

Response to Proposal to Develop the Sunnybank School site, Potters Bar

13th April 2014. Sent by e-mail to local.plan@hertsmere.gov.uk, marked for the attention of Mr M Wilson.

1. Introduction.

This paper has been **produced by Angela Passant on behalf of interested residents** of Field View Road and the surrounding area as a result of meeting with Matthew Wilson, Senior Planning Officer, Hertsmere Borough Council (HBC) at the drop-in session at Wylyotts Centre on 3rd April 2014 and reviewed the associated development proposals for the Sunnybank School site.

It should be noted that consultation is at a very early stage and no details were available to residents other than the Hertsmere Local Plan from the HBC Planning Policy Document.

The aim of the paper is to

- Set out our understanding of the conversation that took place today between some residents and Mr Wilson and his female colleague in relation to the proposal to build dwellings on the land known as Sunnybank School, which is currently part of the Green Belt and which, according to Mr Wilson, would require a re-drawing of the Green Belt map in order to permit such a development. (Note 4.49 (b) of the SADM dated March 2014 which states that the whole site has **already been removed from the green belt.**)
- Provide HBC Councillors and officers with an understanding of the issues that residents believe are vital to retaining the environment of the immediate surrounding area
- Identify changes in relevant circumstances, such as demographic changes since 2006 which may provide additional opportunities for the Council to deliver the aspirations set out in the Council's Core Strategy and SADM (March 2014) up to 2027.

Information has been also been taken from The Hertsmere Local Plan published in March 2014 together with documents on the following website link:-

<http://www.hertsmere.gov.uk/Documents/09-Planning--Building-Control/Planning-Policy/Local-Development-Framework/SHLAA-Site-assessment-Potters-Bar.pdf>

This paper confines itself to that proposal (no. S47) in the Hertsmere Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment and provides a response in respect to the viability of the HBC proposal, together with the environmental, social and financial impact on residents within Field View Road and the surrounding area.

This response also notes the provisions of the Site Allocation and Development Management Policies, in particular those relating to section 1.23.

2. Main Comments and Response to HBC

It is evident that the increasing population and popularity of the area is leading to a demand for additional housing in Potters Bar and this is putting pressure on all vacant lots and green spaces that could be developed, however, it is believed by residents that this will also put an intolerable burden on the community, both collectively and individually, who will be impacted by these significant changes and further reduce the ability of educational and other services to maintain a suitable level of supply up to 2027.

The residents of Field View Road and the surrounding area believe that, in order to provide the necessary evidence on which such a change of use of the Sunnybank School site should be undertaken, the following data should be collected and assessed:

2.1. A review of the demographic changes that have occurred on the Sunnybank estate and surrounding roads to the west of Mutton Lane are extrapolated to show, over the next 10 years sufficient evidence to confirm there is no need for the refurbishment of the Sunnybank School to provide more infant and junior school places as demand rises. **This data and any proposals for managing the effect of the results should be shared with residents:**

2.2. A full traffic survey of the Sunnybank estate and surrounding area to demonstrate the impact of both the demolition and re-building works on the school site together with the day-to-day increase in traffic pertaining to the new build. **This survey should be shared with residents:**

2.3. In order to ensure that there is a proper flow of water, waste and an adequate supply of gas, electricity and other services, an utilities impact assessment should be carried out. In addition, connection to existing utilities will potentially require Field View Road to be dug up causing further disruption, further impeding the accessibility and flow of traffic. **The results of the assessment together with proposals to manage any deficit, should be shared with residents:**

2.3. Further consultation exercises should take place over a longer time to maximize the involvement of all residents

The residents believe it is within the ability of the Councils, both at County and Borough level, to protect and maintain the pleasant and sustainable environment in which Field View residents and others currently live by giving careful **consideration and acting upon** the following comments.

2.4. Access and Egress to the site

All current means of access and egress are through narrow roads, with access for only two-way smaller vehicles such as domestic cars and delivery vans. Larger lorries find the road difficult to access and cannot turn without encroaching on the green verges and footpaths. Experience of residents being woken regularly at 5.30 a.m. by heavy lorries with flashing yellow lights accessing the school site indicates clearly that life for residents during any development of the site will be intolerable. This is likely to include the queues of heavy delivery vehicles along Field View Road as contractors wait to enter the site. This would result in blocking the road for domestic and emergency vehicles. It is also possible that HCC as land owners may wish to demolish the school buildings before sale, thus extending considerably any noise, dirt, heavy traffic and other negative experiences. **The negative impact on residents in terms of disruption and well-being cannot be overestimated.**

It will be necessary for safety and domestic reasons to ensure that alternative routes are identified throughout the Sunnybank estate and surrounding area for appropriate access and egress

Vehicular access standards require that an increase of 5% of traffic (and this should include longer term disruption during any development/demolition) must trigger an impact assessment.

2.5. Impact on the environment (see paragraph 5.1)

This will require a thorough assessment including air quality, the loss of natural drainage through the field/verges and any other elements as set out by the Environment Agency and similar organisations.

2.6. Additional demand for utilities

Extra demand on the current water, electricity, gas and other services such as telephone and cables lines will require significant investment as demand increases. Sewerage and other utility services together with drainage outlets are already under considerable strain due to the haphazard building between 1952 and 1959 of dwellings in Field View Road and other nearby roads across several years and by different builders. An additional 43 dwellings will require an upgrading of all underground services including new/additional utilities and services to avoid an increase in blockages and flooding both to private properties and the roads and footpaths.

Residents already have concerns regarding the current levels of usage for existing residents without the additional demand incurred by a new development.

2.7. The site suitability assessment

Some elements on which this document has been based are factually incorrect and this inaccuracy requires an updated review

3. Background

It is important to understand the background to this meeting and some of the limitations that been identified during the discussions that took place.

The drop-in session was the last of five organised by HBC as part of the initial consultation with local residents. This session covered several proposals to build dwellings that would contribute to meeting the target of four thousand dwellings that HBC are required to build over the next ten years. The plots were identified after consultation with land-owners throughout HBC and included Hertfordshire County Council that owns the land that was previously Sunnybank School, Field View Road, Potters Bar.

The relevant timetable is shown below, dates of which may be approximate, as is understandable at this very early stage, however, it is important to act as early as possible and take advantage of any local information or data that will add to any response made to HBC.

- Initial drop-in session at Wyllyotts Centre - 3rd April 2014
- Responses/Comments must be received by HBC **by 14th April**
- Comments to be considered by HBC Planning Officers during August/September
- Second round of consultation and drop-in meetings during Autumn, 2014.
- Planning Inspectorate will review HBC's proposals and mount any challenges at the end of 2014/early 2015.

4. HBC's Proposal

It is **proposed to build forty three (43) dwellings** on the site of the former Sunnybank School that is currently partly being used as a centre for students who have been excluded from other schools. It is understand that currently only between five and ten students attend this facility. The infants' block is currently being used for a Key Stage 3 Centre and has been refurbished at an estimated cost of £950,000. (Source Cabinet paper dated 16th May 2012). A further £212,000 was spent to make the site secure. Having been faced with the failure to utilise the main building for excluded pupils, HCC now considers the site as available for **development within five years**.

In line with HCC's own targets, out of the forty three dwellings, HCC would be aiming to provide **35% of affordable housing**. Mr Wilson was unable to confirm the likely mix of houses/flats due to the very early stage of consultation, however, H9 of SADM1 suggests that the dwellings would be a mix of semi and detached properties, leaving 1.4 hectares as green public space. He stated that no plans had been produced, however, advised me that if the developer felt that 35% affordable housing would not be financially viable, the developer could propose a lower proportion of affordable housing which would require negotiation with HBC Planning Department.

There are several **key errors, omissions and assumptions** made within the initial proposal that require correction as shown below:-

- Site suitability includes the proximity of a GP surgery – Annandale surgery is closing in May 2014 and relocating to a new facility opposite the Potters Bar Bus garage on the High Street, some two miles from the school site.

- It is stated that the No. 84 bus is 'within five minutes walking distance'. The comment does not include where the nearest bus stop is located, but the timetable for the No.84 bus shows three stops in Potters Bar, the closest to Sunnybank being the Potters Bar train station. It takes a very fit young person ten minutes of brisk walking to reach this point.
- A resident spoke to Mr Wilson's female colleague later on 3rd April and was told that Field View Road would be the main access and egress point to the site and the whole of the site, including the green field, is likely to be developed. This would entail including the whole site as outside the green belt land and is at odds with the statement on the Land Availability Assessment where it stands that for sixty nine dwellings 'Only 1.84 hectares proposed for development by site owner'. Since the agreed number of dwellings has been reduced to forty-three and the total area of the site is 2.84 hectares (Source Cabinet papers 16th May 2011) it would appear that over one hectare would remain undeveloped. Although this has been set out within the SADM document at H9 of SADM1, this matter requires further undertakings from HBC to avoid further erosion of green spaces and development of that area in the future.
- There is no mention of the impact of additional traffic and accessibility to the site. There is no direct bus route through Sunnybank and surrounding roads including Field View Road, placing additional pressure on access and egress as any further development is likely to result in increasing demand to use personal vehicles. This raises a number of key concerns including the increasing 'bottleneck' at Daleside to that which is currently experienced. At peak hours and during school runs, access and egress using the mini 'dual carriageway' which is Daleside, is problematic to say the least, with long queues in Baker Street and surrounding local roads. A full assessment of the impact against vehicular access standards should be carried out as this may render this development unsuitable. (See HBC Corp Priority 2009/2013)
- No mention is made to the situation regarding Cranborne School, which is the nearest infants and junior school to the Sunnybank estate and is over a mile by foot or car. Currently the demand for school spaces since the closure of Sunnybank School has meant the building of temporary and some permanent buildings on the Cranborne site that is annually flooded to a greater extent during periods of medium to heavy rain. Meteorological forecasts suggest that there will be increasing rainfall in the future and therefore an increasing likelihood of continued flooding on the Cranborne School site. Consideration should, therefore, be given to the re-instatement of the infant and junior schools at Sunnybank school site since £950,000 has already been spent in refurbishing the infants' block.

5. Probable Impact of Proposed Development on Residents of Field View Road

While it is acknowledged that the Sunnybank School site is currently under-utilised, it would appear that, regrettably, the residents of Field View Road and surrounding roads will pay a high personal price for the apparent mismanagement of the site of the former Sunnybank School.

Whilst it would appear that the proposals in H9 of SADM1 appear reasonable and would provide a large area of green field to be safe-guarded, it is also noted that the whole site has been removed from the green belt and therefore is vulnerable to development at a later stage. This would significantly damage the environment and well being of the residents and requires further re-assurances on this point.

The residents have identified that the key negative impact on them are :-

5.1. Environmental (see 1.23 and 2.6 of SADM)

The name of the road implies the nature of the environment in which the residents have expressly chosen to live. The sight of the green field adds considerably to the peace and quiet residents enjoy and the lack of through traffic together with trees and grassed areas adds to the country feel of the locality. Wild life

enjoys the proximity of the open field, which, if developed as a local park amenity, could be used by dog-walkers and those currently having to run on the roads around the area to keep fit.

The required improved access to the development, including years of disruption due to building works, will impact badly on the environment. An environmental impact assessment is required to fully take into account any changes to this special area.

5.2. Social

Residents of Field View Road and surrounding area benefit from a genuine sense of community and feel that they live within a safe, supportive and close-knit environment. The activities of dog-walkers and those using the immediate area for leisure activities such as jogging and walking will be at risk with additional traffic and the potential loss of green spaces. (See 4.22 and 4.7 of SADM)

In order to help continue to foster this sense of community, would the Council also include other amenities on the Sunnybank site to support a growth in population of forty three households of between two and four people? Consideration should be given to a local community centre, small shop, a park and the reinstatement of a bus service.

5.3. Financial

The uncertainty over the use of the Sunnybank site over the past eight years has impacted on property values and this proposal only prolongs this sense of uncertainty. Many residents have invested significantly in refurbishing their homes. The cost of the bungalows reflect the quiet environment and the immediate access to green spaces and there is a fear that there will be a reduction in the value of any properties in the surrounding area should plans be agreed that will create denser dwelling places, more traffic and additional pollution during the period of demolition/build.

5.4. Utilities/Services (60 years old)

These are currently under considerable strain and will not be able to support the demand from further housing. A fully costed review of independent services will be needed.

6. Additional Cost of Reparations to Residents and Remedial Work

It is likely that, as the full impact of any development is being planned, additional costs relating to the mitigation of a negative impact on residents should be factored in to the sale price of the plot that has been identified as fit for development, namely, such as the cost of

- Deliveries and collections falling within those times controlled by The Control of Pollution Act, 1974

General construction work should be restricted to the following hours:

Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm

Saturdays 8am to 1pm

Noisy work prohibited on Sundays/Bank Holidays.

Examples of noisy activities include: : using hand tools - hammers and saws, using power tools - hand-held tools including drills, saws and sanders: using plant equipment - such as Kango hammers, pneumatic hammers, cement mixers, large power saws, planers, compressors and generators: pile-driving, erecting and dismantling of scaffolding:

- Full and robust enforcement by HBC and HCC of the above statutory requirements to protect the residents of Sunnybank estate
- A significant reduction of Council Tax for each of the dwellings likely to be affected by the development
- the restoration/improvement of the appearance/safety of the roads, lighting, pavements and any greensward/trees which are currently well below expected standards and aspirations of the Council set out within SADM
- provision of community amenities as set out in paragraph 5.2

This response is supported by the residents shown on the documents to be forwarded by separate e-mail on 14th April 2014 and each will require an individual opportunity to comment further during all future stages of consultation, design, planning, demolition and construction.