

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL
COUNCIL MEETING – 10 APRIL 2017

QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

Notice of the following questions has been received:-

1. Question from Will Davis

"The Local Plan is now almost three years behind schedule according to the Councils own timeline set out in 2012. The councils own figures show just under 3.5 thousand responses were submitted the 2012 consultation on the subject. The 2015 consultation later yielded almost 5.5 thousand responses. But, you now state that the 2016 consultation attracted only 2,191 responses to the draft Local Plan, well under half the number for 2015. The figures speak for themselves, clearly not enough has been done to engage local residents in this process, as I've been saying for some years now. You also state there were only 1,245 individuals and groups submitting all those responses in 2016. This represents barely one percent of the boroughs population. Does such a paltry figure demonstrate community involvement in the process?

Personally I don't think so. Your new appendices documents are also telling. In them you address every set of objections raised by that one per cent. Your written response to each objection ends with just two words: No Change. I counted 'No Change' repeated 811 times throughout the appendices, by comparison I saw not a single instance of 'will change' or 'change'. How can this be remotely described as listening to local communities? You achieve a very poor one per cent response rate, you then you go on to dismiss practically every one of those responses.

I would really like to hear how you justify all of this? No doubt you will vote tonight to carry on regardless, and agree to submit this flawed Local Plan to the Independent Inspector anyway. On the grounds that it's so overdue now, that you have to submit something, with collective fingers crossed. Is there anything you can say to stop me feeling that most of the borough's residents have been short-changed all along in this process? Ultimately it's us who will pay the price for this plan, long after most of the decision makers here have moved on or retired."

2. Question from Tom Darwall-Smith

"In carrying out sustainability appraisal the law requires the Council to take into account the objectives of the local plan, which include maintaining the existing settlement pattern by directing new development to the main towns and limited development to the excluded villages. A new village at Symondshyde is clearly contrary to this objective as although it is classified as an excluded village the allocation of 1,130 new homes and its recognition as a strategic site cannot reasonably constitute limited development.

The law also requires that the sustainability appraisal assesses reasonable alternatives to any proposed allocation. Tables 6.15 and 6.16 of the sustainability appraisal assesses the proposed HAT1 allocation against its reasonable alternatives in and around Hatfield being sites HAT2, 5, 11, 19 and HS12. However, even though the sustainability appraisal states that these sites in and around Hatfield could be also considered as reasonable alternatives to Symondshyde no direct assessment between Symondshyde and these sites was undertaken, which is unlawful.

You will be aware that the Housing and Planning Panel is divided on whether the plan is ready for submission and even some, if not all, of those that support its submission say its 'the least bad position' and recognise the strength of local feeling that late changes to the plan are being rushed through.

Of course, much of the pressure to submit the plan for examination has come from the threat of the Secretary of State to intervene in delayed plan making, however, this is ill founded as the Planning Minister issued a statement on 16 March that the Government is highly unlikely to intervene in plan making until the revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework are in place.

Consequently, the Council does not need to act in such haste and I ask whether it would be better for the Council to delay the submission of the local plan and reconsult on modifications that properly assess the suitability of Symondshyde against other already identified alternatives, including HAT2, which incidentally could also accommodate a secondary school and this must be taken into account"?