
FULL COUNCIL
Tuesday, 20 February 2024

QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER PROCEDURE RULE 15

5a) Question 1 from the Public, Mike Sims, Rickmansworth

Does the council understand the purpose of the greenbelt and if so, why is it placing 1400 new dwellings between Penn and Mill End and Maple Cross Wards in the local plan, when there are many alternative sites available that will not impact the Green Belt?

Written response:

Yes - I and officers are fully aware of the purpose of the Green Belt.

The five purposes of Green Belt are set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The Council's approach has always been to minimise harm to the Green Belt whilst trying to meet the development needs of the area. Our approach was to consider brownfield first and only then consider sites within the Green Belt.

The Council has undertaken extensive evidence work in support of the emerging Local Plan. This includes the Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) which assesses all the sites that have been submitted for the Council's consideration. Sites need to be assessed as suitable and available for development. If a site is not available, we cannot include it within the Local Plan as it can't realistically be delivered. We have also conducted an Urban Capacity Study where we have considered the urban areas in detail and identified potential sites for development. However, these sites need to be assessed through the SHELAA and also be suitable and available. Ultimately, there were only sites to accommodate 988 dwellings within the urban area which comes nowhere near meeting the development needs for the area (as set out in the Local Housing Needs Assessment evidence base study). As such, the Council has had to consider sites in the Green Belt. All the alternative suitable and available sites are also in the Green Belt as we have exhausted our brownfield options.

Again, when considering sites in the Green Belt we have taken a detailed evidence-based approach, conducting a Green Belt review to consider which areas of Green Belt perform best against the purposes of Green Belt as set out in national policy. We have selected sites in areas that would result in the least harm to the Green Belt.

The Council is preparing the Plan based on a low growth option. The government's standard method for calculating housing need has been used as the starting point as required by national policy, however we believe that the Green Belt constraints across the District means we cannot meet this figure. At the same time, in order to meet needs such as homes for future generations, affordable housing and

accommodation for the elderly we need to build in the Green Belt. The latest version of the plan proposes to leave 98% of the Green Belt untouched.

This Council would much prefer to allocate all development on brownfield, previously developed sites. However, even by including every site put forward (and not ruled out by statutory bodies or withdrawn by landowners), those will only yield 988 units in total over the 18 years of the Local Plan.

There have been three separate 'Calls for sites' to see if other brownfield land is available. Legally, as Mr Sims might know, the Council can only allocate sites that the owner says is available.

As our consultation makes clear, we have ruled out all higher harm Green Belt for development. Our approach has been supported by the Three Rivers Joint Residents' Association representing 22 residents' groups as well as the "Cannot' Replace Green Space " group.

If Mr Sims is aware of any other brownfield land that is available for development and has not been considered by this Council through its lengthily Local Plan process, we would really like to know about it. We will certainly investigate and if possible use that to reduce the pressure on Green Belt sites.

5b) Question 2 from the Public, Catherine Green, Mill End

"Having lived in Mill End for 26 ½ years I know very well that there are already issues with some infrastructure:

700 homes at Shepherds Lane will mean approximately 14% increase in residents to Mill End plus 14% more cars through the area.

Shepherd Lane/Church Lane supports St Johns, Shepherds and St Peters primary schools. Church Lane and Grove Road are already bottle necks as the main access points and I witness 'stand-off arguments between car and lorry drivers on a weekly basis with traffic backing up into the Uxbridge Road. Accidents at the junctions are evidenced by damage to railings and the wall of The Tree pub.

More homes on the higher ground at Shepherds Lane field will mean more surface and waste water onto the already strained and flooding Uxbridge Road. Cottages along the Uxbridge Road have flooded in the past and I've witnessed drains along the Uxbridge Road being lifted up from the amount of waste water.

Why has Three Rivers chosen to not improve the road and waste water infrastructure as part of the plan?"

Written response:

The Regulation 18 consultation is not for 700 homes but for 550 homes plus a school/ health facility on the Shepherds Lane site along with retention of protected trees and public rights of way. As the consultation document made clear, access improvements are expected to Shepherds Lane; and this has been reinforced in the comments made by the highway authority (Hertfordshire County Council).

At this stage this is a site allocation proposal, not a planning application. Should the Government Inspector agree to include this site in an adopted Local Plan, a detailed

planning application will be required that will have to cover not only access arrangements but improvements to the highway network as well as addressing flooding issues. The response from Herts County Council is that site is an "appropriate development site".

As detailed in the public consultation, any development would need to undertake suitable mitigation to address surface water flood risk and ground water flood risk; and this would be required as part of any detailed planning application and must be assessed and agreed by the Lead Local Flood Authority (again that is Herts County Council).

The Council will be producing an Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) alongside the new Local Plan. The IDP is prepared in close consultation with infrastructure providers and considers the future infrastructure needs of the district when factoring in the level of growth set out in the draft Local Plan. Larger sites may be able to provide on-site infrastructure such as schools and doctors' surgeries (as per this site) and all new residential development must pay into the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). The CIL monies are then used for delivering infrastructure across the District in accordance with the Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

New development will be required by policies in the plan to include mitigation measures for surface and waste water runoff, such as Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS) which often result in a lower level of runoff than pre-development.

5c) Question 3 from the Public, Namrata Zaveri, South Oxhey

This March, residents like myself will face a significant increase in Council Tax, with a large portion going to Hertfordshire Police. My 2023-24 bill shows a staggering 6.7% increase for police compared to a maximum 2.99% increase for other services. This comes at a time when our community is desperate for effective police action.

Recent burglaries and anti-social behaviour have left residents deeply concerned and frightened. There have been an extraordinary amount of burglaries, 16 in a space of 4 months that we know of.

We, the residents of Carpenders Park and South Oxhey, deserve to feel safe in our own homes and community. We urge our councillors to act with urgency and ensure our tax contributions translate into tangible improvements in police effectiveness. I know that policing is not a matter for Three Rivers District Council. That said, what help can councillors give the residents of Carpenders Park and South Oxhey in ensuring that effective police action is taken to at least reduce the crime that has been blighting our community for far too long? We are desperate!

Written response:

Our Community Safety Partnership is keen to ensure residents feel safe. Our Strategic Priorities also include Burglary and Anti-Social Behaviour and Youth Crime. Residential burglaries remain both a challenge and a priority here in Three Rivers due to the local road network and our geographical location, and we work closely with the police to tackle this. The anti-social behaviour team at Three Rivers District Council also work closely with the police, housing associations and voluntary sector partners to reduce anti-social behaviour in Carpenders Park and South Oxhey. Three Rivers District Council also fund an additional two Police Community Support Officers

to offer further support and reassurance in the community. We also provide CCTV which can act as a good deterrent and provide useful information for investigations. The Community Safety Partnership annually assesses the level of crime and disorder within the district, along with concerns expressed by the local community to develop priorities, objectives and an action plan. Please do report any concerns to our anti-social behaviour team or call 111 unless it is an emergency call 999. Three Rivers District does remain a very safe place to, live, work and visit but we will continue to work in partnership to address issues and develop preventative and reactive actions to tackle crime and disorder.

5d) Question 4 from the Public, Jack Eliades, Carpenders Park

I'm the Chair of Can't Replace Green Space, representing Carpenders Park residents and a member of the Three Rivers Joint Residents Association.

On November 26, 2023, alongside the Carpenders Park Residents Association, we arranged a meeting at Carpenders Park Community Hall. The purpose was to offer a platform for concerned residents to inquire about the ongoing consultation on the Three Rivers Local Plan. I want to express my gratitude to Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst for accepting the invitation, along with the other councillors, and addressing various questions from attendees. Residents truly valued his straightforward explanations, and we eagerly anticipate inviting him back once we have the consultation results.

Residents in Carpenders Park are uneasy due to the inconsistent support for the proposed housing figures in the Local Plan consultation. Notably, we have heard that Hertfordshire County Council also opposes these housing numbers, you may be able to substantiate that. Our information points to a conflict, with the Government insisting on over 11,000 homes, Three Rivers Conservatives advocating for under 3,000 homes, and Conservative-led Herts County Council supporting an unspecified number, likely exceeding the consensus reached by residents' associations.

Could Councillor Giles-Medhurst shed light on the implications for the future of the Local Plan, endorsed by all residents' associations in Three Rivers but facing opposition from Conservative District Councillors, Herts County Council (and consequently Conservative County Councillors), and the Government?

Written response:

Can I thank Mr Eliades for his question and once again thank him and his committee for the opportunity to present the details of the Low Growth, lower Housing local Plan protecting more Green Belt land. I was delighted to be able to take and, I hope, fully answer so many questions from members of the public. I always welcome the opportunity to answer questions and explain council policy and the facts, even if they may not always be exactly what people want to hear. I prefer to tell it straight and would be delighted to return to explain the consultation results and the next stages as we seek to get an agreed plan to a Government Inspector for approval.

Early analysis of consultation responses indicates overall support for the Council's approach to housing growth. The detailed consideration of consultee comments is currently being undertaken, with a full consultation report being reported to the Local

Plan Sub-Committee in the summer. We are not in a position to comment on individual responses at this stage.

Once all the consultation comments are considered and final evidence work completed the Council will agree the final draft of the Local Plan to go out for Regulation 19 consultation. This is the version of the plan that the Council proposes to submit to the government for examination in public. Decisions will be made on what will be included in the Regulation 19 consultation through the committee process so until these decisions are made, we cannot say what exactly this version of the plan will include.

Once the plan is submitted for examination it will be considered by an independent examiner. They will take into account the consultation responses as well as the Council's detailed evidence base supporting the plan, and whether the plan conforms with national planning policy. In doing so the inspector will consider consultee comments on their merit in planning terms and not necessarily on the volume of responses saying one particular thing. It is possible for one comment to be given more weight than say 500 comments if the inspector considers it to be more relevant in planning terms.

Turning to the other points. I can understand the confusion.

The Government standard methodology says that Three Rivers housing allocation for the Local Plan period (18 years) would be 11,466. The Secretary of State has recently again reinforced the standard method of assessing housing need as the correct way that housing numbers should be calculated, with an emphasis that this remains an advisory starting figure. This was also reinforced by Housing and Planning minister Lee Rowley in a House of Commons debate on 23rd January, when he said that he expects more cases for exceptional circumstances to be put forward in the future, following the publication of the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) .

He said: "Logically, I would then expect more cases for exceptional circumstances to be accepted by the Planning Inspectorate, although that will also be for the Inspectorate to determine on a case-by-case basis."

The published NPPF does not change our approach and indeed it could now be considered supportive of the radical approach this authority has taken. I know for a fact that the Three Rivers Joint Residents' Association still thinks that the changes to the NPPF do not go far enough.

What the NPPF still makes clear is that an authority can try to argue for a lower number, but if it is rejected by the Planning Inspectorate, then the government can blame the Inspectorate or the council for suggesting a too low number!

Locally the Conservatives in Three Rivers, including all of those present at the October Council meeting, voted against our preferred lower growth housing number, despite having suggested in Committee a much lower number! They excluded some brownfield sites, despite the clear requirements from Secretary of State and indeed the MP for South West Herts that all such sites should be included in order to minimise pressure on the Green Belt. Their suggestions would have reduced the number of dwellings proposed in the Local Plan by at least another 2,284 according to my records - thus leaving just 2,568 over 18 years or just 143 per year. That is well below the assessed housing needs, making the council dependent on 'windfalls'

(unplanned sites proposed by developers). It also ruled out large sites that would have delivered new schools, health facilities and affordable housing for our communities.

As I have mentioned before, the Three Rivers Joint Residents' Association fully supported the Council's approach as a balanced one allowing for homes for our children and grandchildren whilst protecting the Green Belt.

As you are aware we excluded all the independently rated "higher harm" sites in Carpenders Park, despite considerable pressure from developers to include them.

Turning to Hertfordshire County Council: in their response to the consultation, their Conservative Executive Member and Officers said, "In this context (referring to the need for growth and new housing) we are concerned that the land for homes allocated in this consultation draft is too low". Its own Corporate Plan HCC is committed to sustainable responsible growth and indicated it had expected 12,624 units in Three Rivers in the plan period 2018 to 2038. And indeed, HCC has allocated and purchased a site in Oxhey Lane for a new secondary school to meet the expected allocation of sites in both Three Rivers and Hertsmere and thus to meet new school pupil demands.

As I explained at the public meeting in November, Three Rivers is taking a risk by not bringing forward a plan that meets the governments starting point for calculating new housing numbers. However, I believe we must stand up for Three Rivers and put forward what I believe is the right number on the right sites whilst protecting Green Belt sites that, if developed, would harm our natural environment. I always say "If you don't try you don't get".

Clearly going forward, it is great to have the backing of groups like yours, but clearly if the Council could present a united front at the public inquiry next year, and if the Herts County Council withdraws its comments about our housing numbers being too low, that would be most helpful -it would show a united front, thus greatly enhancing our chances of getting this Low Growth, lower housing Plan approved, protecting the Green Belt. I will strive to achieve that.

I am particularly concerned that the County Council approach is so different not only to ours, but also to what the Conservatives are saying locally – despite two Conservative Three Rivers County Councillors being leading members of the HCC administration as Deputy Lead members.

I am also concerned because we have had experience of the County Council undermining Three Rivers as they did the same thing in the last local Plan process. They backed a developer's plan in Woodside Road, Leavesden, and de-facto the future allocation of land on neighbouring fields, by agreeing an access to enable a large development, against the plan this Council had put forward. As a result, the Inspector included the site, which has now been built. I clearly do want that to occur again.

5e) Question 5 from the Public, Michael Hill, Rickmansworth

Can the Council confirm that the Licence Agreement between TRDC and Basing Gardens Bowls Group, initiated in 2011, remains in existence until 2026 and that

under the terms of that Licence TRDC are fully responsible for the maintenance of the Bowling Green and are now failing to meet the required standard.

Written response:

The current licence agreement was granted on 5 May 2011 for a term of 5 years, with the option of an extension for a further 5 years. It does not remain in existence until 2026. Negotiations with the Bowls Club regarding the grant of a new lease commenced in 2020 and the Council has just received formal, written comments from the Bowls Club in connection with the proposed Heads of Terms on 6 February 2024.

Under the terms of the licence agreement, TRDC are required to maintain the Bowls Green for duration of the bowls season between the last week of April and the 30 September in any year. The green continues to be maintained consistently, each and every year in accordance with the requirements of the licence agreement.