



We are now rapidly approaching the critical moment when Basildon and Brentwood Councils will be publishing the final drafts of their local plans and voting on whether to submit them to the planning inspectorate. A lot has happened since the Local Plan consultations at the start of this year so this is an update from the RAID campaign group to bring everyone up-to-date.

## Dunton Hills Garden Village

After the joint consultation for Dunton Garden Suburb at the beginning of 2015, Basildon and Brentwood failed to agree on the next steps in the face of massive opposition from the Basildon side and mixed views from the Brentwood side. So Brentwood went ahead with its half of the development renamed to Dunton Hills Garden Village while Basildon continued with its piece around the existing Dunton Village.

At the start of September this year Brentwood released all the comments submitted to its Draft Local Plan consultation. We still don't have any responses from the council, but the comments did give us some helpful details on how the developer wants the new village to look. So here are their aspirations side-by-side with those of the council as originally shown to us.



The council (left) told us that they planned to keep a large green buffer over the lower lying areas to the West. The developer (right) wants to carpet almost the whole area in housing to build lower density more expensive homes. Quite a difference!

# Yet Another Site Consultation

How many times have Basildon and Brentwood councils asked us to make comments on potential sites for development around our area? *Basildon Local Plan Core Strategy, Dunton Garden Suburb, Basildon Draft Local Plan, Brentwood Preferred Options, Brentwood Strategic Growth Options, Brentwood Draft Local Plan.* I make that 6 times, but it's not enough. **Now we have to respond to another Basildon Consultation on Alternative Sites!**

The new consultation which runs until 15<sup>th</sup> December looks at additional sites for development in Basildon. Some were already considered in the Local Plan Core Strategy consultation but the council says the developers gave new evidence. There are also new sites proposed as submissions to the Draft Local Plan consultation long after the call for sites had passed. The council tell us that they are not looking to add additional housing but the representations from the developers are demanding that the number of houses is increased from 15280 to 16740, the maximum limit set in the local market housing assessment. One developer even commissioned a 90 page detailed reassessment of the housing need to argue that the number should be much higher.



We think this consultation is unnecessary and dangerous. **It is developer driven and could result in the housing targets being increased at some stage.** Once the consultation ends the council will have to spend extra time and money evaluating each response. They have had to push back the schedule for the Local Plan by months, increasing the risk that the government deadline will be missed allowing developers to get unwanted planning applications approved on appeal because we don't have a plan in place. This consultation was forced on us by the Tory cabinet alone. As a decision on the Local Plan, it should have gone to full council allowing the opposition to oppose it. Nevertheless, **we urge you to respond to this consultation.** Not many of the sites are near West Basildon but they all have the potential to add more housing which means more people and cars straining the infrastructure we rely on. Yes, our objections to over-development in the earlier consultations are being ignored but if we give up now and say nothing the council will have to listen to the developers and increase the housing target further. All the comments in all the consultations will form the evidence we need to get the Local Plan thrown out when it goes before the government's planning inspectorate. We must see this through until the end.

<http://www.basildon.gov.uk/article/6092/Public-Consultation---Local-Plan-New-and-Alternative-Sites>

The Localism Act (section 9F) says that Local Authorities must set up overview and scrutiny committees to scrutinise decisions made by the council. The 20 year Local Plan is the most important policy the council will produce, so its scrutiny by elected council members is a clear legal necessity. Unfortunately the Tory group don't see it that way. First they questioned the cost, then they disrupted meetings and finally they usurped the opposition chairman of the housing and growth scrutiny committee to replace her with one of their own who has already cancelled one scrutiny meeting. This is a report from Mike Andrews chairman of the Billericay Action Group.

# The Scrutiny Committee

The Housing & Growth Scrutiny Committee is a forum for the Draft Plan to be publicly analysed and held to account in public. Crucially, the chair was a member of the opposition, the local UKIP leader Cllr Linda Allport-Hodge. BAG have attended two of the three meetings held. The first was very difficult as, in our opinion, the Conservative Councillors on the committee (Cllrs Baggott from Billericay and Hillier) together with Planning Officers ruined the meeting by time-wasting, an approach that you'll see from one party or another in most meetings of Full Council. The second was approached far more professionally; issues were debated in a constructive manner. Members of the public were made to feel valued and were able to express their concerns. Cllr Baggott saw things differently and referred dismissively to the 80+% of people who objected to the Draft Plan saying :

**“We can't let Council policy be dictated by a few whingers”.**

Councillor Baggott is not a whinger; he made no response to the Draft Plan consultation. The great hope emerging from the meeting was that the Chair said she would invite a Government Planning Inspector to a future meeting. This would be of enormous value as the Inspector would tell local councillors, in full view of the press, what another Inspector told Castle Point councillors

**“You don't have to build on Green Belt”.**

Councillor Baggott did not like this idea at all.

**Full Council:** Following the Scrutiny meeting a Full Council Meeting voted to remove Cllr Allport-Hodge from her position as Chair of the Scrutiny Committee and replace her with Cllr Baggott. BAG have attended meetings chaired by Cllr Baggott. He's very effective; the problem is that he supports the Local Plan and there's very limited value in having a Conservative scrutinising a Conservative led Plan. You can guarantee he won't be inviting the Planning Inspector! Interviewed by the Yellow Advertiser about the Local Plan's Progress, Cllr Turner criticised Cllr Allport-Hodge saying “She's putting about the fable that we don't have to build on the Green Belt, if we didn't have to we wouldn't”

**It's not a fable, even the draft Local Plan recognised the possibility.**

That's not to say we don't recognise the practical difficulties. If Cllr Turner is truly building three times more homes than he wants then he should invite a Planning Inspector to a public meeting where Councillors, Planning Officers and members of the public can question the Inspector.

**Our view is that the Council frequently confuse what they CAN do with what they MUST do – let's clear these things up once and for all.**

# “Safe Under Us?”

RAID is proud to be one of 14 campaign groups who are members of SEEAGA, the South East Essex Action Group Alliance. The group was recently contacted by CPRE (Campaign to Protect Rural England) who have been working with the London Green Belt Council on a report highlighting the potential loss of green belt in the country

CPRE have been campaigning to limit urban sprawl since 1926, so they have a lot of political influence. Their report “Safe Under Us?” questions the sincerity of the government’s commitment to protect the green belt. We were able to contribute to the report using our experience from campaigning against Dunton Garden Suburb. As a result here I am at the House of Lords for the launch event drinking a beer where I was able to thank the author Alice Roberts for giving us a voice in high places.



The report revealed that at least 123,000 homes – equivalent to a City the side of Coventry or Cardiff – are planned in the London Green Belt alone. The Department of Communities and Local Government says this is an exaggeration, however, CPRE were able to show the figure is likely to be **significantly higher**.

The highpoint of the launch event was a speech from Lord Richard Rogers, Labour peer and renowned architect who explained that **"We can easily build all the housing needed for forthcoming years on brownfield land. We need to get control of housing and planning back from developers."**

RAID has made the decision to join the London Green Belt Council for a small fee of £10. This will help them continue lobbying parliament to promote building on brownfield sites instead of releasing more green belt.

Full details of the report and the event are available at :-

<http://www.cprelondon.org.uk/news/item/2341-safe-under-us-report-launch-house-of-lords-september-13-2016>

# Are the Travellers thinking of going?

Dale Farm and Oak lane have been traveller sites in Basildon for some 15 years but finally it seems that they are less than happy with their location. Candy Sheriden submitted a comment to the Local Plan consultation on behalf of the Gypsy Council urging them to consider development of the sites to allow travellers to move on due to the pollution on the site where sewage is untreated. The council has responded by including two new sites (4 and 7) in the public consultation for possible sites to be used in the emerging Local Plan.

From information provided by the agent on behalf of the developer with an option on the Dale Farm site it appears that the travellers recognise that they may no longer qualify as travellers under new government planning policy and would therefore like to sell their land and use the money to move to locations they have identified outside Basildon. The travellers at Hovefields have similar but less clear plans which include retaining a traveller site with a smaller number of pitches along with housing development at their site.



Residents of Basildon are likely to have mixed feelings about this. On the one hand, ending the unpopular camps would come as a relief, but it would also mean that the travellers will have profited from their unauthorised camps on green belt land. The cost of eviction to the local tax payer is unlikely to be recovered and a part of the green belt will disappear under housing for good. The access roads to the A127 are also likely to be problematical.

We leave it up to you as individuals to decide whether you want to support or object, all things considered, but in either case we urge you to also stipulate conditions that must be applied if the council do allow either of the sites to be developed. These could include the requirement that the development must replace existing green belt release in the Local Plan rather than increase housing numbers, that the assessed need for traveller pitches should be reduced to exclude the need generated by Dale Farm, Oak Lane and Hovefields, and that foot/cycle bridges across the A127 will be constructed at the cost of the developers.

# Has Grayling Lost the Key?

This week the Transport Secretary Chris Grayling gave a speech on new infrastructure being supported by government funding. He had much to say about a few billion quid that his colleague Philip Hammond gave away in the Autumn Statement the week before. This was to build new roads around the country in order to “unlock housing and economic growth”. While this money increases government borrowing it unfortunately gets spread very thinly on a national scale and all that was left when the butter knife reached Essex was a little cash to smooth over some potholes.

The spin phrase “to unlock housing” has become very popular. We heard it a lot during the Lower Thames Crossing consultation at the start of the year, but what has come of that? During the consultation many campaign groups were encouraging a “No Crossing in Thurrock” response, but at our R.A.I.D AGM it was pointed out that the Dartford crossing is broken due to the inadequacy of the bridge and especially the tunnels. The best option for everyone including those in Dartford would be to complete the M25 with new modern motorway tunnels bypassing the entire stretch that remains A-road including the existing crossing. After the consultation this (option A14) also became the preferred option of many people in Thurrock.



The problem with this option from Highway England’s point of view is of course that it does not “unlock housing.” Their preferred option C routes would do this by gouging a dirty road through the green belt of Kent and Essex. So can we expect Highways England (i.e. the government) to ignore option A14? Now here is the strange thing. The Thames Crossing decision was expected to be announced in the Autumn Statement at the latest. There has been a commons debate about it and our new PM mentioned at question time that we will hear in due course, but Grayling did not mention it once during his speech. He talked about HS2, Crossrail 2, various new roads up North and even the London sewer but nothing about the largest road project planned for the near future. The government position has always been that they are committed to delivering a new Lower Thames Crossing so why not mention it? Are they having second thoughts? No doubt we will know soon, or perhaps not.

So has Grayling lost the key to unlock housing in South Essex? It looks more like he put it back in his pocket when he found the door wide open. With the exception of Castle Point, all the Local Authorities in the area are well on their way to allowing vast numbers of houses to be built all over the green belt already, without even a whiff of government funding for local infrastructure.