

**Berkhamsted Residents' Action Group**

**Statements  
to the  
Independent Examination  
into  
Dacorum Borough Council  
Core Strategy**

**18 September 2012**

## **Issue 1 – Basis for the Overall Strategy**

BRAG agrees with the overall strategy in broad terms and considers that the socio-economic and environmental characteristics of the area have, on the whole, been soundly assessed.

Though BRAG disagrees with some specific points/conclusions and believes the Core Strategy could be strengthened with a few minor changes, it is clear from the supporting documents that the overall strategy is based on a sound assessment of the socio-economic and environmental characteristics.

BRAG represents the residents of Berkhamsted and the main worry within the community revolves around a strained infrastructure, in particular water management. It is worrying that DBC simply accept the utility companies' assertion that they can provide capacity, when all objective and anecdotal evidence suggest that they are already failing to cope adequately. An article in the RICS Commercial Property Journal (September-October 2012) states "The South East of England has less water available per person than the Sudan and less than most European countries." (Waterwise 2009). However, BRAG accepts that this is a regional problem that will have to be addressed if there is to be any growth at all in Dacorum.

Setting aside our concerns as to whether the utility companies can cope with growth (see Issue 4), then BRAG believes only a few minor changes are required for the impacts of the proposals to be properly addressed, while providing an appropriate balance between building new homes and safeguarding the quality of life of existing residents.

BRAG refers to the evidence in our earlier response to the Core Strategy, in particular it's responses to paragraphs 1.4, 1.8, 1.13, 1.17,1.18, 1.21, 3.2, 3.5, 3.12, 3.15, 3.21, 3.22, 5.2, 8.7, 8.8, and 8.9 Table 1.

While many of those specific points will be discussed in more detail within other Issues, they indicate that DBC has taken a broadly holistic approach that correctly attempts to balance the need for housing growth with the needs of existing residents, taking into account environmental constraints along with local economy and regeneration targets.

Hemel Hempstead as a Mark 1 New Town with significant employment opportunities is the appropriate place for the main development and change over the next two decades.

Berkhamsted on the other hand is a compact, valley market town with considerable character and history. It has evolved from Roman times at a steady pace. At the heart of the town is a mixed economy of commerce, retail and leisure with national and independent traders and occupiers.

Light industrial employment remains but in recent years industry at Coopers and at Stag Lane have closed and the resulting brownfield sites have been redeveloped with residential property. Attempts to draw retail away from the town centre have been resisted.

There has been a decline in employment space – between 2001 and 2012, 24,000 sq. m. of A2 and B2 space has been converted to residential use. The growth in population over recent years has in general been carefully managed and new residents have been welcomed and absorbed into the town.

However this growth has also placed a considerable strain on the town's infrastructure. Environmental characteristics are especially important when planning further growth in Berkhamsted.

The Core Strategy is sound and justified in protecting the green swathe between the town and the A41 and in limiting further development on the ridge tops. The steep valley sides on either side of the central town, with its main road, canal and river, lead to considerable reliance on car transport for work, shopping and leisure use – walking and cycling are very limited.

BRAG emphasises the need to protect the openness of the ridge tops and the Green Belt surrounding Berkhamsted from additional growth if the quality of life for existing and future residents is not to be sacrificed and supports MC82 strengthening paragraph 21.6.

Furthermore BRAG believes this is fully in line with the Government's commitment for the protection of the Green Belt in the NPPF.

Having broadly recognised the varying needs and characteristics of different settlements within the region, DBC have quite rightly resisted pressure to develop a purely demand led strategy as promoted by many land owners and developers, who offer misleading arguments simply with the aim to maximise profits rather than promoting a balanced strategy.

By way of a specific example, plans by Grand Union Investments (GUI) to add significantly to the size of Berkhamsted by developing Green Belt land south of the town are strongly rejected by BRAG.

Unlike the Core Strategy, the GUI master plan is not based on a sound assessment of socio-economic and environmental characteristics, and completely flies in the face of the principal of protecting the Green Belt.

In common with many developers they promote a (faux) village feel with shops and amenities, but previous attempts to provide shops away from Berkhamsted centre have failed. There is every reason to believe such so called benefits would in fact actually end up a drain on the community.

There is nothing offered in their plans that would enhance the quality of life for residents, in fact it is entirely the reverse. See Appendix 1 for a photograph showing views of Green Belt land in South Berkhamsted.

GUI is a joint-venture between Patron Capital Partners (which describes itself as "a leading opportunistic real estate manager") and City & Provincial Properties (which says it "seeks to

maximise value through the planning process....resulting in major consents being obtained on brown field and green field sites”).

The Government have been promoting the importance of local involvement in developing sustainable and deliverable plans for housing growth. Neither of the partners in GUI can be described as local, having any local support or as having any useful local knowledge.

BRAG believes that from a Berkhamsted residents’ perspective, Dacorum’s overall strategy is broadly sound and requires only minor adjustments.

**Appendix 1**

Picture 1 – Ashlyns Hall and its Setting as Viewed from Swing Gate Lane



**Appendix 1**

Picture 2 – South Berkhamsted from Bullbeggars Lane

