is what draws people to live here and makes it a pleasant place to live. As such I was extremely upset to think that you would consider building on the green belt. Even this week the Standard newspaper quoted Thurrock and Epping Forest as the two top places that people wish to live in and gave the reason as "because it is surrounded by green belt land" (see Evening Standard Tuesday 3 February 2015 page 13). I believe this emphasises how important green belt land is and why it should not be built upon

I list my reasons and comments below

- Your document does not seem to have been approached on a sensible and even basis. Especially concerning the bias running through the document leading towards development to the south of the Borough. For example, the obvious and severe traffic existing problems on the A127 are not stated in the discussion, with development being seen as a possible solution to an inferred need, (3.12) whereas such growth in the A12 corridor 'could have similar negative impacts on infrastructure and services' (3.13) and in the even more so in (2.10) where development in the Brentwood urban area and north of the Borough creates problems whereas in the A127 corridor and West Horndon development "creates opportunities" according to your document.
- For the reason stated above the consultation is not objective in terms of presentation and environmental and financial cost.

Q1: Do you agree with the three broad areas, for the purpose of considering approaches to growth?

No for the following reasons:

- It is arguable whether the Borough needs subdividing at all for growth purposes
- In the absence of evidence relating to transport it is far from certain that this is the key matter to base decisions upon.

- Even in the most rural parts of the Borough transport is not particularly poor compared with many parts of Essex let alone the country.
- The subdivision is based ostensibly on transport but the north / middle / south land subdivisions is just too coarse a reflection of transport availability, this being predominantly linear in nature.

Even accepting transport led subdivisions in principle, this quickly needs to be refined by considering the questions of available capacity and financial and environmental cost to upgrade to accommodate growth. Without these considerations the basis of the study is unsupported.

Q2: Do you agree with the issues raised for each of these three areas?

Partially although the brief analyses 2.14 – 2.19 should be consistent. 2.19 is particularly biased whereby it makes an unsupported link between the character and availability of land for growth being potentially greater (surely this is the ultimate conclusion of considering all aspects of land use) and that the A127 has more scope for improvements than the A12 (and I would add, the A128, B roads and local road network).

To reiterate the point under Q1 if transport really is the key issue then a link is required between problems and solutions before judgements can be suggested.

Issues for the three areas should also concentrate on environmental impacts of the various options.

Q3: Do you have any comments on the appropriateness of particular sites?

I believe it is totally inappropriate to use Green Belt land for such purposes. I agree with the aim to maximise the use of brownfield areas both within urban and rural localities.

Even taking this into account should additional sites be required these should generally be of an infill nature or otherwise to create compact communities. This should apply to both urban and rural areas in order to create built up areas that minimise impact on landscape and facilitate the creation of a focus. The extent to which this principle should be applied would be based on minimising impact vs growth.

In terms of the sites illustrated:

3.12 – The completely new town 'Dunton Garden Suburb' would in my view have disproportionate impacts on the Green Belt in addition to creating a new urban centre which I feel would be detrimental to Brentwood Town centre and the road network. In addition the growth suggested for West Horndon is clearly disproportionate to the suggested aims above. Some smaller growth to West Horndon though could be accommodated whilst keeping the existing community compact and focused.

3.13 – In general both these options should be pursued within the aims I mention above. I would oppose the large scale areas shown south east of Hutton as per my comments on the 'Dunton Garden Suburb'. Further linear expansion at Brook Street termed 'Development options at M25' are also highly detrimental to the Green Belt by eroding this already narrow strip between Brentwood and the edge of the green belt in Havering, and that at Coombe Woods, Bereden Lane would be a planning travesty. Some smaller growth opportunities to Pilgrims Hatch, Shenfield and Honeypot Lane would perhaps have the least affect on the Green Belt and be close enough to

existing built up areas to keep the built up area as compact as possible and focus activity towards existing urban centres. Small extensions to Mountnessing and Ingatestone that are within the confines of the existing road / rail corridor could also be considered.

The idea of an additional junction with the A12 to intercept the A128 is so obvious that I'm surprised that this wasn't incorporated back in the 1960s. It is this sort of link to the interrelationship between growth and transport that I was referring above although in this case it would have a significant added benefit to the community rather than just accommodating additional pressure created by growth.

3.14 – Isolated sites should not in general be considered for housing development such as Clapgate Estate and Thoby Priory. Some smaller growth to each of the main communities shown on the plan (except Navestock) could be accommodated whilst keeping the existing community compact and focused.

Q4: Given the greater capacity for growth along the A127 Corridor, which of the sites put forward do you think is the best location for growth?

This is a strange leading statement as the assumption regarding greater capacity for growth along the A127 Corridor remains undemonstrated. On the face of it the same phrase could be used to open a question about any other part of the Borough. For example, if necessary local road improvements could be considered for the area of the 'five villages' in the northern subdivision.

As discussed above in relation to the A127 Corridor limited growth at West Horndon is the only reasonable option for this sub area.

Q5: Should the A12 Corridor accommodate growth by releasing sites on the edge of urban areas?

I assume that this is referring to green belt land and therefore my answer is no.

Q6: In order to provide for local need is it preferable for greenfield sites on the edge of villages to be released, or to develop brownfield sites (both within Green Belt)?

It is in general much more preferable for brownfield sites to be developed over greenfield sites however the impacts and implications of this do need to be taken into consideration. In some cases brownfield sites are best left in employment use and /or are not in a town or village context and in such cases creation of new housing in the countryside should be avoided.

Q7: To enable future employment need to be met do you agree that the most sustainable approach is to allocate new sites close to the strategic highway network?

I think the link between employment use and the strategic highway network is likely to be sweeping and in cases the opposite is true.

I also believe that we should be looking at sustainable transport such as the railways and not adding to road traffic and pollution.

I would say that future employment need should be met by considering the full range of planning matters including impacts on the landscape and the green environment.

Q8: In order to ensure that the Town Centre remains economically sustainable, do you agree that a "Town Centre First" approach should be taken to retail development?

Definitely. Retail lends itself well to densification of existing land use and I do not feel that release of any green belt land should be necessary to accommodate such growth.

Q9: Are there opportunities for more open space provision in the area where you live?

Not so much provision of open space as the need for better recreational linkages between open spaces.

It would be helpful if the Council were more proactive in terms of the environment and, for example, provided public transport to the parks such as South Weald and Thorndon, or at least provide free parking for the first 2 hours. It is important to replace trees on the edges of roads etc to keep Brentwood feeling rural and not urban. To this end it is important to avoid advertising creep on business premises. I think it is important to not have neon signs for e.g. the Holiday Inn and other businesses. It is important not to allow planning creep - a poor example of this and one which the Council could have prevented is the large Sainsbury store which when it was first built was built away from the main road in quite a laid back position with trees and landscaping. Not long after it was allowed to build the monstrous car park which as well as being an eye sore has meant that those arriving on foot have to walk much further to get to the entrance.

The A127 represents a severe block to north - south recreational routes. Effectively there is no sympathetic crossing for the 6.5km from Great Warley Road to Dunton outside of the Borough. This is a very regrettable matter as it limits the value of Thorndon Park to residents of West Horndon and any recreational users coming from the south to the Park.

Q10: Please rate the level to which you value the landscape near where you live. (See Page 29)

In Harold Park and living very near to the borders of Brentwood the following areas are very important to me.

Being able to see the countryside and not feeling like I live in a town, being able to see wildlife, the need for woods and trees to provide oxygen, to counteract pollution and to act as a sound barrier to prevent noise from the road and the railway. I would therefore rank the following as of equal importance

Scenic Beauty / Outdoor Recreation / Wildlife interest / Historical interest / Tranquility

Other – a key aspect omitted is views. As mentioned in my first paragraph it is very important to me to be able to see green fields, deer roaming, etc and I think that Brentwood Council should be doing more to prevent the urbanisation of the area. For example limit the advertising signage and changes which are more in line with an urban area than a semi rural one.

Q11: To what extent do you think the following is present in the landscape near where you live?

Houses - all the houses are in tree lined roads and surrounded by gardens and the estates are green with fields all around

Commercial buildings - there are very few apart from a small number of local retail

Nature Reserves - I can get to Thames Chase / South Weald / Thorndon Park in a matter of minutes

Farmland - several farms although Oak Farm has never been seen as a proper farm

Woodland - many woods which act as a sound barrier, provide oxygen and look pleasant

Wasteland - none

Infrastructure - A12, A127, M25 nearby but not so near as to disturb the peace, railway nearby

Leisure Facilities - sufficient, especially as I enjoy walking and cycling and there is a cycle path and several areas to walk in without needing a car.

Q12: Have we considered the main infrastructure issues? Are there other important issues to consider?

I do not believe that green belt should be built on at all. Instead the borough should be not allowing the building of large accommodation, for example most recent estates are for 3 or 4 bedroom detached houses where there is clearly a need for 1, 2 and 3 bedroom houses to meet the need especially factoring in the change in families, more single people etc.

Q13: What do you think the priorities for infrastructure spending should be?

This requires a study in itself and I note that this is being looked in to (6.3). As stated throughout this response though I feel that Strategic Growth options need to come out of the conclusions from the Infrastructure study (and studies into other such high level matters) rather than being in response to a more arbitrarily suggested steer.

As discussed above I believe there are many opportunities for the council to be more pro-active in terms of infrastructure and caring about the environment and restoring and maintaining a sense of community. For example, including sustainable transport in any plans concerning infrastructure, for example, sensible and safe cycle lanes which don't encroach on the pavement. Free parking and transport to local parks. Maintenance of footpaths and public bridleways to encourage people to make use of the fields around. Support for local shops and local post offices. Encouragement for people to shop locally, for shops to sell local produce. Subsidies for milkmen, paper deliveries etc so that the elderly and vulnerable are included in any plans. Creating a community whereby the elderly and vulnerable are not isolated, for example encouraging businesses, banks and libraries to use people and not replace people with systems, e.g. banks in Brentwood high street, Brentwood library etc. This also has the added benefit of creating employment.

I look forward to hearing from you regarding the above in due course.

Yours faithfully



J M Gillingham