



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Stevenage Borough Council Local Plan 2011 – 2031
Stage 3 Statement

The Inspector is aware that I have objected to this plan on several grounds and at every stage of the process on behalf of my constituents. I will reiterate that there is no support for this plan amongst the local community and many organisations have also registered a variety of objections.

I would like the Inspector to take into consideration my previous submissions and will not repeat the comments made in them. I have made them available on my website for my constituents who feel they are being ignored by this process, due to SBC's desire to force through an undeliverable local plan.

Deliverability is the key test for any local plan and SBC's local plan fails this test on a variety of fronts in the following key areas:

Employment land - The plan does not provide for enough employment land and is reliant upon North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) and Central Bedfordshire. Welwyn and Hatfield Borough Council have withdrawn their offer of any employment land and objected to a variety of measures in the Stage 2 hearings. NHDC have not submitted their local plan to the Secretary of State for consideration yet, but SBC are reliant upon them to deliver the shortfall in employment land. Central Bedfordshire have been muted as an option if NHDC fall short, but they have now paused their process. In fact they have stated on their website:

"We are temporarily holding fire on the process of publishing our draft local plan for consultation.

Originally we had planned to launch this in January 2017 but the Government's long-awaited Housing White Paper is now expected to be published during the same timeframe, so we are holding back the publication of our draft plan to allow us to consider its implications.

Whilst we cannot be certain what these implications might be for Central Bedfordshire, we do recognise that there is the potential for significant changes



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

in relation to the housing numbers we are anticipating and in terms of our responsibilities in relation to developing local plans.

In this context, we have concluded (as have other local authorities across the UK) that it would be inappropriate to continue with planned publication of our draft Local Plan in January 2017."

Central Bedfordshire have to help resolve Luton's housing and employment needs before Stevenage's. Consequently, there is no evidence that the shortfall in employment land will be made up for in other areas. It is an aspiration, not a fact.

Town centre - The vehicle that SBC are relying upon to deliver town centre regeneration is called Stevenage First Central Framework. Their ridiculous plans to move the train station, close Lytton Way, demolish the Gordon Craig Theatre and build 1300 flats on the Leisure park have failed and been rejected by the Government. The Government has announced £19million funding on 9th February 2017 to help drive the regeneration of Stevenage town centre, but this money has not been allocated and comes with several conditions. Kris Kranowski, a senior civil servant at the Department for Communities and Local Government outlined these conditions to the Local Economic Partnership in a letter, which SBC should provide the Inspector with a copy of, as follows:

"Delivery Capacity – *The regeneration of Stevenage Station is a large and complex project, with significant risks associated with cost or time overruns which could have wider impacts on the transport network. We are not sufficiently reassured that either the LEP or the Stevenage First Partnership has the capacity in place to deliver this project.*

Governance – *We agree that creating a new, independent body to lead the regeneration of the town offers considerable advantages, both in terms of greater transparency and creating delivery capacity. Consequently we will make any Local Growth Fund allocation to the regeneration of Stevenage conditional on the creation of a suitably robust governance structure to oversee it. This structure must be approved by DCLG Ministers and comply with the following conditions:*



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

- *The organisation is not a continuation of the existing Stevenage First group, but an independent new structure. This body must have an independent chair, recruited in consultation with Government, through an open, competitive process.*
- *The new structure includes stronger political representation, including the local MP.*
- *The new structure includes a stronger business voice, with representation from local employers."*

Consequently, despite SBC continually misleading the Inspector, the reality is that a new organisation has to be created, which can then apply for the £19million. However, the key point is that this new organisation will be responsible for their own regeneration plans and myself and local employers will insist they include the shops and oppose any plans to relocate the library or build new councils offices as outlined by SBC in their Stage 2 statement.

Over 3,000 of the 7,600 homes in the local plan are dependent on the town centre development and the current plans in front of the Inspector are not deliverable, not funded, and do not have mine, the local community's or the Government's support.

I have demonstrated throughout the local plan process that SBC's local plan relies heavily on transport infrastructure delivery, but has no access to adequate funding and this means a large majority of SBC's S-Paramics Model Forecasting Report is now inaccurate.

SBC have consistently failed to provide evidence of any committed funding sources and once again focus on aspirations rather than deliverable facts.

Green Belt - The much loved Forster Country is being lost as SBC plan to remove 90 hectares (roughly equates to 90 Twickenham sized rugby pitches) and 35% of our current Green Belt. There is no evidence of the necessary exceptional circumstances required for this amount of building on the Green Belt. SBC have consistently under-delivered when it comes to meeting housing need and due to their incompetence cannot meet the required 5 year land supply without building on this Green Belt.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Government has consistently stated housing need alone is not enough to qualify for exceptional circumstances and other brownfield sites such as the Icon Building are available. The landowners confirm the site was vacated fully in early November 2016 and they plan to build over 500 flats on the land as soon as possible.

Affordable housing - The Housing White Paper makes it clear that 10% of all homes on individual sites are affordable home ownership products in paragraph A.126. Paragraphs A.124 and A.130 make it clear this will be placed on a statutory footing and developer contributions will be reformed with an announcement at the Autumn Budget 2017.

SBC have provided no evidence they can meet the affordable housing need and the current plan proposes almost no affordable housing in the town centre. Consequently, this will push the need for additional affordable housing onto the Green Belt sites, which makes them less economically viable for developers.

Delivery & Monitoring - The deliverability of sites on an ongoing basis is going to become central to any local plan this year. The Housing White paper announced a new Housing Delivery Test and the first assessment period will be for financial years April 2014/2015 to April 2016/2017, as stated in paragraph 2.47. SBC already have to plan for a 20% buffer due to their history of under-delivery and paragraph 2.51 makes clear that Green Belt development will still be restricted if the presumption in favour of sustainable development is triggered.

In conclusion, it is clear that SBC have failed to provide the evidence required to demonstrate they can deliver many of the sites outlined in the local plan. The loss of a wide range of community facilities and Green Belt due to a history of under-delivery and incompetence by SBC is not acceptable. The local plan is incredibly constrained by having no flexibility and relying on a small number of large sites, many of which are not deliverable.

Stephen McPartland
Member of Parliament for Stevenage

3 March 2017