



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

**Stevenage Borough Council Local Plan 2011 -2031
Stage 2 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. It is important to note that there is no support for this plan amongst the local community and a lot of confusion due to Stevenage Borough Council's (SBC) failed consultation with local people.

For example, the information leaflet published by SBC in January 2016, 'A new plan for Stevenage' was inaccurate and misleading. It suggested the plan was a fait accompli. It made no mention of plans to build 1300 flats on the Leisure Park, demolish the Gordon Craig Theatre, close Lytton Way and move the train station.

It stated 'existing open spaces will be protected', which is not true as many are earmarked for development such as Shephall Recreation Ground, community facilities such as Drakes Drive Scout Hut are also earmarked for demolition and housing. There was no mention of the new Travellers site to be constructed and no consideration of a new Garden City, which would resolve housing need in this area once and for all.

I have asked for the plan to be called in by the Secretary of State, as it was not tested against reasonable alternatives such as a new Garden City. I believe it cannot be sound, as it is not justified, effective, positively prepared or consistent with national policy. Furthermore, it is important for the Inspector to now consider this plan in light of the recent Government Housing White Paper which was published on 7 February 2017, and aims to deal with many of the concerns I, and others, have raised.

The key test of any local plan is that it is deliverable and it is clear that this one is not. On the 9th February 2017, the Government announced £19 million funding to help drive forward the regeneration of Stevenage town centre, but rejected the current plans and demanded Stevenage First be abolished. A new organisation will replace Stevenage First, which has failed to regenerate our town centre, Stevenage train station will not be moved and the money cannot be used to close Lytton Way.



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I love Stevenage, but its town centre is not fit for purpose. It needs regenerating and bringing forward into the 21st century, and it needs to reflect the growing aspirations of the people who live here, but do not shop here. However, the latest regeneration plan was painful to read, totally undeliverable and a billion-pound joke on local people. The ridiculous proposal included moving the existing railway station, relied on by 35,000 commuters a day, closing Lytton Way, demolishing the Gordon Craig theatre and building 1,300 flats on the leisure park to wipe out our community facilities.

The plans fail to regenerate the town centre, as they do not include the shops in Queensway, which they claim is a Conservation Area! I explained to Government, that we cannot support any regeneration scheme that does not include our shops and threatens to destroy the local economy by moving the train station. I am delighted that after intensive discussions with Ministers, Stevenage First will be abolished and a new organisation is to be tasked with the regeneration of our town centre. This is backed by almost £20 million of Government funding and I will take a role in it. This is on top of the £12 million the Government provided for land acquisition in Stevenage town centre in 2011.

I have spoken to developers, financiers, chief executives and chairmen of leading retailers, and they all tell me the exact same simple facts of regeneration. We have to increase customer footfall and the dwell time of shoppers before they will come, and the quickest way to do that is with an element of free parking. SBC must now discuss giving up its addiction to the £3.5 million it receives in car parking charges, which blocks every regeneration attempt.

The Inspector is aware that I alluded to this announcement in the Stage 1 hearings and made it clear that SBC were present when the agreement was reached in December 2016. Consequently, the updated Infrastructure Delivery Plan that was submitted to the Inspector by SBC was inaccurate at best and misleading in reality.

I understand that SBC may want to modify their plans to state closing Lytton Way and moving the train station are now aspirational rather than critical. However, there is no evidence that they can ever be delivered, as the Government has rejected those plans already, due to the destructive impact they pose on our local economy.



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Consequently, Policy TC4 should be removed from the Local Plan. Policies TC3 and TC5 both state they are reliant on the train station move in paragraphs 7.36 and 7.50 for these policies to be deliverable.

Policies TC1, TC2 and TC6 all rely upon the closure of Lytton Way, which has been rejected by the Government and the £3million estimated funding gap for this project in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan cannot be met. The Inspector has also received representations from Tesco, which owns most of the land referred to in policy TC6 on a freehold basis, objecting to the closure of Lytton Way.

Policies TC7 and TC8 rely upon both the train station being relocated and Lytton way closed to make those policies deliverable.

Policies TC1 to TC8 also fail the key test of any local plan, which is deliverability. Over 3,000 of the 7,600 homes to be constructed are reliant on these policies, which are critical to the Local Plan and it is clear they cannot be delivered.

I have demonstrated that SBC's Local Plan relies heavily on transport infrastructure delivery as part of their Stevenage First Central Framework delivery for the town centre. However, this framework has no access to adequate funding, which means a large majority of SBC's S-Paramics Model Forecasting Report is now inaccurate.

In the recent Housing White Paper at 1.3 the Department for Communities & Local Government reiterates the commitment the Government has to its manifesto promise to protect the Green Belt. I believe this is an important point, as again SBC fail to provide any evidence as to why they feel the Green Belt land allocated in their plan meets the exceptional circumstances outlined in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). In fact, CPRE make it clear in their submission that:

The Technical Paper, in paragraph 2.15 states that the Council accepts that "it would appear that we can just about meet our OAN without the need to use Green Belt land." This statement demands that the information provided by the Council to support its proposals is tested to determine whether in fact sufficient housing can be built in Stevenage without using land currently designated as Green Belt either within Stevenage or elsewhere.



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I contend that SBC are arguing exceptional circumstances because they have a history of under-delivery when it comes to meeting housing need. The loss of 90 hectares, which is 35% of Stevenage's Green Belt, due to SBC incompetence over many years is not an exceptional circumstance. The loss of the much loved Forster Country, which was only added to the Green Belt by a previous Inspector in 1992 to safeguard it for the future is unacceptable to local people and undermines confidence in the process.

SBC have also not addressed several cross boundary issues in this plan. In particular, education needs and road links in the area. Our roads are overcrowded and links to the edges of Stevenage have not been considered. Furthermore, no evidence has been provided to assess the impact on our local secondary schools, which are already at capacity, and the suggestion of using the Collenswood site is not enough as it is already in use by specialist educational groups. This is evident in North Herts District Council's (NHDC) submission regarding matter 11 where they state that by using Herts County Council's (HCC) method, most of Stevenage's secondary schools would be oversubscribed by more than 70% by 2031. Yet they somehow conclude that using their method is better than using HCC's which is statutorily responsible as the education provider in Hertfordshire.

I understand that SBC have deviated from national and local methodology throughout their Local Plan and I would like to conclude by drawing the Inspector's attention to the new Housing White Paper. It clearly states that the Government are adopting a new standardised method to calculate various needs in a Local Plan, that coincides with changes in the NPPF.

SBC's local plan is incredibly constrained by having no flexibility and relying on a small number of large sites to try and hit their housing and employment targets. It is clear the plan is not deliverable, positively prepared, justified, effective or consistent with national policy.

Stephen McPartland
Member of Parliament for Stevenage

20 February 2017