

Stevenage Local Plan Statement : Stage 3

Statement from Graveley Parish Council

Matter 16- Housing Site Allocations

Policy HO3-North of Stevenage

Question 6- Would it give rise to any Highway Safety Issues or traffic congestion that could not be mitigated?

Statement by Jack Rigg, Chair, Graveley Parish Council

Graveley Parish Council considers development of HO3 to be unsustainable due current traffic congestion and that which will arise from the development proposed under Stevenage's Local Plan, which will be further accentuated by development proposed by North Herts, both for the site adjacent to HO3 but also the significant development in Baldock / Letchworth and Royston.

Background:

1. Road access to Stevenage from the north is via two main routes, the A1(M) at junction 8 and the B197 through Graveley. Both routes are currently subject to heavy traffic congestion and delays at peak times.

2. Reflective of the above ORD5 identified 20 locations requiring some form of mitigation on a Do Minimum & Do Something basis (Table 4.3 page 16).

Included within those locations identified are

HM1: A1M J9 / Letchworth Gate / A505

HM2 A1M J8 / A602*

HM18 A602 / Corey's Mill lane*

HM20 B197 Graveley Road / North Road*

3. Additionally in *Odyessey Markides's Technical Note: North Herts: Local Plan Transport Technical Review dated 23/9/16 (Examination Library T19)*, noted the Graveley Lane / B197 junction was identified in 2015 as being a congestion Hotspot by Herts County Council under its COMET Strategic Traffic Model (paragraphs 3.28 and 3.29, pages 15 & 16, see Appendix 1).

4. In commenting on the asterisked locations in 2 above, the North Herts Infrastructure Delivery Plan in paragraph 5.105, page 47 (Examination Library T20) states "It should be further noted that the requirement for many of these schemes is triggered by background growth in traffic levels alone" (extract detailed in Appendix 2).

Indeed increasing road congestion is such that major improvements to the road network are required to cater for existing traffic volumes let alone any increase resulting from Local Plans proposed by Stevenage and NHDC.

Similarly for the Graveley Lane/ B197 junction noted in 3 above improvements will be needed to accommodate increasing existing traffic flows.

5. Modelling of the district's road network has focused on the A1 (M) and major Principal (A) roads. Planners have not adequately recognised the importance of the B road network in relieving heavy congestion pressures on the principle roads and the A1 (M) in particular. Both the B197 and the B656 serve as alternates to the A1 (M) and are classified as such by Herts Highways, with the villages of Graveley to the north of Stevenage and Knebworth to the south of Stevenage for the B197 and Codicote on the B656 being pinch points for traffic at peak travel times and suffering a constant stream of traffic at other times.

6. The Times (8th February 2017, see Appendix 3) reports that due to an £800 million funding gap in the government's road building programme proposed upgrades to a number of projects including that proposed for the A1 (M) between junctions 6 and 8 may be postponed or cancelled altogether.

If this proves to be the case not only may it result in a further increase the heavy traffic congestion experienced on the district's A and B road network but may also bring into question the level of proposed development under Stevenage and North Herts Local Plans as improvements to the A1 (M) were seen as a prerequisite to the scale of development proposed.

Comment.

8. The proposed development HO3 is located on the B197 to the south of the B197 Graveley Road / North Road junction. Traffic currently queues along the B197 past the proposed HO3 site back to the B197 Graveley Road / North Road junction at peak times. On those occasions when road works along the B197 take place the tailback can be as far back as the A505. Developers at a recent presentation on their proposals for the site stated that traffic lights would be used to facilitate the flow of traffic to / from the site. This will result in traffic tailing back through Graveley Village and will most likely also grid lock the new round about. Comments by developers that improvements to the A1(M) will reduce congestion along the B197 are not credible.

9. In addition to HO3, Stevenage has also proposed development of a large Retail Store (TC11), an employment area EC1/4, and a smaller housing development HO1/11, while North Herts is seeking approval for a 900 home development adjacent to the HO3 development. Not only will the scale of this combined development result in significant increased traffic volumes but the employment area is likely to increase the proportion of commercial vehicles using the Graveley Road / North Road junction. Planned improvements for this junction propose a new round about with a dual carriage approach from each direction but the single carriage nature of these roads will require traffic almost immediately to merge back into single lane traffic.

In addition to the above, the recent upgrade of the Lister Hospital completed in 2014 has seen a big increase in staff related traffic volumes at the Graveley Road / North Road junction, which coincide with peak travel times in the morning to reflect an 8am shift pattern. The increase in staff parking need has required the hospital to arrange for parking at the garden centre.

10. Traffic volumes are therefore likely to rise significantly from the 31,490 southbound and 30,744 northbound weekly volume measured by Police Traffic Management through Graveley for the week commencing 21/07/16, as planned new residential development totalling some 6,000 homes and the proposed 20 hectare industrial estate BA10, adjacent to the Baldock By-Pass are completed. The location of the latter to the north of Graveley and EC1/4 to the south of the village will inevitably see increased commercial traffic between the two sites.

11. Development of HO3 is scheduled to take place between 2017 and 2022 and will in of itself result in significant disruption to the B197, not only in respect of the delivery of materials to the site but also in respect of tradesmen/labourers travelling to / from the site. If the adjacent NS1 development is approved, development of that site is scheduled to commence 2024 and last until 2031. While NS1 is not a matter to be considered by this Examination, approval of these sites will result in ongoing construction on this short stretch of the B197 for 15 years, with perhaps a two year break between 2022 and 2024, resulting in unacceptable traffic congestion and queuing, a material lengthening of travel times, noise and pollution. The above excludes any disruption associated with the development of the other proposals within the immediate locality.

Graveley Parish Council, February 2017.

Attachments :

Matter 16, Appendix 1

Extract from T19: Odyessey Markides's Technical Note: North Herts:
Local Plan Transport Technical Review dated 23/9/16, pages 15 & 16

Matter 16, Appendix 2

Extract from T20: NHDC Infrastructure Delivery Plan, September 2016, page 47.

Matter 16, Appendix 3

Times Article dated 8th February 2017