

Hilton Parish Council (HPC) – 12th January 2018

Ref: Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 – Proposed Submission

This representation was discussed in a public meeting held on 16th January 2018 and was voted unanimously in favour of its submission to Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC) by Hilton Parish Council.

Representation:

Hilton Parish Council (HPC) submitted a detailed response to the Consultation Draft of this document, Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036, on the 21st August 2017. Since then we have received a revised version of the Local Plan to 2036, referred to as the Proposed Submission, which Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC) will seek to adopt.

This representation addresses the material differences between the Consultation Draft and this latest Proposed Submission version of the Local plan to 2036 and determines the new draft is no longer sound. Specifically policies which directly affect the village parish of Hilton, both in terms of the scope for future development within the village or development which would directly affect the village such as surrounding infrastructure, large developments nearby, traffic policy etc.

LP1 Amount of development

The policy states: *"In Huntingdonshire in the period 2011-2036 provision will be made for at least 20,100 new homes (both market and affordable), and approximately 14,400 additional jobs"*.

To put this into context there are approximately 70,000 households in Huntingdonshire, (CCCRG Estimate 2009). St Neots has approximately 12,000 households. Residents are already experiencing the effects of development and the pressure this applies to local infrastructure and services.

HPC acknowledge that the number of new houses required is a result of national pressures; however we do look to Huntingdon District Council (HDC) to ensure the development in services and infrastructure will keep pace, especially in regards to the increase in traffic.

LP2 Strategy for Development

The policy states *"Approximately a quarter of the objectively assessed need for housing, together with a limited amount of employment growth, will be permitted on sites dispersed across the key service centres, local service centres and **small settlements** to support the vitality of these communities and provide flexibility and diversity in the housing supply"*.

Including Small Settlements in this group is new and indicates a change in thinking by HDC. It appears for the first time that HDC are making provision in new planning policy to expand Small Settlements despite making clear in previous drafts that this would not be supported.

Previous drafts have stressed the importance of concentrating new sustainable development in Spatial Planning Areas and Key Service Centres, where there is the potential to provide, the most comprehensive range of services and facilities and not expand small settlements which would result in more journeys. This seemed eminently sensible and had the support of HPC.

LP8 Key Service Centres

Fenstanton has been identified as a key service centre and as such housing development would be supported. The policy states *“A proposal for development on land well-related to the built-up area may be supported where it accords with the specific opportunities allowed for through other policies of this plan”*. There is no definition in the Local Plan as what well-related means. As Hilton is close by to Fenstanton could Hilton be considered well-related?

LP10 Small Settlements

The new version of this policy indicates a change in tone and appears to acknowledge housing development in small settlements may be beneficial. Gone is the line from the policy *“small settlements have a limited role in delivering sustainable development”* replaced by a number of paragraphs in the reasoning section outlining *“the potential benefits of promoting some growth within Small Settlements”*.

There are now only three criteria limiting the level of development:

- a. *level of service and infrastructure provision within the settlement;*
- b. *opportunities for users of the proposed development to access everyday services and facilities by sustainable modes of travel including walking, cycling and public transport;*
- c. *effect on the character of the immediate locality and the settlement as a whole*

In the ‘reasoning’ section the statement does not give a specific definition as to what level of service, facilities or infrastructure would be required for development to be acceptable. There is no specific guidance for planning other than to say each site application will be judged on its merit, vis-a-vis the above criteria. This guidance is now subjective and open to interpretation and could have adverse effect on all small settlements in Huntingdonshire.

LP11 The Countryside

The policy undertakes to *“protect the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside”* but then goes on to say *“avoiding the irreversible loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land(Grade1to3a) where possible”*. The expression *where possible* is vague and open to differing interpretations of when is possible or not. If the objective was to truly protect the countryside and the rural economy the expectation would be that all productive agricultural land would be protected from development.

Conclusion

The original principle of concentrating housing development in locations which provide the greatest potential for a comprehensive range of services is valid and the latest draft still supports this. However there is a softening in the guidance in respect to Small Settlements which indicates HDC are prepared to support development under certain, much more subjective, conditions. Considering this change of tone together with the recent Housing & Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA), it is hard not to come to the conclusion that in order for CCC/HDC to meet its national housing targets it is casting the net wider for suitable sites which now includes Small Settlements.

This would be a mistake and we urge HDC to adhere to its original principles in the allocation of sustainable development sites.

For these reasons Hilton Parish Council does not support this latest version of the Local Plan to 2036 as it is no longer sound. We formally object to these changes and ask for this representation to be presented to the inspector.

END