

Hersham Residents Association

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To: planningpolicy@elmbridge.gov.uk

24th February 2017

Dear Sir / Madam

Comments on the Proposed New Elmbridge Local Plan

Hersham Residents Association (the HRA) is a non-political organisation whose aims are to promote the interests of Hersham and its residents. We understand that having an updated local plan in place will enable the council to reject building development projects and individual planning applications which would be strategically undesirable.

Whilst we support this forward thinking approach there is the risk that the local plan itself might give the green light to inappropriate development which could spoil the character of Hersham and the quality of life for residents across Elmbridge. For these reasons we are keen to engage with this consultation and further discussions about the next stage in creating a new local plan.

Government targets and regional planning policy.

We feel the Elmbridge local plan should take account of the government's nearly 10,000 new homes target, but not rigidly adhere to this. This is because we feel it would be impossible to achieve this target without damaging the environment and quality of life in Hersham and across Elmbridge.

Whilst we are sympathetic to some increased housing, particularly if it is affordable, we feel that the target of building nearly 10,000 houses by 2035 is excessive and needs rethinking for the following reasons:-

- The target seems to take little account of the fact that many areas across Elmbridge are protected due to their status as sites of special scientific interest (SSIs), common land or valuable woodland. This puts too much pressure on areas of land which cannot claim special status (other than being in the green belt).
- We feel that in an area like Elmbridge which is near to London there will always be a strong demand for housing no matter how

much supply is increased. This is why we feel that a tough approach to planning control is needed now rather than after valuable green belt has been eroded.

- Responding fully to current government demands for housing at the expense of green belt and quality of life sets a precedent and establishes a pattern of incremental encroachment of green belt triggered each time the local plan is reviewed.
- We feel that the Elmbridge target is part of a flawed system which should focus much more on regional and national planning and development of industry, jobs and housing in a more strategic way.

Although commenting on government policy is perhaps beyond the HRA's normal remit, we suggest that a more strategic approach would allow industry and housing to be directed to those areas of the country which need, and have capacity for more development.

We hope therefore that Elmbridge can make these points to the government at the same time as submitting a well thought through local plan which justifies a more *limited amount of development* which is sustainable and right for the area.

Option 1-3 for further development

The three approaches for future development which are set out in the consultation were the subject of much discussion at our committee. Because we recognise the need for some development and some use of greenbelt, but we not supportive of building on existing green space within urban areas, we are probably nearest to supporting the option favoured by Elmbridge, namely option 2. However we would not wish to endorse this option unless the target of nearly 10,000 extra houses by 2035 is substantially reduced for the reasons outlined above.

Concerns about infrastructure

All the options risk increasing traffic congestion, pollution and strain on local schools, social and emergency services, and drainage and water supplies. The local plan should of course consider how the right infrastructure could be provided and which options are likely to minimise the negative impacts of development.

In determining potential areas for development it would be important for example to make best use of existing public transport **and** also to improve its coverage and frequency, so as to minimise the need for vehicle movements.

From a Hersham perspective, bearing in mind current congestion and capacity issues, we would not wish to see the schools in the area (which have already been expanded) having to enlarge further beyond their existing capacity with the consequent peak traffic congestion that would entail.

Drake Park - resisting development

We support the strategy of protecting and strengthening strategic areas of green belt where they provide an important barrier for countering urban sprawl from London.

An example of this is the Drake Park area just north of Hersham which has been the subject of several applications for large scale housing development. The HRA objected to these on the grounds of increased traffic through Hersham and the strain on local infrastructure generally. However we also agree with Elmbridge that maintaining and strengthening this particular area of green belt is strategically important to stop urban settlement areas merging.

Land either side of Queens Road near Sir Richard's Bridge

Whilst we understand the suggestion in the draft local plan that areas of lower performing green belt might be considered as more likely prospects for potential development, we do not consider that this area falls into that category. In fact we suggest that this area of wooded land is vital to retain as a break between urban areas which would otherwise merge.

At a recent meeting of our committee we agreed that this area is not only a crucial barrier but the trees also provide metaphorical 'lungs' for this part of the borough. We suggest however that the amenity of this land could be improved further by providing a cycle lane and walkway options parallel to this stretch of road to promote cycling / walking and road safety for cars and cyclists. We were pleased to see walking and cycle routes referred to in the consultation.

We strongly feel therefore that the aspiration for cycle and walking routes on this land, *and generally across the borough*, should be clearly referred to in the new local plan to help prepare for this being implemented as soon as possible within the lifetime of the new plan.

This would represent some of the improved infrastructure needed to support any new development and minimise the otherwise inevitable

increased vehicle use in Elmbridge. Please see our previous suggestions on this matter on the HRA blog.

Floodplain land on the Hersham side of the River Mole

The area between the River Mole and the Burwood Road is part of the floodplain, and hence not suitable for development. We are pleased that it has also been recognised as an area of high performing green belt. It also represents an important area of remaining farmland which helps make Hersham a desirable place to live, and we would not therefore wish to see eroded.

However, we have already seen some urbanising influences affecting this land specifically in the area of Turners Lane which is now being used more intensively as a main exit road from the Burhill Golf Club, and has started to alter the character of this part of Hersham.

We have previously commented on this and suggested that to offset this and provide some benefits back to Hersham residents, access to and from the golf club via the top of Turners Lane should be restored. We also suggest a pedestrian and a cycle bridge should be considered across the river Mole, perhaps somewhere near the Burhill Road allotments as part of the local plan discussions.

This would improve and (in the case the area of the golf club) restore access routes and hence improve the amenity provided by the important areas of remaining green belt countryside in and neighbouring Hersham. We feel these matters should be included in the local plan to address and reverse the trend towards residents being excluded from areas of countryside previously available on the basis of commercial interests and preferences of local landowners.

Please see our related responses on this subject which can be accessed on the HRA blog.

Consultation on open spaces in Hersham

The consultation supporting documentation examines small scale parcels of land in Hersham itself, and seems to make early judgements and assumptions about the use and value of the land. We are concerned that the scoring allocated seems to pre-judge the wider consultation.

For that reason we hope this part of the documentation will be highlighted to those in the area of each of the parcels of land

concerned in case this consultation is missed by many of those who actually make use of these green open spaces.

Some preliminary comments on several of the areas of land identified are set out below, but please note that HRA has not been able to consult with all those who might be affected and may have strong views: -

Vauxmead

Vauxmead is an important amenity in Hersham under the management of St Peter's Church. It is used regularly by two local pre-schools, by the local Guides troop and by young people's football teams. It also provides a venue for ad hoc community and church events.

St Peter's is very keen to increase use of the field for the benefit of the people of Hersham, while recognising that covenants on the land and other restrictions place some limitations. To this end, discussions are ongoing with both the Scouts and Guides organisations, and St Peter's would be interested in hearing from other local organisations, particularly those involved with open-air activities for young people.

Recreation ground opposite the Barley Mow

This land is an important community asset. Whilst the park itself is next to the dual carriageway, it is buffered by a large bund which minimises disturbance for park users. The bund and the park provide a barrier and some distance between the road and the houses beyond.

Land at Vaux Crescent

This provides an important amenity for the area in terms of green space and the play park in the middle of this land.

Hersham Green

This is a key area for Hersham not only providing green space and a venue for community events, but also acting as a focal point which helps to give the village a sense of identity. This historic former common land is therefore an irreplaceable asset to the village.

Hersham Golf Club

We have not been able to consult widely on this. Whilst it is understood that developments, perhaps of higher density near to public transport hubs might be proposed, the infrastructure in this area is inadequate, and even next to a railway station the inevitable increase in car usage would have a negative effect on the quality of life of local residents. The golf club itself provides local people with access to an area of attractive green space and we would not want this amenity to change or be degraded.

Other comments

Housing densities

We suggest that housing densities should be maintained in line with existing development in the surrounding area. However increased densities might be justified near centres of transport.

Employment in Hersham

Hersham has lost several key office buildings and areas previously allocated for industry, most recently the land to be occupied soon by Lidl. In the interests of maintaining Hersham's long history as a community which included local work opportunities, the local plan should balance the need for residential and industry / office space use.

It is suggested that the plan should provide a framework for resisting 'employment land' being too easily converted into residential use for short term financial gain, but the longer term detriment to local residents.

How the plan and EBC will refer to Hersham in future

Following the boundary review which affected Hersham negatively in terms of the geographical area of the village ward coverage, we were concerned to read that the settlement areas would also be reviewed as appropriate. We would like to be involved in any early consideration of this before further consultation documents set out, and then start to establish a geographical and perceived sphere of influence for Hersham which is in line with the recent ward changes.

There were a number of detailed areas for consultation which have not been covered in this response either because it refers to areas beyond Hersham, or because our committee hadn't developed a particular view on the matter. I hope nevertheless this response is useful. Some more detailed comments have been made by some of our members who have used the on-line form to respond.

The HRA is keen to engage further on the development of the plan particularly as it may affect Hersham and the neighbouring areas. We would also like to discuss and help develop our associated suggestions in this response about cycle paths and improving footpath access in the area of Turners Lane and in Hersham generally. If you have any advice about this or would like to discuss any of the above, please get in touch.

Yours sincerely

David Lock
Chair of the HRA
On behalf of Hersham Residents Association
<mailto:info@hershamresidents.info>

See the HRA website and blog at: <http://hershamresidents.info/>