

**Standing up for Hertfordshire's countryside**

Amanda Foley  
Chief Executive  
St Albans City and District Council,  
Civic Centre,  
St Peters Street,  
St Albans,  
Herts, AL1 3JE

Our Ref:

Your Ref:

9th February 2018 (by email)

Dear Ms Foley,

**St Albans City & District Local Plan 2020-2036**

1. This letter is about the current consultation on the Local Plan, but is not to be taken simply as our response to that consultation. We are writing to you because we are deeply concerned about the way the consultation is being carried out. We think that it is possible the public may be misled.
2. The Council has issued a brief Issues and Options consultation leaflet in both printed form and online. Quite frankly, this document is misleading in what it says and is so threadbare as to be not fit for purpose. This is a consultation that does not set out the issues in any detail and seeks to limit the options to a predetermined outcome of building 913 dwellings a year over the Plan period. The Planning Policy Committee was presented with a much fuller draft consultation document at its 7 November meeting, but for reasons that are not clear, the Council chose to issue a drastically truncated version.
3. We understand the difficult position the Council is in, having had its previously submitted Draft Local Plan found unsound on grounds of failing the Duty to Co-operate test, and the threat from the Government of direct intervention in the Local Plan process if rapid progress is not made. However, this does not excuse the way in which this Regulation 18 consultation is being conducted, and the way that the citizens of the District are being treated.
4. The consultation leaflet, under the heading *Build homes in the right place*, states that the Government says that 913 homes a year should be built in the District. No explanation of where this figure comes from or what is its status is given. In fact, the figure is an illustrative one, published by the Government as part of its initial analysis of the standard housing needs assessment methodology put forward in the DCLG consultation document *Planning for the right homes in the right places* last September. The results of that consultation are not yet known, and are not likely to be known until the proposed new National Planning Policy Framework is published in draft form, probably in March 2018. There will then be a further consultation period before the final revised NPPF is published and comes into effect later in the year.

5. Unless your Council has been told differently by the Government, without the public being informed, there is no certainty that the proposed standard methodology will be imposed in its present form, or that the figure of 913 dwellings will result from it. There has been widespread criticism of the proposal, including from CPRE nationally, who submitted a detailed, rational response to the DCLG consultation, which can be viewed at <http://www.cpre.org.uk/resources/housing-and-planning/item/4702-cpre-response-right-homes-right-places>. Indeed, your own Council was critical of the proposed methodology for calculating housing need, saying in its response:

*The current proposals introduce an unreasoned approach. The mixing of demographic projections with an essentially arbitrary 'demand' factor is not supported. Adding 'demand' to 'demographic need' and calling the resulting figure 'need' is both an inappropriate approach and fundamentally misleading to planning professionals, elected politicians, stakeholders and the public at large.*

We could not agree with you more. Yet you are now presenting the housing 'need' figure as a fait accompli that must be met.

6. This is not in accordance with government policy as set out either in the existing NPPF (paragraph 14 and footnote 9) or in last year's Housing White Paper and the DCLG *Planning for the right homes* consultation document. The latter states, in paragraph 9:

*Local planning authorities should start the plan-making process with a clear understanding of the number of new homes that they need in their area. While this is an essential first step, it is not the only stage in the process. Local planning authorities then need to determine whether there are any environmental designations or other physical or policy constraints which prevent them from meeting this housing need. These include, but are not limited to, Ancient Woodland, the Green Belt, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Sites of Special Scientific Interest.*

*This means that the level of housing set out in a plan may be lower or higher than the local housing need.*

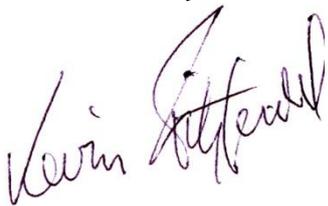
7. None of this is explained to the public in your Issues and Options consultation document. Instead, there is a presumption that the so-called 'objectively assessed housing need' must be met and that the only way to do this is to build on the Green Belt. The document estimates that 9-10,000 new homes (65% of the total) will be needed in the Green Belt over the Plan period, and goes on to specify the 8 strategic development areas identified in the Green Belt Review. The likely capacity of these areas is not given, with the result that it appears to the uninformed public that these 8 areas alone will satisfy the housing need that cannot be met in the existing built-up areas.

8. However, there is likely to be a shortfall of around 3,000 dwellings that would have to be found from the Green Belt. Nowhere in the consultation document is this made clear. Using the figures from the Green Belt Review, the 8 strategic sites would provide about 6,500 dwellings at 40 dwellings per hectare, plus the 500 dwellings on small-scale green field Green Belt sites originally proposed. The resulting 3,000 shortfall would have to be provided by expanding the existing towns and villages or by creating new settlements in the Green Belt. Already, we are seeing reports of 'bids' for major development sites in such areas from landowners and developers.

9. In conclusion, our view is that this Issues and Options consultation will do little to carry matters forward so far as the new Local Plan is concerned. The answers you get from the consultation, for the most part, will have been given without full knowledge of the planning context for the questions. We trust that you will repair the situation at the next public consultation stage, which should arguably be an additional, post new NPPF stage prior to the Regulation 19 consultation.

10. We shall seek to draw attention to what we consider to be the deficiencies with the draft Local Plan. We think that the failure of the Council not to provide the public with important information and the consequent possibility of people being misled is lamentable.

Yours sincerely,



Kevin FitzGerald  
Honorary Director

c.c. Tracy Harvey, Head of Planning & Building Control, St Albans City & District Council