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Planning Policy Team
King George V House
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Wednesday 21st August 2019

Dear Sir/ Madam

Representation to Draft Chiltern and South Bucks Local Plan 2036 - Denham Parish Council

Having taken professional planning advice in response to the above we set out below a range of concerns that the Parish Council has with the Draft local plan. These follow reviewing the document and discussing many of the concerns held by local residents.

The Parish Council has a number of observations on the document necessitating raising of a formal objection. Detail is set out below on the specific areas of policy concern, although first the Parish Council would like to express disappointment with the process that has been followed in bringing forward the new land use proposals.

Process Issues

The part of the Council's web site dedicated to the emerging local plan is very difficult to navigate and it is only by chance that the Parish Clerk stumbled across the supporting evidence base documents. Such information should be clearly sign posted. Once found the level of detail that is available is vast, with much of it being of a very technical nature. Such a situation makes it extremely difficult for the Parish Council, let alone a normal member of the public, to locate and digest what is available.

In order to undertake the level of review that is appropriate it would appear to necessitate technical competence in a range of subject areas, and in reality requires the commissioning of a number of specialist consultants. This has clear cost and time implications.

In this context, although it is acknowledged that 6 weeks is the standard requirement for public consultation, given the extensive specialist information that respondents should ideally be referring to, it may have been appropriate to have extended this period from the outset as it is a task for many that has to be fitted in around daily life. It is noted that in week 5 of 6 of the original consultation period, a point in time when the pressure is fully on all consultees, the consultation period was extended. Although this was welcomed, the consultation period is still during the main holiday period.

Further, the method of submitting comments in itself appears to have been made unnecessarily complicated, with the suggested form extending to 34 pages. For those not regularly involved in these processes this is extremely off-putting. A point which is further complicated by the fact that it is not made clear that the District Council will actually accept general written comment. Indeed, prior to production of this letter the Parish Council's advisors, who understand the local plan process, had to seek agreement to provision of the submission in its current form.

The entire process is intimidating to non-professionals, is evidently not easily accessible and cannot realistically serve to secure the maximum amount of public involvement. As such, it is in clear conflict with Government aspirations to get the wider public involved in planning and the ethos of Localism.

We would also highlight that the approach up to this point has not been as effective and transparent as it might have been and in some instances has been clearly misleading. At a previous manned consultation event held at South Bucks District Council offices, members of the Parish Council were advised that nothing had changed regarding the green belt in Denham and there was to be no removal. The members were also told that the only thing that had altered was that Chiltern and South Bucks councils were merging and the local plan would therefore be resubmitted as the joint local plan. Consequently, it came as an unwelcome surprise to then see that Denham and proximate land was indeed being put forward for removal from the green belt.

There is also evidence that there has been too much haste in the production of the supporting documents with a range of omissions and errors having been noted, for example:

- Higher Denham has been completely omitted from the Sustainability Assessment
- In the Townscape Character Assessment (Jan 2019), where Higher Denham was identified, the pictures in the actual document on page 54 are not even of Higher Denham
- Within the Measures of Compliance document, it is also noted that it refers to the Habitats Directive and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010, where this should be related to the updated 2017 version.

Such errors do not give the reader confidence as there is always the query that if such basic errors have been made, what other omissions are there within the document/s.

On a more fundamental point, it is questioned whether it is wise for Chiltern and South Bucks to rush to adapt the work previously done in order to bring forward a local plan at this time, when it is intended to introduce the Unitary Council for Buckinghamshire on 1st April 2020. Further, it should be recognised that in agreeing to the formation of the Unitary authority one of the Secretary of State's key reasons was to ensure that no fundamental decisions were made without a strategic overview. Having the Chiltern and South Bucks Local Plan progress outside of this strategic framework is in clear conflict with the justification for the new combined authority.

In order for the new combined authority to work effectively there will be a need for a new development plan to be produced. Obviously, with the ability to policy plan over such a large area there may be new opportunities for addressing housing needs, including scope for new settlements etc. As the new Unitary authority is to come into force within the next 7 months it would perhaps be wise for any new local plan to cover the entire Unitary authority area. Indeed, even if the current draft local plan progresses to adoption it will be likely to require a very early review.

Denham is 1 of 9 authorities in South Bucks which is looking to progress a Neighbourhood Plan to help guide activity. In this regard, it is considered that the local plan could have an increased emphasis on the role and benefits of such plans in supporting strategic policy.

Local Plan Comments

- Level of Development in South Bucks

*Policy: **Spatial Places***

*Support or object: **Object***

*Is it sound: **No***

Comment:

There is concern with the disproportionate provision of development identified for South Bucks. It can be noted that the South Bucks administrative area is 42% of the combined area of Chiltern and South Bucks, yet there is a requirement for South Bucks to accommodate 59% of the proposed housing growth. The Parish Council believes that the spread of development should more accurately reflect the relative authority areas.

The 'duty to co-operate' requirement is accepted, although it is queried whether the communication that this necessitates has taken place with **all** neighbouring authorities. In producing a plan an authority/s must have regard to what is taking place in surrounding areas.

It is again questioned whether it would be better for a single local plan to be coming forward following the formation of the Unitary Council to ensure that the strategic view can be fully understood.

- Level of Employment Land

*Policy: **SP EP4***

*Support or object: **Object***

*Is it sound: **No - Not justified***

Comment:

There is concern that the suggested employment land requirement is excessive and does not fully take account of changing employment patterns, with increased working from home/ on the move. The HEDNA for South Bucks shows a requirement of 40,000 sqm of office space. The local plan is suggesting putting 40% of this (16,000sqm) on a single site by Denham roundabout. The suitability of such a high concentration of activity is questioned and for travel reasons it would appear that more dispersed provision would be preferable. After all, the residents of Denham will not generate such high demand to warrant the new offices or hotel, meaning that extensive 'in commuting' will be necessary. This is likely to be road focused.

The Plan suggests that '*micro and small businesses make up around 98% of the local business base*'. These businesses do not require large premises. They require affordable and accessible premises close to staff and users. Therefore provision of new largescale facilities in a single location would not appear to be responding to identified demand.

Whilst the justification for additional employment is made, the local plan takes no account of

the following Economic Sites already in Denham, namely Broadwater Park, Martin-Baker Aircraft, Rivermead, Uxbridge Business Park, Chalfont House, Phoenix House and Capswood Business Centre. The latter having been occupied by South Bucks District Council, with the building stood substantially empty for the last three years following relocation of all staff to Amersham. These vacancies are despite active marketing having taken place.

Further, it does not appear to fully appreciate the extensive vacancy rates that currently exist in the area. A basic review by the Parish Council has quickly identified more than 1,800sqm of office space currently vacant just within Denham (Capswood, Pheonix House and the Daisy Building). These are possibly vacant as they do not satisfy the needs of smaller businesses and there is a need to be careful not to provide a surplus of mid-range/larger office blocks that will be underutilised and end up becoming housing, while failing to cater for genuine smaller business needs.

It is also understood that part of the additional employment floor area being called for is as a result of Permitted Development Rights being used in central locations to change from office space to residential. The level of employment land required has led the council to suggest that it cannot be delivered without green belt release. Such a significant shift in policy appears to represent particular circumstances that could be used to prevent further permitted development conversions from offices to residential. Town centre locations are still considered appropriate for high trip generating employment uses and removal of the PD rights would mean that there is reduced pressure for green belt release for employment purposes. It can also be noted that with the decline of retail more of this central space is likely to become available for alternative uses over the longer term. It is questioned whether this has been adequately addressed within the background work.

- Green Belt Release

Policy: SP PP11

Support or object: Object

Is it sound: No - Not justified, not consistent with national policy

Comment:

At a national level '*The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts*' (NPPF paragraph 133). Policy is clear that once established '*Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified*'. In this regard the Parish Council contests the case presented to justify removal. It also clearly goes against the stated approach by Buckinghamshire County Council to protect green belts.

The green belt around London was designed as 'the lungs of London'. In that respect it is still serving its purpose.

It can also be noted that the most pressure on the green belt is from London, meaning that it is reasonable to suggest that those areas of green belt closest to London should be accorded additional protection to maintain the green lungs that were always envisaged. For example, small-scale green belt releases further out can be accommodated without any direct effect on coalescence, whereas release of even small areas closer to London can be damaging. In this regard, it is contended that those settlements identified for green belt release which are closest to London, particularly within M25, including Denham Village, Higher Denham and Tatling End, should be protected for their strategic location and for their own sakes. The Council's 2016 Green Belt Review recognised the role that General Area 66 performed in maintaining a number of gaps between green belt settlements.

Within the last few weeks the London Green Belt Council has issued a press release (copy attached) urging local authorities in London and the Home Counties to include policies of stronger protection for green spaces in their plans, as these areas are seen to provide vital climate change mitigation.

Within the referenced release it is noted that:

'some local councils are being inconsistent by declaring a Climate Emergency but failing to prevent development on Green Belt countryside and open spaces which provide vital mitigation for climate change. Some of these local authorities are even putting forward large swathes of Green Belt land for housebuilding despite their professed commitment to environmental protection'.

LGBC Chair Richard Knox-Johnston also recognises that:

'The Green Belt is a vital green lung for people in London and the wider South East. By protecting green spaces, it is making a hugely important contribution to people's health and well-being as well as maintaining essential eco-systems and providing wildlife corridors.

Green spaces help to mitigate climate change because carbon is absorbed by vegetation and held long-term in soils emissions. They also help us adapt to climate change by absorbing rainwater and cooling our towns and cities. The greener space we lose, the more we are at risk from flooding and rising temperatures, two of the predicted effects of climate change. ...but if they do not also pledge to defend the Green Belt and countryside from development then they are failing in their duty to protect our communities and environment.

Giving up Green Belt to development is an easy answer to the housing shortage but actually it does nothing to improve the affordability of housing - all it does is leave communities with less greenspace. In fact, there has never been a greater need to protect the Green Belt from development'.

Such a role, and the need for increased protection of the green belt, should be recognised by the Council.

The NPPF is quite clear that policies:

'should promote an effective use of land in meeting the needs of homes and other uses, while safeguarding and improving the environment... should set out a clear strategy for accommodating objectively assessed needs, in a way that makes as much use as possible of previously developed or brownfield land'.

(Paragraph 117)

It is also suggested that use of brownfield locations should be maximised, whilst density of development should be optimised (NPPF 137 a) and b)) to reduce the level of green belt identified for release. A release of 7.83sq.km is considered excessive. If the green belt is to be released for development first consideration should be given to previously developed land and/ or land well served by public transport. Neither is considered to be the case relative to Denham.

We believe that the local plan needs to increase the densities being looked at on brownfield sites, both in and out of centres. This requirement relates equally to sites that are being identified for strategic development. Through maximising densities the pressure on the green belt can be eased, minimising the level of any resultant green belt release.

As indicated above, it may be that once the Unitary authority is formed a more efficient/ radical

solution becomes available to address the housing and employment requirements, such as a provision of a new settlement. It might be preferable to have a strategically planned solution incorporating required infrastructure than having a dispersed model of delivery.

Paragraph 139 of the NPPF highlights that *'when defining Green Belt Boundaries'* plans should:

e) be able to demonstrate that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the plan period.

In this case the plan period is given to conclude in 2036, whilst it is known that South Bucks Council is to be subsumed into the larger Unitary Buckinghamshire Council in 2020. Given the different stages of plan preparation within the authorities, and the need for a strategic overview, it is likely that there will be a need for an early review of the local plan affecting South Bucks, whilst pressures from the combined authorities for development is likely to necessitate further green belt boundary changes in conflict with the NPPF. Any release should be delayed until an appropriate strategic view can be taken across the combined authority area to avoid calls for further green belt boundary changes in the very near future.

It is also understood that extensive work was previously carried out relative to assessment of the green belt. Indeed, an earlier review initiated by Bucks County Council, and undertaken by all District Councils including the SBDC Local Team was published as recently as April 2019 and rejected taking settlements out of green belt as they presented very limited infilling opportunities. It is hard to reconcile how the sites no longer satisfy the requirement that they did when the green belt was first created or as most recently assessed.

The Parish Council believes that Denham continues to perform a valuable function, in line with the requirement of the green belt:

- Preventing the merging of development/ settlements (New Denham and Denham Village would only be separated by the M40 motorway)
- Safeguarding the countryside from encroachment
- Preserving the setting and special character of historic towns (the setting of Denham's conservations area must be viewed as relevant here), and
- Encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

Much of the assessment carried out on behalf of the council to justify the removal from the green belt appears ill informed, whilst the assessment is often subjective. On the matter of openness, few green belt settlements comprise of small scale linear/ ribbon developments, and the suggestion that settlements no longer satisfy the openness test as a result is questioned.

Removal of Tatling End, Higher Denham and in particular Denham Village from the green belt, with its often large curtilage plots, will result in significant pressure for infilling, which will have an adverse impact on not only the settlements but the open nature of the areas which have been created by their green belt location. Contrary to officers' assertions, settlements within the identified green belt are afforded more protection than those that are not.

To note, the Draft Local Plan glossary defines infilling as *'Development of new housing within existing residential areas excepting within the Green Belt sites where stricter Green Belt control policies must be complied with'*, and windfall sites are again defined as *'Sites not specifically identified in the development plan'*

It is questioned whether removal of the settlements from the green belt is really about

increasing the level of windfall development in these sensitive areas. It is noted from page 68 of the Local Plan that over the last 10 years in South Bucks the percentage of overall development coming forward as windfalls has increased from 10.8% to 24.68%. Is the release of settlements from the green belt intended to maintain/ increase this trend by changing settlements that have been protected for years beyond recognition through development?

This is feared to be the case and if correct the Council should be clear about this. If it is the case, increased windfall provision could serve to reduce the overall level of development required to take place within the green belt.

- Site Specifics

*Policy: **SP BP13***

*Support or object: **Object***

*Is it sound: **No - Not justified, not consistent with national policy***

Comment:

In addition to the Parish Council's concerns relative to Denham, Tatling End and Higher Denham being identified for removal from the green belt, the detail of policy SP BP13 is also of significant concern. All the comments raised above relative to other elements of the local plan should be considered to apply equally to this policy, whilst further specific comments are as follows.

The provision of the intended development relies upon its release from the green belt. This is considered inappropriate as it serves as a green lung helping to maintain a sense of openness and separation from the significant highway infrastructure. The development on this site would risk joining settlements as New Denham and Denham Village would only be separated by the M40 motorway.

As detailed relative to policy SP EP4 it is considered that the level of office floor space required is excessive and does not take account of changes in working practices or the ability to limit further losses in more appropriate central locations through permitted development changes to residential. As highlighted within the NPPF, high trip generating activities should be within the town centre, including offices. Regardless, this is not considered an appropriate location for such a significant level of commercial development (40% of the local plans total office requirement).

Similarly, the justification for the hotel is questioned. Will such a facility serve the proposed office development or will it fulfil a wider function to the airports and those visiting London? Again, the NPPF makes it clear that 'hotels' are considered 'Main town centre uses' and should be provided in central locations. Provision at this site will only add to the traffic problems currently being encountered in the area.

Despite assertions to the contrary, this site is not in a sustainable location and as evidenced by its proximity to the M40/ motorway network will be dominated by car usage, in conflict with the aspirations of policy DM DP9 which is seeking to reduce reliance on the car. This will put extreme pressure on the proximate network, particularly the junction onto the M40 and M25 J1A There is concern that this impact has not been fully considered.

The area around the Denham roundabout is highly congested, the M40, J1A M25, A40, A412, A413, A4020 all converge on the roundabout. These A roads are already at maximum capacity and in addition serve as relief roads on those frequent occasions when the motorways come to a standstill due to accidents or traffic jams which happens two or three times a week,

causing these roads to be used as 'rat runs'.

The building of HS2 is leading to more HGV movements and this will continue into the plan.

Quarrying in New Denham is also continuing into the plan period and this activity feeds onto the existing locally congested road network.

Regard also needs to be had to the development of the Denham Film Studios and associated increased traffic movements.

The expansion of Heathrow Airport will also impact this area, both during construction and in terms of visitor numbers.

Iver and Beaconsfield, which both abut Denham, also have large housing allocations.

The extra traffic from these developments will add to the already congested area around Denham and the intended changes would serve to push the traffic problem further into Denham.

The additional traffic from the intended office space, the 100+ bed hotel, the additional 1,450 houses in Iver and 1,600 in Beaconsfield suggests that the authority do not understand the present situation and no realistic/ extensive/ detailed mitigation measures are being proposed. Page 192-193 of the local plan provides a wish list of mitigation measures which underlines the complex requirements associated with the possible development of the site.

It is questioned whether the need for the highway improvement sought through SP BP13 (4) can be reasonably attributed solely to the proposed development of the site.

Paragraph 103 of the NPPF makes it clear that *'Significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering genuine choice of transport modes'*. The sites location at the junction of two motorways clearly illustrates the anticipated access arrangements for the proposed site. It is not in an accessible location in terms of non-road methods of transport.

With the increased vehicular activity there is significant concern about the possible increase in pollution levels in the area. Local conditions act as a concentrator and multiplier of pollutants. Denham is located in a low-lying river valley with a particularly micro climate frequently sheltered from prevailing winds. Additional development of the open areas between the A40 and M40 could be counterproductive to health.

It should be recognised that the NPPF accords significant weight to the importance of SSSI's and their protection. For example, paragraph 175 b) makes it clear that:

'Development on land within or outside a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and which is likely to have an adverse effect on it (either individually or in combination with other developments), should not normally be permitted'.

In this regard, it can be noted that the site is within close proximity to a number of SSSI's, including Mid Colne Valley, Harefield Pit, Denham Lock Wood, Fray's Farm Meadows, Old Rectory Meadows, Kings Cup Meadow and Oldhouse Wood. From reference to the associated Natural England consultation zones it can be noted that this proximity will necessitate detailed dialogue with NE. The trigger for referral in one of the zones is noted to relate to all non-residential developments of over 1,000sqm, as is the case here. The full impact on the SSSI's has not been adequately explored.

Given the above, although the release of the site might appeal as an easy win, it is clear that it is entirely inappropriate and will have a range of adverse effects on the local community and wider area, including the highway network. As such it should be removed from the local plan proposals.

We hope that the above is of use and assists the Local Plan Inspector in deciding which issues are to be explored at the pending examination and which parties should be given the opportunity to address him/ her. To avoid confusion, Denham Parish Council consider that given the concerns raised, and the fact that the Parish Council represents an extensive community, it should be given the opportunity to appear at the examination. Appreciating this, the Inspector must first consider whether it is appropriate for the local plan to progress given the pending creation of the Unitary Council for Buckinghamshire, which will inevitably necessitate an early overall policy review for the entirety of the enlarged area.

In the meantime, should there be any queries associated with the above, or officers would like to explore how amendments might be possible please feel free to contact me.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'M. Heath', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Marilyn Heath
Chairman - Denham Parish Council
Email: marilynheath@denhambucks-pc.gov.uk

Clerk

From: London Green Belt Council <londongbelt@aol.co.uk>
Sent: 03 July 2019 16:09
To: londongbelt@aol.co.uk
Subject: Press release on Green Belt and climate change

Categories: Planning

Dear member

Please see below for information on a press release that went out this week.

Hilary Livesey
Administrator
London Green Belt Council

NEWS RELEASE
1st July 2019: Release time immediate

LOCAL AUTHORITIES ARE URGED TO PROTECT GREEN SPACES TO MITIGATE CLIMATE CHANGE

Local authorities in London and the Home Counties which have declared a 'Climate Emergency' in their districts, and which propose to adopt strategies and action plans to tackle climate change, are being urged to include policies of stronger protection for green spaces in their plans, as these provide vital climate change mitigation.

The London Green Belt Council (LGBC), which represents over 100 environmental and community groups across the region, warns that some local councils are being inconsistent by declaring a Climate Emergency but failing to prevent development on Green Belt countryside and open spaces which provide vital mitigation for climate change. Some of these local authorities are even putting forward large swathes of Green Belt land for housebuilding despite their professed commitment to environmental protection.

LGBC Chair Richard Knox-Johnston says: "The Green Belt is a vital green lung for people in London and the wider South East. By protecting green spaces it is making a hugely important contribution to people's health and well-being as well as maintaining essential eco-systems and providing wildlife corridors.

"Green spaces help to mitigate climate change because carbon is absorbed by vegetation and held long-term in soils emissions. They also help us adapt to climate change by absorbing rainwater and cooling our towns and cities. The more green space we lose, the more we are at risk from flooding and rising temperatures, two of the predicted effects of climate change.

"District and borough councils are absolutely right to recognise the seriousness of climate change and to acknowledge the role that local government can play in tackling the climate crisis, but if they do not also pledge to defend the Green Belt and countryside from development then they are failing in their duty to protect our communities and environment."

The LGBC is calling on all local authorities to state categorically that climate change mitigation requires the protection of Green Belt countryside and open spaces, and to agree to block developers' proposals for building on Green Belt land. This is especially important, the LGBC points out, at a time when London itself needs to become more resilient to climate emergencies which means it needs to have plenty of green spaces around it.

Mr Knox-Johnston adds: "Giving up Green Belt to development is an easy answer to the housing shortage but actually it does nothing to improve the affordability of housing - all it does is leave communities with less greenspace. In fact, there has never been a greater need to protect the Green Belt from development."

The LGBC is currently working with a wide range of partner organisations to produce a consultation paper setting out "A Vision for the Future of London's Green Belt". This emphasises the Green Belt's value for health and well-being, biodiversity and environmental sustainability, and its crucial importance to the fight against climate change.

For further information on the work of the LGBC, go to www.londongreenbeltcouncil.org.uk

-ENDS

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The London Green Belt Council is a grouping of more than 100 organisations with a concern for the Green Belt around London.

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