

Response to Basildon Borough Draft Local Plan 2016

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As an outline to my approach to this review I have, with the exception of housing policies, read through all the policy statements. In respect of housing policy I have concentrated my effort on those policies that affect Langdon Hills and have left it to others to respond in relation to their own areas of interest.

Therefore with the exception of housing policy I am in a position of broad agreement with the policy statements except as set out below. I have set out my comments largely in the order in which the sections appear in the Draft Plan but there are occasions where by necessity several sections overlap in one policy area.

Section 2 – Policy Context

The last bullet point in paragraph 2.27 refers to continuing provision to cross border boundary development in relation to the 'Dunton Garden Suburb'. The consultation in 2015 produced an overwhelming rejection of this scheme with 84% of respondents being opposed to the development. This should be sufficient to acknowledge that we have undertaken our Duty to Co-operate and that we should have no further discussion with Brentwood unless it is to reinforce the residents views to reject the scheme.

Section 3 – Spacial portrait

Whilst it is right to acknowledge the growth of Basildon since 1950 as shown in paragraph 3.7 it seems to be somewhat perverse to use this growth as an indicator of what should be expected in the future. The New Town development has to be seen in the context of exceptional population growth.

In paragraph 3.11 the Cross Rail services to Shenfield are described as being one stop EAST of Billericay whereas the station is one stop WEST of Billericay.

Section 6 – Achieving Sustainable Development

Paragraph 6.18 refers to the objectively assessed need (OAN) for between 763 and 837 per annum. This is a higher rate of growth than was seen during the New Town development. The Basildon Borough Council website quotes a figure of 15,169 homes being built in the first 21 years of the New Town. This is an average rate of development of nearly 750 homes per annum in an area of 7834 acres. It is difficult to see how a similar or larger number of homes can be built in the plan time frame without using a similar amount of land without compromising the designs of the area. This suggests that the OAN is overstating the growth of the Borough which must inevitably lead to questioning of the studies and methodology used in arriving at the growth figures.

Paragraph 6.45 proposes that Dunton changes to a district area within the Basildon Urban area as outlined in Policy H11. Having just rejected the Dunton Garden Suburb proposals the residents of Dunton would rightly feel aggrieved if those plans are replaced by similar plans under a different name.

Policy SD2 clearly concentrates growth in the Basildon Urban area. The allocation of 48 of

the 49 Hectares of development land is disproportionate and simply perpetuates a disconnect of Basildon from Billericay and Wickford similar in nature to the disconnect of South East England from the North East and the North West which the Government is trying to remove with their 'Northern Powerhouse' schemes. We should not produce a similar situation locally via this plan.

Policy SD2 paragraph 4 states that Dunton Village will become part of the Main Urban Area of Basildon. This is clearly against the wishes of local residents and should be deleted from the plan.

Policy SD2 also provides for only 0.3 Ha of land for employment. This provision is disproportionate to the proposed residential development and would require residents to travel towards Basildon to work and given the limits to road capacity in the North / South direction this would lead to more road congestion at peak times, thus exacerbating traffic problems in the Borough.

Section 7 – Building a Strong, Competitive Economy

Paragraph 7.6.1 talks about breaking the structural underemployment in the Borough. This is then at odds with Policy E1. The proposed rate of growth would see this policy fail.

The proposed approximate 15,000 extra homes could see over 30,000 new inhabitants in the Borough. Paragraph 3.7 quotes 174,000 residents living in 74,000 homes (para 3.15) which is an average of 2.36 people per dwelling. The figure of 15,240 new homes at this rate indicates a total of 36,166 new residents. Paragraph 3.21 indicates there are 76,000 jobs in the borough from a population of 174,000 means that approximately 44% of the population can be provided with jobs within the Borough. Applying this proportion to the anticipated 36,166 new residents means that 15,797 new jobs will need to be created to maintain that level of local employment.

Ergo, Policy E1 which proposes an additional 8,600 does not keep pace with the increase in residents and cannot hope to address the structural under employment in the Borough.

Paragraph 7.36 relates to the constraint for the development of Gardiners Lane South (GLS) by the relocation of the Playing Pitches. This is a matter I will come back to but at this moment suffice to say that the land in and around Dunton which is Green Belt would be suitable to accommodate the playing pitches that would need to free GLS for redevelopment.

Paragraph 7.45 discusses a new junction on the A127 to serve housing and business on the East of Basildon. Essex County Council not only resisted any new junctions between Fairglen and Nevendon to service the Waste Facility at Courtauld Road but also indicated they would use their power of veto to ensure no such junction would be created. Either County have now taken an alternative view of it will not happen and will thus put at risk the developments proposed East of Basildon.

The inclusion of the area West of Westmayne as industrial use (paragraph 7.32) is to be regretted. Whilst there is employment land in the Cranes Farm Industrial area that is under

utilised then this westward shift should be resisted.

Policy E10 is to be warmly welcomed.

Paragraph 7.64 infers that the release of building for recreation use in business areas will be resisted but recent planning permissions have not been in accord with this policy.

Section 8 – Ensuring the Vitality of Town Centres

I welcome Policy R3 in respect of Laindon with a few caveats.

The number of 200 – 300 homes on the site seems a little excessive. The last valid application for the site included 130 homes in flatted development above the shops. This at the time was thought to be the maximum sustainable.

The policy R3.4 needs to be strengthened, as per paragraph 8.38, to make sure that NHS England come on board with the current owner's regeneration scheme so that a more coherent and comprehensive development is achieved.

Previous proposals for Laindon in the Core Strategy included extending the designated Town Centre southwards to encompass The Oxcrofts and the area down to the Police Station. That proposal is missing from this draft and should be reinstated.

Policy R8 on Primary Shopping Frontages does not include Laindon. The other Towns are included but not Laindon. Laindon as a community pre-dates any of the other Towns in the Borough and should not be missed out. The significance of Laindon is shown in that it is one of the four elements on the Council's Crest. Following the attempt by the Development Corporation to rip the heart out of Laindon for this Council to not include it in the list of Primary Shopping Frontages is an outrage and an affront to residents.

Laindon does not appear either in Policy R9 (Secondary Shopping Frontages) nor Policy R10 (Local Centres). By a swipe of a pen Basildon Council has completed what the Development Corporation failed to do. You have wiped Laindon off the map. This is a serious omission and needs to be rectified without delay.

Policy R11 is internally incompatible. Paragraph 8.77 correctly identifies that the Out of Centre Retail Area offer opportunities for the retail of bulky goods, DIY, Electrical and furniture. Policy R11.2.a proposes that these Centres could be further developed if supported by customers who walk, cycle or use Public Transport. I fail to see how someone might get on a bus with their new washing machine or cycle off with their 52 inch television on the crossbar. Policy R11.2.a should be deleted.

Policy R12. Festival Leisure Park (FLP) is there. We should not be writing policies that preclude expansion of the facilities at FLP if it affects the viability of the Park. Basildon Council surely has a responsibility to ensure the ongoing viability of FLP as well as promoting Town Centre use.

Policy R16 simply cannot exist in any coherent form. Policy R16.1 has some validity but R16.2 is totally unworkable. Two examples will do to prove the point. Laindon Town

Centre where it might be reasonable to allow a Fast Food Takeaway outlet is under 400 metres from Millhouse, James Hornsby and Pheonix Schools and Merrylands school is outside 400 metres by the width of a road. The second example is the Triangle shops recently rebuilt by the Council has provision for 2 Fast Food Outlets. It is separated by the width of Berry Lane from Lincewood School and by the width of the High Road from the Special Needs school in Langdon Hills. If this policy is to remain then the distance needs to be reduced to say 200 metres. If this cannot be done then compliance with the 400 metre limit would likely preclude any Fast Food Outlets from operating in the Borough.

This policy, if adopted, would be completely undeliverable.

Section 9 – Promoting Sustainable Transport

Policy TS2.1.f needs clarification. If implemented as written then there would be no access on to High Road North, there would be no access to McDonalds there would be no access to or from Laindon High Road to the A127. I am sure this is not what is intended by the policy statement which probably refers to the removal of the roundabout at the Fortune of War interchange. If this is the case then the policy needs to be properly worded to convey this. If the intent is as written in the Draft policy then it is incorrect and should be deleted.

Policy TS3 At paragraph 9.20 it states that Basildon has 'a well developed network of cycleways' and that 'people travelling to work by bicycle is well below the national average'. These statements indicate that it is not a lack of cycleways nor a poor network of the same that precludes travel to work by cycle. It must therefore be that people choose to use their own transport for that purpose. If the £1.8 to £3.6m fund were channelled into improving the current road network then it would be a better option and of greater benefit to local residents.

Policy TS4 is broadly to be welcomed but does need buy in from the Rail and Bus operators and by the County Council in areas where routes are not commercially sustainable.

Section 11 – Delivering a Wide Choice of High Quality Homes

In this section I have concentrated of policies that more directly affect the residents on the West of Basildon. A lack of comment in policies in this section should not be construed as an acceptance of those policies.

I argued earlier my concern over the methodology used to arrive at some of the housing figures proposed and I am not going to rehearse those argument here.

Policy H7. Development of this site is long overdue. I have some reservations about the mixed use as the site exists in what is properly the Cranes Corridor of Industrial uses. Mixing housing in this area goes against all the principals on which the New Town was built – a separation of industry from residential.

However Policy H7.4 does indicate the need to relocate some of the sports facilities away

from this site. Policy H10 is marked as an area that could be considered for this purpose.

Policy H9b is an area that has been considered for some time as suitable for development and should be brought forward.

I have reservations on the suitability of area H9a sandwiched as it is between two roads.

Policy H10. It is difficult to object to this Policy except in its entirety.

Last year the public consultation on Dunton Garden Suburb resulted in 84% of people being opposed to the scheme. It would now fly in the face of public opinion to accept development on this scale on the Basildon side of the Dunton Garden Suburb proposals.

The list of infrastructure included with this policy indicates how difficult it would be to develop this area in any meaningful fashion that enhances the residential amenity. Between 1000 and 2350 homes, a primary and secondary school, 5.5 Ha of employment land, a Doctors surgery, a care home, travellers pitches, the relocated playing pitches from Gardiners Lane South. That sounds like a quart into a pint pot which ever way it is looked at.

Any development in this area will harm the biodiversity (Policy H10.5) and Policy H10.6 states 'this site must not be at risk of inundations from surface water' in an area where for most of the winter there is standing water in the fields.

The biggest danger to this area is that any development is contrary to Green Belt Policy as stated in the NPPF. The greatest concern of this is the Green Belt Policy that is to check unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas yet this is precisely what is being proposed by the Policy.

If Basildon Borough is to use Green Belt Policy to protect its boundaries then it must do so in a positive way. Basildon cannot build up to its western boundary in the hope the Brentwood Borough will then protect the area from urban sprawl. There is precious little green to prevent the Eastern extension of London towards the Essex Coast at Shoeburyness and Basildon Council should do its bit to prevent this from happening by resisting any large scale development along its Western boundary.

The Local Plan does not make any statement about areas that it is determined NOT to develop and yet the area covered by Policy H10.

In my opinion the only way to prevent urban sprawl westwards is not to develop on Green Belt land to the west of Basildon, especially west of the Lower Dunton Road, which should be made sacrosanct.

However, most of the Green Belt land in Basildon Borough is north of the A127 and therefore Green Belt south of the A127 becomes more important. By proposing development East, West and South of Basildon the proportion of Green Belt south of the A127 likely to be lost to development is much greater than the proportion North of the A127. There is therefore a greater intrinsic value to Green Belt land south of the A127 and this should be accorded greater protection. If we do not protect our Green Belt we cannot

expect others to do it for us

Route D being considered as part of the Lower Thames Crossing will have a greater impact on the area covered by Policy H10 which will also restrict what can be developed in this area.

The relocation of pitches and sports facilities from Gardiners Lane South into this area can be accommodated without harm to the Green Belt as they are activities that are acceptable as they do not reduce the openness of the Green Belt.

To include Alternative Option 3 – Dunton Garden Suburb in this document makes a complete mockery of the Consultation that was undertaken a year ago on these proposals. If residents are to be listened to then when they speak loudly their words should be heeded. The inclusion of this option is an insult to local residents.

Policy H34. Whilst recognising the need to provide Affordable Housing there is a concern that because most of the development will occur in Basildon that there will be a disproportionate over provision of affordable housing south of the A127. It is well known that there is a higher proportion of affordable housing already in Basildon Town (including Pitsea and Laindon) and efforts should be made to better a better mix across the Borough.

There must be resistance against trying to get a higher percentage mix of affordable housing from developments.

Policy H35 is supported as is Policy H36.

Section 13 – Promoting Healthy Communities

In paragraph 13.8 there is reference to 'only 1 in 10 adults participating the recommended physical activity levels'. I wonder if this is reflective of the demographic age profile of the Borough.

Policy HC1.3 would tend to lend support to the idea that the area of Dunton could be a suitable location for the relocation of the Playing Pitches on Gardiners Lane South referred to above.

Policy HC7.2 refers to Policy HC12 which does not exist.

Paragraph 13.67 and paragraph 13.68 refer to the private clubs on Gardiners Lane South and again lends itself to some positive action referred to above. It would be wrong to promote ever increasing use of Barleylands Farm to provide the Playing Pitches when the alternative of using the Dunton Area offers an alternative to that.

Section 14 – Protecting Green Belt Land

Policy GB3 is broadly supported although the number of 218 homes (paragraph 14.24) in the plotlands areas is much lower than the number previously proposed in the Basildon Replacement Local Plan and the Core Strategy documents; figures almost 4 times the number mentioned in this policy.

Policy GB4 is supported.

Policies GB 5 and GB6 are largely to be supported with the following omissions from the policy. In both cases they allow enlargement or replacement of dwelling up to 35sq m above the 1948 size datum point. The 1998 District Local Plan indicated extensions up to 35sq m or 90sqm whichever was the greater. In both the Replacement Local Plan, the Saved Plan policies document and the Core Strategy replaced the 90sq m limit with 180sq m and this has been used to determine planning applications in the Green Belt in recent years both in committee and under delegated authority.

To delete the alternative 180sq m now would be retrograde and overly restrictive. No justification for removing this limit is presented in the text. The 90sq m is noted in paragraph 14.33 but no reason is given for its removal. No reference is made to the 180sq m limit from later planning documents.

Another omission from this policy is the mention of basements. For some years now Development Control have been seeking a policy on how to handle basements when included in applications. I will give two examples of the problem.

In determining an application for Alpha Farm House which was a new building, the DCTM committee deliberated over whether to include the proposed basement as part of the floor areas. The committee decided to include the basement when permission was granted. DCTM used the same criterion when considering enforcement action against development at Ramsden Park Farm where a replacement building was developed with a basement and room in the roof which were deviations from the approved plans. In this case DCTM included the basement as part of the size calculation and refused permission.

That application was appealed and granted on appeal where the Inspector chose NOT to include the basement of the rooms in the roof as part of the size because they did not, in the Inspector's mind, materially enlarge the house from that which been granted permission. The result was that having been granted a floor area of around 360sq m, itself over what would normally be granted, the applicant then build a house with about 640sq m.

Since then Applications with basements have no clear policy on which to make decisions where absolute clarity is needed. In Policy GB5.1.b and Policy GB6.1.c statements relating to the inclusion of rooms in the roof or basements would give clear guideline to application and decision makers on how to proceed.

Section 15 – Meeting the Challenge of Climate Change and Flooding

I have a sceptical view of Climate Change. Whilst I do not deny the evidence that fewer winters are as cold as those of my youth I do not necessarily attribute this change to an increase in aerial pollution. Indeed the introduction of the Clean Air Acts which reduced the amount of smoke and particulate matter released into the atmosphere may well have contributed to so called global warming. Particulate matter on which moisture can condense no doubt added to the amount of fog and smog which in turn reduces the amount of incident sunlight reaching the surface of the earth, a greater amount being

reflected away from the surface of the earth.

Despite this I do feel that we should as far as is practicable accord with the Policies in this section but I use different grounds on which to suggest this.

One further comment to make on this section is in reference to Alternative Options CC1 where in Option 1 on the third line the phrase 'would potentially result in the NPPF being found unsound' is clearly fallacious and erroneous.

Policy CC7.2 and paragraphs 15.67 – 15.69 cause some concern. Notwithstanding the drive from Government to consider these schemes the experience of the CHP scheme on the Langdon Hills Estate should sound a cautionary note. When that estate was in the ownership of the Development Corporation which pre-dated the transfer to the Council, the sale of houses to social and private landlords and the transfer under Right to Buy into Owner Occupation then it was clear who was responsible for the maintenance of the system. Since that time it has been very unclear who owns which part of the CHP infrastructure, where the change of ownership takes place and how to properly meter usage have been issues that have caused confusion and problems with the maintenance. I would not want to see other schemes falling into this same sort of chaos under the use of Policy CC7.

Prepared 24-03-2016

Submitted 24-03-2016 23:45

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