

Brentwood Borough Council - Strategic Growth Options Consultation – Response

1. Managing Growth

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

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

The whole Borough should be looked at as a whole when considering a coordinated approach to growth. To split the Borough into three broad areas does not achieve the primary objective, which is growth to enable the Borough to grow as a whole. The approach taken by the Council allows it to weight significant growth in the area it wishes, which is predominantly the A127 Corridor and to limit growth elsewhere in the Borough.

In the last consultation document, West Horndon was strongly pushed by the Council as an area that could take significant growth. There was strong objection to this plan, so the Council have decided to move the area slightly eastwards but still achieving its objective of siting the majority of the required housing as far away from the main conurbations of the Borough as possible and calling it Dunton Garden Suburb. The word garden is designed to make the area sound prettier than it really is. Again the Council have ignored the need to spread development throughout the Borough.

The wording of the three areas is misleading and highlights areas of concern for development in the north of the Borough and the A12 Corridor whilst glossing over any issues with development within the A127 Corridor. Why does the Council believe that “although the A127 suffers from congestion problems it has more scope for improvements than the A12 “. The A127 has significant problems and is beset with traffic issues. The amount of money needed and infrastructure changes required to sort either the A127 or the A12 out to handle a new town will/would be massive. The damage caused to the environment whilst the work was being undertaken and the resulting damage to the landscape would be irreparable.

As previously mentioned the issues for the three broad areas are significantly weighted against Option A (North of the Borough) and Option B (A 12 Corridor) in favour of Option C (A127 Corridor). It is accepted that land will have to be released from the Green Belt to allow the Borough to reach its housing target and provide the necessary employment land.

If the Borough is considered as a whole instead of splitting it into areas then development on the outskirts of sustainable villages such as Ingatestone, Hutton, Kelvedon Hatch etc along with larger developments on the outskirts of Brentwood and Shenfield would allow the impact on the Green Belt to be minimised. To erect 4000 plus houses along with

employment land along the A127 Corridor would create more damage to the Green Belt. The Council seek to minimise the effect by describing the land as of different landscape character and making this a reason for encouraging development. First and foremost it is Green Belt and its different character should be the reason for encouraging its preservation and not destroying it.

In the Council's latest Sustainability Appraisal it states: "Sites which make up Option 5 would be dispersed around the periphery of towns and villages. While this would lead to adverse landscape effects, it is considered that the smaller scale of developments would reduce the adverse effects compared to the other four options. There would be greater scope to avoid development in areas or particular landscape sensitivity and/or Green Belt value." The preservation of the Green Belt, according to one of the Council's previous questionnaires, is the primary concern of the residents of the Borough. The potential for development throughout the Borough not just on a few large sites and one in particular would more accurately achieve this concern.

2. Sustainable Communities

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

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.

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

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).

The Appropriateness or not of sites was looked at during the SHLAA Consultation. With over 230 sites put forward during this process it is not possible to comment on the appropriateness of every site. It is considered that a new more up-to-date Consultation should take place due to the time lag and new Government Policy since the original Consultation in 2009.

Site ref 190, Gardeners, is an 8 acre site consisting of a residential property with substantial outbuildings and a large garden. The site can house a small scale development with minimal damage to the openness of the Green Belt. The site has an entrance onto the Ongar Road and onto Frog Street, it has homes on three sides, is within walking distance of Kelvedon Hatch, has a number of bus routes opposite the site and is well screened by trees. The site is in a sustainable location. It is sites such as this that can disperse development throughout the Borough, helping villages survive and prosper.

Question 4 regarding growth along the A127 Corridor is a leading question that assumes that development should take place along the A127. As previously mentioned, it is considered that development can be accommodated throughout the Borough with a proportion of this development along the A127. West Horndon would be considered the most appropriate

viable option to take limited development along the A127 Corridor due to existing infrastructure.

Any residential development along the A127 Corridor is likely to have minimal impact on the long term sustainability and stability of Brentwood Town Centre and village communities spread throughout the Borough. The proposed Dunton Garden Suburb may benefit Basildon Town Centre but will not benefit Brentwood. The sustainability of initially the West Horndon Scheme and now Dunton Garden Suburb scheme must be called into question. The infrastructure will need substantial investment and the area of Green Belt lost would not fit in with Council policies.

As part of an integrated scheme sites should be released along the A12 Corridor to encourage the long term prosperity of Brentwood, Shenfield and Ingatestone. This option should be joined with the other options to enable the Borough to grow in a sustainable way. The strategic growth options should enable the Borough to have a long term plan, this will not be achieved by building the majority of houses required at the furthest South Eastern tip of the Borough.

Brentwood Borough, as shown by the recent Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA), is a Borough where people want to live. There is a proven need for more houses throughout the Borough, not just for those wishing to commute into London but for those wishing to work within the Borough. The SHMA described Brentwood as an affluent area with higher than average employment, low unemployment and average pay higher than benchmark averages.

The question that needs to be asked by the Council is why do people wish to move into the Borough and where do they wish to live and not just where can we build thousands of homes to meet our housing target.

In relation to question 6, it has previously been mentioned that an integrated approach is required to meet the housing demand within the Borough. It is interesting to note that as this option is clearly the least favoured by the Council it mentions land lost within the Green Belt whereas Questions 4 and 5 both fail to mention that development for these options will predominantly be within the Green Belt.

The Borough's population is expanding and is expected to grow by approximately 10% between 2011-2021, this is in fact lower than the average for Essex as a whole. The number of households is expected to grow by a similar figure over the same period, these figures are well below the Boroughs of Colchester and Braintree. This equates to at least 3000 new homes in this period. Migration into the Borough is growing according to the SHMA and this is expected to continue. Migration helps the Borough's economy through houses built and sold, new businesses and support for existing businesses within Brentwood and surrounding villages. Development throughout the Borough will provide the necessary diverse housing required by its existing and future residents. Diverse housing is also required by the government.

An extract from the latest government guidance states; "... Address the need for all types of housing, including affordable housing and the needs of different groups in the community and caters for housing demand and the scale of housing supply necessary to meet demand." By providing new homes throughout the Borough, including on the edge of villages, the Council will be meeting the criteria as set down by the government. It will be providing a

variety of houses/sites to meet the varied demand of the population, this will not be met by building thousands of houses in Dunton which lies distant from the heart of the Borough.

Building on the edge of villages will not just be meeting local need, as the question infers, it will be meeting the need of existing residents and those wishing to move into the Borough. In the Council's own literature it is accepted that the least harm to the Green Belt will be to build on the outskirts of villages, on smallish sites spread throughout the Borough. Within the recent SHMA it recognises the clear need for more houses within the Borough and that one of the main reasons for moving house, for existing householders, is the quality of the neighbourhood. For concealed householders the two main reasons for moving house was to be near family and they had always live here. Whilst the Council is set on building thousands of houses along the A127 Corridor, it is difficult to see how this meets the criteria of existing and concealed householders. An integrated housing policy, with development throughout the Borough would meet the main criteria for people wanting to move.

In the SHMA it was identified that 56.5% of residents travel to work by car, this is lower than all other benchmarks. With development throughout the Borough, increased public transport and a greater reliance on working from home this figure could be reduced further. There has been little/no mention of live/work units, these could be created to encourage people to work from home on a regular basis. With increased technology there is a trend for people to go into the office less and instead work from home. When live/work units were originally introduced they were for craftsmen to have workshops adjacent to their homes, this has progressed to a person having a fully functioning office above their garage or within their house – they are fully connected to their office but do not need to travel in every day. This reduces car usage and encourages the use of local facilities.

3. Economic Prosperity

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

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.

Constructing new employment sites near/adjoining the strategic highway network, throughout the Borough (not just along the A127) will attract multi-national firms to the area whilst providing employment to local residents. To be sustainable it will be necessary to improve/provide public transport to the sites. There must be consideration for local businesses to expand and to encourage new businesses within residential areas providing they are compatible ie office use, shops etc. By providing an integrated approach it will encourage new sites to be developed and for businesses to grow within villages, thereby providing local employment and reducing car usage.

To ensure that the Town Centre remains economically sustainable it is essential that housing development is not solely situated as far from the Town Centre as possible in Dunton. Public transport needs to be improved to enable access to the Town Centre and parking provisions need to be appropriate for those wishing to drive. The Council could consider the approach taken by Chelmsford Council of providing a park and ride scheme, to avoid congestion in and around the City Centre and to encourage shoppers into the City. A coordinated approach that considers the motorist is essential to enable the town to survive and thrive in the long term. There has to be greater access to the Town otherwise residents will drive to Lakeside/Bluewater where there is plentiful parking. The residents of the Borough should be encouraged to see the Town Centre as their main destination whilst using local shops where possible.

4. Environmental Protection and Enhancement

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

Q10 Please rate the level to which you value the landscape near where you live.

Q11 To what extent do you think the following is present in the landscape near where you live; Houses, Commercial buildings, Nature Reserves, Farmland, Woodland, Wasteland, Infrastructure, Leisure Facilities, Other?

The Borough is well supplied with footpaths and open spaces, there are always opportunities for more open spaces but are they needed or necessary. Opportunities could arise through more development throughout the Borough with developers providing money for the Parish they are building in. This would go directly to the Parish Council, not the Borough, and spent within the Parish, to provide improved/new local facilities.

The Borough is predominantly Green Belt and therefore small scale development throughout the Borough will have the least effect on the existing Landscape, as confirmed in the Council's latest report. The landscape throughout the Borough is valued and offers opportunities to be enjoyed by all. There are Houses, Commercial buildings, Woodland, Farmland and Roads (including Bus stops) all are within 100 metres of the property, there are also footpaths and areas to walk.

5. Quality of Life & Community Infrastructure

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

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

The main infrastructure issues have been considered however it is important that the money is directed in the right way. The priorities should be new schools, health facilities and improved road network including public transport. It is important for the Council to remember that the majority of the population still drive to work and therefore the roads in the Borough must be maintained to a high standard. The Borough is well served by its Green infrastructure and this should be at the low end of its priorities. The level of money spent on the infrastructure of the Borough must be kept at a level commensurate with an expanding population.