

Section (3) Borough Vision

Do you think the overarching vision, the vision for Dacorum's places and the strategic objectives are right for the Borough?

NO

All 'vision' statements are inevitably framed with positive language around well-meaning sentiments. The 'Overarching Vision for Dacorum's Growth by 2038' is no different with grand statements claiming improvements will be achieved relating to Environmental Sustainability, Economic Growth and Health and Wellbeing.

However, much of the plan under consultation works against those aspirations, particularly for the two historic market towns of Berkhamsted and Tring.

BRAG represents residents of Berkhamsted and Northchurch (as DBC consider Northchurch as West Berkhamsted) so will generally confine comments to issues relating to Berkhamsted and Northchurch, but much of BRAG's comments could equally apply to Tring.

Specifically, BRAG does not agree with 'The Vision for Dacorum's Places' relating to Berkhamsted. The proposed growth is simply too much for the town – with circa 500 dwellings planned in Northchurch Parish (aka West Berkhamsted at DBC planning) and around 1700 in Berkhamsted, it equates to a 24% increase in dwellings and a massive 31% growth of the urban footprint (Google Earth used for calculations), most of which is located within sensitive ridge top locations in Green Belt.

BRAG notes that the 2013 Core Strategy vision of *"maintaining the strong valley and linear character of the settlement"* has been dropped for the new Local Plan. Where previously the Council asserted that *"The open valley sides and ridge top locations are especially sensitive to new building and development in these locations will not be supported"* (and put this argument strongly to the Planning Inspector), DBC now promote the land for removal from Green Belt and suggests that development can now be built *"in a way that takes account of sensitive views and landscape"*.

BRAG strongly disagrees with this premise and believe the 2013 vision should be re-instated.

BRAG welcomes the vision to provide *"significant new investment into sustainable transport initiatives to increase passenger transport and improvements in walking and cycling connections throughout the town"*, but BRAG fails to see in this plan any real commitment to make that investment in Berkhamsted. Siting developments at a distance (3-4km) from the town centre at the top of a significant hill (some gradients greater than to be found anywhere on the Tour de France!) will only serve to promote unsustainable high-carbon forms of travel rather than walking and cycling.

Indeed, the plan removes areas that have become and are becoming increasingly popular walking/rambling routes and easy access to the wider countryside. Removing these areas will further increase the need to travel for recreational walking/hiking/running purposes. Over the pandemic residents have not flocked to the likes of Velvet Lawn to do laps of a sports' field, but rather the immediate and wider countryside.

The increased number of car movements within the expanded urban area will be circa 15,400 per day. Berkhamsted doesn't have the road infrastructure to cope, nor is there the ability to provide it given the historic built nature of the town – BRAG focuses more on this in the comments on section 21 but suffice to say the plan being promoted cannot be anything other than detrimental to both the Environmental Sustainability and Health and Wellbeing visions.

BRAG finds it disturbing that Dacorum Planning have completely shifted the Council's position from one of planning within the constraints of the Borough, with the wellbeing of current and future residents in mind along with protecting the unique and historic assets of the two market towns and their environments, to a position that makes no attempt to protect valuable assets of the Borough including large swathes of Green Belt.

Paragraph 1.37 of the introduction sets the tone by "making a bold commitment to significantly increasing the supply of land to deliver 922 dwellings per year." From this point on the 922dpa target is taken as the single argument that "exceptional circumstances" exist that requires the removal of Green Belt.

BRAG disagrees with the housing target being set at 922dpa and will discuss this when commenting on other sections in the Plan, but frankly the dogged insistence that the target is the only requirement for Green Belt release needs correcting at the vision stage as it is clear that 'The Vision for Dacorum's Places' has been retrospectively moulded to suit the absurd acceptance that the promoted plan can deliver the numbers without detrimental effects.

The 922dpa originates from Central Government, and specifically the Conservative manifesto promise, which has potentially been usurped by 1023dpa. BRAG has sympathy with DBC given the mixed messages from Central Government do confuse matters when deciding what the starting point for analysis will be, however Government has made it crystal clear that the numbers are a starting point only and it is up to Local Authorities to know if local constraints such as Green Belt means that the numbers cannot be delivered.

There are many examples that could be used, but BRAG has limited itself to highlighting just six examples of guidance issued by Government that shows the policy on Green Belt protection is clear and unambiguous:

- 1) The NPPF provides protection for Green Belt and the land due to be released around Berkhamsted clearly pass the tests.
- 2) In June 2016, the Minister of State for Housing and Planning wrote a letter to MPs confirming "demand for housing alone will not change Green Belt boundaries".
- 3) Paragraph 9 of the 2017 DCLG "Planning for the right homes in the right places: consultation proposals" states that "Local planning authorities then need to determine whether there are any environmental designations or other physical or policy constraints which prevent them from meeting this housing need. These include, but are not limited to, Ancient Woodland, the Green Belt, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Sites of Special Scientific Interest. They also need to engage with other authorities – through the duty to co-operate – to determine how any need that cannot be accommodated will be redistributed over a wider area. This means that the level of housing set out in a plan may be lower or higher than the local housing need."
- 4) On December 16th 2020 the Government published a response to the recent white paper consultations. With reference to protected landscapes and Green Belt it states "We should be clear that meeting housing need is never a reason to cause unacceptable harm to such places."
- 5) The same response goes on to state "We can and must strive to build more homes, but to do so with sensitivity and care for the environment, heritage and the character of existing communities."
- 6) And further clarifies "Within the current planning system the standard method does not present a 'target' in plan-making, but instead provides a starting point for determining the

level of need for the area, and it is only after consideration of this, alongside what constraints areas face, such as the Green Belt, and the land that is actually available for development, that the decision on how many homes should be planned for is made. It does not override other planning policies, including the protections set out in Paragraph 11b of the NPPF or our strong protections for the Green Belt. It is for local authorities to determine precisely how many homes to plan for and where those homes most appropriately located. In doing this they should take into account their local circumstances and constraints.”

DBC’s sole justification for accepting Government’s numbers (922dpa) as a strict target is simply that *“Any option below the standard methodology would have to be robustly justified”* (paragraph 5.8 of The Development Strategy Background Topic Paper).

Given that Government has made it clear the numbers are NOT targets and Green Belt should be afforded the highest protection, BRAG fails to understand why DBC Planning felt unable or unwilling to make a case that can be *“robustly justified”*.

Indeed, the 2013 Planning Inspector stated in his Core Strategy report, development in Berkhamsted *“has to be balanced against the need to protect the town’s historic character and setting”*, but the new retrofit Borough Vision fails to reflect any of this.

‘The Vision for Dacorum’s Places’ for Hemel Hempstead is similarly confusing. The vision leads with *“The Hemel Garden Communities programme will be delivering new homes, green spaces, green businesses, and community facilities and is a catalyst for transforming Hemel Hempstead and taking forward the legacy of the New Town”*.

But the bulk of the dwellings that make up the Hemel Garden Communities initiative are being held back to be delivered after the Plan timescale. So, it is difficult to understand how they are going to contribute to a ‘vision’ for the town over the plan timescale when the land is to be ‘safeguarded’ over that period.

Most of this land is Green Belt and, as stated above, the Government numbers do not constitute the exceptional circumstances required take the land out of Green Belt. But then as the bulk of the development is after the Plan period and doesn’t form part of the allocation to meet the ‘targets’, DBC clearly have other exceptional circumstances for removing the Green Belt status, but those circumstances are not evident in this Plan.

DBC are receiving funding from Government to help develop the Garden Communities program and BRAG understands that the Garden Communities project is in fact a joint initiative with St Albans.

Any cross-boundary initiatives can be complicated, but if the ‘exceptional circumstances’ required to change the land designation is the chance to transform Hemel Hempstead, then DBC have completely missed the opportunity to provide a truly bold regenerating vision for the Dacorum’s main town.

In truth, these plans simply lay the foundation to tack on new housing estates long past the Plan period that fail to rejuvenate Hemel Hempstead and in the meantime destroy the historic character and setting of Berkhamsted and Tring.

In the context of the Local Plan out for consultation the visions outlined are far removed from reality. To be credible they should stand a realistic chance of being achievable. So, in summary, it is BRAG’s contention that as currently presented the draft Plan is unsound and would not pass Public Examination.

Section (4) Sustainable Development in Dacorum

Do you have any comments on Policy SP1 (Sustainable Development in Dacorum)?

YES

The principles of sustainable development are understood, however there is a fundamental dichotomy between the aggressive growth targets outlined in this plan and the environmental role of the planning system in protecting and enhancing the natural, historic and built environment of the Borough.

As highlighted in BRAG's comments on section 3, 'the visions and strategic outcomes' referred to in Policy SP1 are fundamentally flawed, while the 'proposals and sites' included in the Plan are fundamentally not "*sustainable*" sites.

Readers of paragraphs 19.6 and 19.7 in the 'Managing Development in the Countryside' section are referred to this section for the '*justification*' of the Green Belt boundary changes but BRAG fails see anything in paragraphs 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 or Policy SP1 that could remotely be described as "*fully evidenced and justified*" as required by the NPPF.

On this basis the Plan fails the sustainability test

Section (5) Spatial Strategy for Growth

Do you have any comments on Policy SP2 (Spatial Strategy for Growth)?

YES

Paragraph 5.5 states *“The Growth Strategy for Berkhamsted and Tring will also seek to maximise urban capacity but will not pursue an urban intensification strategy that detracts from the character of these locations. Instead growth will be accommodated mainly through expansions to these settlements in a way that manages landscape and Green Belt impacts but also meets our aspirations for growth to be sustainably located close to passenger transport and other services, facilities and employment opportunities.”*

This paragraph makes no sense in the context of the actual Plan and proposed sites, which for Berkhamsted are mainly valley wall and ridge-top sites situated at a distance (3-4km) from the town centre. These, by definition are located at a distance away from *“passenger transport and other services, facilities and employment opportunities.”*

Indeed, despite promoting massive growth, the Draft Local Plan offers no proposals for any growth of employment opportunities in Berkhamsted, thus promoting what realistically will be increased high-carbon travel for work.

The 2013 Planning Inspector stated in his Core Strategy report, development in Berkhamsted *“has to be balanced against the need to protect the town’s historic character and setting”*, but while paragraph 5.5 offers some protection for the ‘historic character’ of the town it offers no protection for the town’s setting.

BRAG does not agree with Policy SP2. The headline target of ‘A minimum of 16,596 homes’ is simply wrong.

BRAG understands that the figure is based on the Government’s method of calculating housing ‘need’ for an area, which is/was 922dpa (potentially usurped by 1023dpa), but at this point there is no need to argue the rights and wrongs of the algorithm employed by Government (that should have been done within DBC’s evidence base – see section 26), because it is not a strict target set by Government. These numbers CANNOT be used to take land out of Green Belt – they do not represent *“exceptional circumstance”*.

Government has made it crystal clear that the numbers are a starting point only and it is up to Local Authorities to know if local constraints such as Green Belt means that the numbers cannot be delivered.

There are many examples that could be used, but BRAG has limited itself to highlighting just six examples of guidance issued by Government that shows the policy on Green Belt protection is clear and unambiguous:

- 1 The NPPF provides protection for Green Belt and the land due to be released around Berkhamsted clearly pass the tests.
- 2 In June 2016, the Minister of State for Housing and Planning wrote a letter to MPs confirming *“demand for housing alone will not change Green Belt boundaries”*.
- 3 Paragraph 9 of the 2017 DCLG *“Planning for the right homes in the right places: consultation proposals”* states that *“Local planning authorities then need to determine whether there are any environmental designations or other physical or policy constraints which prevent them from meeting this housing need. These include, but are not limited to, Ancient Woodland, the*

Green Belt, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Sites of Special Scientific Interest. They also need to engage with other authorities – through the duty to co-operate – to determine how any need that cannot be accommodated will be redistributed over a wider area. This means that the level of housing set out in a plan may be lower or higher than the local housing need.”

- 4 On December 16th 2020 the Government published a response to the recent white paper consultations. With reference to protected landscapes and Green Belt it states *“We should be clear that meeting housing need is never a reason to cause unacceptable harm to such places.”*
- 5 The same response goes on to state *“We can and must strive to build more homes, but to do so with sensitivity and care for the environment, heritage and the character of existing communities.”*
- 6 And further clarifies *“Within the current planning system the standard method does not present a ‘target’ in plan-making, but instead provides a starting point for determining the level of need for the area, and it is only after consideration of this, alongside what constraints areas face, such as the Green Belt, and the land that is actually available for development, that the decision on how many homes should be planned for is made. It does not override other planning policies, including the protections set out in Paragraph 11b of the NPPF or our strong protections for the Green Belt. It is for local authorities to determine precisely how many homes to plan for and where those homes most appropriately located. In doing this they should take into account their local circumstances and constraints.”*

DBC’s sole justification for accepting Government’s numbers (922dpa) as a strict target is simply that *“Any option below the standard methodology would have to be robustly justified”* (paragraph 5.8 of The Development Strategy Background Topic Paper).

Given that Government has made it clear the numbers are NOT targets and Green Belt should be afforded the highest protection, BRAG fails to understand why DBC Planning felt unable or unwilling to make a case that can be *“robustly justified”*.

DBC have seem to mis-understood their responsibilities. Paragraph 136 of the NPPF is clear *“Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified”*, and not the other way round.

Paragraph 19.6 of the Plan does say *“In Dacorum, we consider that there is a combination of factors that exist that together constitute the exceptional circumstances that require us to amend the Green Belt boundaries.”* But, beyond that statement there is absolutely no justification offered, except the Government ‘target’ that isn’t actually a ‘target’.

Readers of paragraphs 19.6 and 19.7 in the ‘Managing Development in the Countryside’ section are directed to the Sustainable Development Strategy chapter of the plan for justification, but BRAG is at a loss to see anything in paragraphs 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 or Policy SP1 that could remotely be described as *“fully evidenced and justified”* as required by the NPPF.

Indeed 19.7 also specifically states DBC have *“identified those areas on the edge of the main settlements where exceptional circumstances exist”*, thus inferring that exceptional circumstance exist for the settlements protected by the specific Green Belt releases. *These “exceptional circumstances”* are certainly not evidenced.

If the SP2 target is allowed to stand, latest ONS statistics confirm that DBC are planning for a massive oversupply compared to local need at the expense of valuable and irreplaceable Green Belt land, potentially as much as 850 hectares.

The 2018-based household projections suggest an annual household need figure of 341 for Dacorum, while The Development Strategy Background Topic Paper identifies 10,954 (609dpa) urban housing supply over the Plan period.

So, using DBCs own figures for identified housing supply, developing in urban areas only will produce a 78.6% uplift in housing supply above the ONS identified need for Dacorum. There are clearly no exceptional circumstances with regards to housing supply in Dacorum.

Indeed, if we look further at the DBC's figures it is noted that DBC have included just 2,408 windfalls (133.8dpa) of the total 10,954 urban homes (22%), but over the last 14 years, the Urban Capacity Study shows windfalls have come on-line at the rate of 306.2dpa (4,287 total). DBC have effectively reduced their windfall expectation by a massive 56%. To put it plainly if windfalls continue at the same rate, urban capacity will produce a total of 14,059 homes or an annual rate of 781.1dpa.

BRAG accepts that a cautious approach by DBC on windfalls may be prudent in normal circumstances and that past completions may not be repeated at the same rate, but we are entering a post-pandemic time with altered working practices that will surely lead to more change of use developments. Reducing windfall projects to the level that DBC has is impossible to reconcile with the facts and clearly shows that the destruction of 850 hectares of Green Belt is totally unjustified.

Statement 2 in SP2 starts *"The primary focus of strategic growth and investment will be at Hemel Hempstead, supported by growth at Berkhamsted and Tring"*. BRAG is concerned about this wording as in its current form it suggests that 'investment' will be focused on Hemel Hempstead and that investment will be supported by the growth at Berkhamsted and Tring.

Certainly, historically infrastructure investment in Berkhamsted has not matched housing growth, while the majority of funds raised through s106 from developers compensating for the failure to build affordable housing and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) payments have gone into Dacorum's coffers for funding investment elsewhere.

With much higher CIL payments in Berkhamsted than elsewhere in Dacorum, it is easy to see the fiscal attraction of promoting development in Berkhamsted, but if that is a driver then it is wrong.

Statement 3 in SP2 states *"The majority of new growth and investment will be concentrated in sustainable locations"* and continues *"Berkhamsted will accommodate growth of at least 2,200 new homes. Development will enhance the town centre and strengthen its function as a key market town in the Borough and will provide significant new investment into sustainable transport initiatives, education, open space and sports facilities."*

However, the vast majority of this growth is to be sited on valley side and ridge-top Green Belt land sited at a distance (3-4km) from the town centre and railway station, with significant gradients (some in excess of any gradient on the Tour de France!) that will only promote high-carbon forms of travel rather than the stated preference of walking and cycling.

Indeed paragraph 23.119 accepts that *"congestion as a key challenge in Berkhamsted resulting in constrained roads, difficulties with bus movements, and limited cycling infrastructure."* And in paragraph 23.120 goes on to concede that *"There are few opportunities for new road capacity in the*

town.”, while offering one of two solutions “*The careful location of new development and promoting opportunities for sustainable travel, will in part help tackle a number of parking and traffic issues.*”

If it was not so destructive the wording “*careful location*” would be comic. BRAG repeats that these sites are located at a distance (3-4km) on valley side with very steep gradients and ridge tops. They can only be regarded as carefully selected locations if the express aim was to deter walking and cycling.

The second solution offered comes in the form of the ‘Berkhamsted and Tring Sustainable Transport Strategy’ (Paragraph 23.122) but again the report has absolutely no ‘Sustainability’ credentials. Rather it simply concedes defeat for Berkhamsted by merely outlining junction enhancements at relatively minor side roads and crossings within the urban area and new/ widened footpaths along Shootersway.

BRAG has already addressed the flawed numbers proposed by DBC as a whole across the Borough, but we specifically object to the target of ‘*at least 2,200 new homes*’ for Berkhamsted and Northchurch.

The adopted Core Strategy identified growth of 1,180 homes over that plan’s 25-year lifespan, which equates to 47.2dpa. In reality, Berkhamsted has contributed to the Dacorum’s new housing stock at a rate of 61.9dpa – in other words completions have out-performed the target by 31.2% in Berkhamsted while new housing stock in Hemel Hempstead has fallen behind the town’s target by 9.3%.

Much of this can be explained by developers’ demand to build in Berkhamsted rather than satisfying need, i.e. Berkhamsted growth is becoming developer led rather than planning led and this Draft Local Plan as proposed is facilitating that process.

BRAG contests that given its current size and topography, Berkhamsted has reached its limits of capacity. As conceded by DBC, the town centre already suffers from congestion and poor air quality (data for Lower Kings Road shows the level of NO₂ in some periods exceed the 40micrograms/cm³ limit).

Building more edge of town developments on valley side/ridge-top Green Belt locations at a distance (3-4km) from the town centre and railway station to satisfy flawed housing targets is not sustainable in any sense of the word. These plans will not enhance the quality of life for residents current or future.

Section (6) The Settlement Hierarchy

Do you have any comments on Policy SP3 (The Settlement Hierarchy)?

YES

BRAG disagrees with the Settlement Hierarchy. Berkhamsted should remain an area of limited opportunity as in the current plan. There is no justification for the massive releases of Green Belt that will result in 24% increase in dwellings and 31% increase in urban footprint.

BRAG agrees with the theoretical broad approach and the 'settlement hierarchy' adopted in the Core Strategy.

In practice the current approach is proving incompatible with preserving the character of our market towns and Berkhamsted in particular, which has received a disproportionately large amount of development to date – unsupported by any improvements in infrastructure. The proposed plans do not offer improvements that will make up for the deficit and really only offer infrastructure that is required as a minimum for the new settlements, while history dictates that if any 'excess' infrastructure is promised it rarely materialises.

To be clear the Core Strategy Settlement Hierarchy states *"Hemel Hempstead will be the focus for housing development within the Borough"*, while recognising that the Market Towns are *"Areas of Limited Opportunity"* and *"The general approach in these locations will be to support development that enables the population to remain stable, unless a small element of growth is required to support local community needs."*

This Settlement Hierarchy was ratified by the Core Strategy Inspector who concluded that *"the Council's approach of focussing growth on Hemel Hempstead is justified."* The Inspector points to *"the sustainability credentials"* of Hemel and contrasts that to the Market Towns where *"The level of services and facilities is lower than at Hemel"*, while also confirming that *"it must be remembered that many of these settlements are more constrained than Hemel Hempstead, for example by the Chilterns AONB (which should be afforded the highest status of protection) and therefore more weight should be attached to securing sustainable growth in the Borough's main town."*

The reality is that the first 13 years of the Core Strategy has seen development in Berkhamsted at a rate 31.2% above the target set, but with no infrastructure improvements to match, while development in Hemel is 9.3% below its target.

BRAG contests that given its current size and topography, Berkhamsted has reached its limits of capacity. As conceded by DBC, the town centre already suffers from congestion and poor air quality (data for Lower Kings Road shows the level of NO₂ in some periods exceed the 40micrograms/cm³ limit).

Tacking on edge of town developments on valley side/ridge-top Green Belt locations at a distance (3-4km) from the town centre and railway station to satisfy flawed housing targets is not sustainable in any sense of the word. These plans will not enhance the quality of life for residents current or future.

The Settlement Hierarchy should revert to the one ratified by the Core Strategy Inspector.

Section (7) Housing Strategy

Do you have any comments on Policy SP4 (Delivering The Housing Strategy)?

YES

BRAG believes DBC's housing strategy as outlined in this consultation can be summarised with the simple statement:

We have accepted a huge target now where do we build? Step forward developers – take the reins.

Paragraphs 7.6, 7.9 and Table 2 are confusing when comes to windfalls. Both 7.6 and 7.9 state that 200 homes pa have been used but Table 2 only shows 2,408 in total which equates to 133.8dpa.

Paragraph 7.9 states *“Our analysis indicates that windfall sites will play an important part in the housing programme (at 200 homes pa). They are made up of a wide range of small to large sites from a variety of sources that have been calculated using historic delivery rates and expected future trends. We believe it is justified based on past local evidence and is a reliable source of supply across the Plan period.”*

But DBC's Urban Capacity Study shows windfalls have come on-line at the rate of 306.2dpa (4,287 total) over the last 14 years. In projecting forward for the totals in Table 2, DBC have effectively reduced their windfall expectation by a massive 56% from what has been achieved in the last 14 years.

DBC clearly have a different view of *“expected future trends”* than most other observers, including Government, who expect increased windfall urban development as working practices change post the current Covid-19 pandemic and change of use applications increase.

This is not BRAG being pedantic or over-zealous in pointing out the discrepancy between Table 2 and paragraphs 7.6 and 7.9, these numbers are of critical importance when it comes to offering our precious Green Belt the protection that the NPPF demands.

Even if taking the windfall rate of 200dpa mentioned in paragraphs 7.6 and 7.9, urban capacity over the life of the Plan would increase to 12,146, which equates to a near 100% uplift over the 341dpa requirement suggested by the 2018-based ONS housing need projections for Dacorum.

Figures from the past 14 years and the knowledge of changes in working practices will almost certainly lead to windfall completions in excess of 50% higher than the 200dpa quoted in paragraphs 7.6/7.9 - and more than 129% higher windfalls than quoted in Table 2.

Maybe a table of our own will illustrate the importance of this point and how it affects the amount of Green Belt release required to meet the 'non-target' of 922dpa.

	Based on data from:			
	Table 2	Para 7.6/7.9	Last 14yr ave	Last 5yr Ave
Windfall rate (dpa)	133.8	200	306.2	346.3
Total Windfalls Across Plan	2408	3600	5512	6233
Dwellings Required In Green Belt	5642	4450	2538	1817

Currently there are two parcels of Green Belt in North Hemel, HH01 and HH02 with a total capacity of 5500 homes due to be released now, but 4000 of these homes held for future development.

Based on the last 14-year windfall average, the requirement to build 2538 homes in the Green Belt could be accommodated comfortably in HH01/02 in this Plan period.

If the more conservative view taken by the Council of a windfall average of 200dpa is used, the Green Belt homes requirement of 4450 can also be accommodated in HH01/02.

The net effect is that DBC could achieve its target of 922dpa by releasing all of HH01 and HH02 now with the added benefit to Hemel that only this scale of development can bring and remove from the Plan the need to develop on Green Belt elsewhere in the Borough - a housing strategy that fully aligns with the current Core Strategy settlement hierarchy which was ratified by the planning Inspector in 2013.

Of course, BRAG does not accept the 922dpa as a legitimate target, but the exercise still clearly illustrates that that even if 922dpa were required it is almost certain that true windfall calculations would reduce the need for Green Belt release by well over 50% - and the table does not account for increased change of use windfalls that is accepted by Government as likely to be a trend going forward, indeed the final column (Last 5yr Ave) suggests the trend for Dacorum is already increasing.

Good planning plans for the right homes in the right places. This is an ill-conceived housing strategy driven by a flawed target and settlement hierarchy that is doing the opposite.

BRAG takes issue with point j of Policy SP4 *“The development of a series of strategic urban extensions on land on the south and western edges of Berkhamsted and up to the A41. These will chiefly be made up of a number of small and large developments to the south and south-west which will deliver around 1,870 homes in total, including land for new primary and secondary schools, and other facilities.”*

BRAG has explained elsewhere why these are not sustainable locations and will not enhance the quality of life for residents current or future. They are not the right homes in the right places, and most importantly for this section they are not required if DBC takes a more measured analysis of the numbers along with adopting a more logical housing strategy that concentrates on urban/brownfield sites and more sustainable locations.

With this in mind, BRAG also questions point l of Policy SP4 *“5,500 homes at the strategic urban extension of North Hemel, comprising of 1,500 homes in the Plan period at North Hemel Growth Area (Phase 1) and 4,000 homes beyond 2038 at North Hemel Growth Area (Phase 2). The later phase will be removed from the Green Belt and safeguarded to meet longer term housing needs.”*

Although BRAG doesn't believe the numbers alone provide the exceptional circumstances required for Green Belt release, the matching of infrastructure and development would appear to be only achievable with large concentrated developments such as a new town or very large site rather than through much smaller ad hoc developments/sites.

BRAG doubts DBC's ability to deliver the utopia vision of the Garden Communities along with rejuvenation of Hemel Hempstead, but we acknowledge that Central Government has already bought into this cross-boundary initiative with substantial grants, so BRAG doesn't understand why the bulk of the homes to be built in Dacorum should be deferred until after 2038. They should be bought forward rather than changing Green belt boundaries in less sustainable locations like South Berkhamsted.

Section (8) Employment Strategy

Do you have any comments on Policy SP5 (Delivering the Employment Strategy)?

YES

BRAG supports measures to reinforce employment opportunities in the Borough, but notes the absence of any commitment to preserve or improve employment opportunities within or close to Berkhamsted, despite proposals for massive residential growth.

Once again this will promote high-carbon travel and is a further argument against the sustainability credentials of the sites being promoted.

BRAG strongly objects to the Jewson site in Billet Lane being reclassified for residential development, as well as the loss of the BFI site.

Section (9) Retail and Leisure Development Strategy

Do you have any comments on Policy SP6 (Delivering the Retail and Leisure Strategy)?

YES

BRAG supports Policy SP6, but in respect of Berkhamsted it is unlikely that the small-scale retail provision in Growth Area Bk01 will be viable and therefore will not reinforce the credentials of the unwanted residential development in this location.

Section (10) Delivering Infrastructure to Support Growth

Do you have any comments on Policy SP7 (Delivering Infrastructure)? YES

The draft IDP is an essential element of the draft Plan. At this stage too much is provisional to assist sound judgement and it gives rise to a number of challenges.

- The perennial problem of the infrastructure requirement being in place before the employment or residential growth takes place
- The basis for developer contributions is unclear pending Central Government's decision on the replacement of Sec 106 and CIL contributions with a single national development value related scheme
- The shortfall in current infrastructure needs in towns such as Berkhamsted let alone that driven by future growth
- In Berkhamsted some infrastructure requirement, such as a secondary school is purely driven by the excessive residential growth proposed
- Small scale sites are fragmented and time variable which will reduce the impact they make on infrastructure requirements
- Promoting movements by means other than car may be a commonly held aspiration, but lack reality when applied to Berkhamsted
- Healthcare. Acute care is provided to the Region by WHHT and is not the responsibility of DBC but current provision is old and inadequate. DBC should be pushing for a new Hospital to serve the Region's growth needs.

Overall, the draft IDP demonstrates how impractical it is to force significant growth on to settlements such as Berkhamsted which in many respects is at capacity now.

Too much of the required infrastructure is either impossible to achieve, such as road widening, or requires significant investment by third parties. For example, sewage and wastewater treatment and network at capacity, as acknowledged in paragraph 15.65 of the IDP. The solution offered is simply that Thames Water and the developer will deliver without any evidence that the infrastructure can actually be delivered.

Potable water supplies rely on extraction from aquifers. Affinity Water have had to agree to extraction limits with the Environment Agency and major investment is required to support new sources of water.

BRAG has raised these issues in past consultations and again expand on this in section 17 (Climate Change and Sustainability). DBC's answer is that *"developers have a right to connect and development cannot normally be resisted on the grounds of inadequate water supply or sewerage capacity."*

BRAG would query whether the Borough is correct in this respect. Things may have moved on but BRAG does know that in the 70's there was a moratorium on house building in South Devon until improved sewage disposal facilities were built, and in Herefordshire due to pollution there is a moratorium on all house building in the River Lugg's catchment area.

In short, the draft IDP fails to adequately address these issues.

Section (11) Neighbourhood Planning

Do you have any comments on Policy SP8 (Neighbourhood Planning)?

NO

Section (12) Monitoring and Review

Do you have any comments on Policy SP9 (Monitoring and Review)?

YES

Policy SP9 is focused on monitoring and reviewing the rates of delivery. There are no policies that help ensure that developers deliver in accordance with the masterplans that gained them permissions.

DBC have a derisive record of holding developers to masterplans agreed by them and local communities.

Section (13) Introduction to Guiding Development

There is no facility to comment on this section

Section (14) Housing Delivery

Do you have specific comments about any of the Housing Delivery policies?

YES

BRAG supports the overall direction of policy which identifies that the Borough's greatest need is for affordable homes to rent or buy and setting this at 40% on sites of more than 10 homes and that this should be provided on-site.

The challenge will be achieving this in the more affluent parts of the Borough such as Berkhamsted, where developers will seek to conflate demand with need and argue that the Policy makes developments unviable and/or reduces their ability to contribute to infrastructure requirements.

The real pressure should come on land values and the central Government need to enact their White Paper proposals on the provision of affordable housing to assist a robust application of the Borough's policy.

Section (15) Employment Development

Do you have specific comments about any of the Employment Development policies?

YES

The Borough has ambitious plans for employment growth but has insufficient suitable land for such development and while Berkhamsted is not an Employment Growth Area it is counter-intuitive to allocate the Jewson employment site in Billet Lane for residential development.

A similar point is made about the British Film Institute site and BRAG questions why the Council no longer support the Core Strategy local objective of *“supporting the BFI to consolidate on their site”*.

Section (16) Retailing and Other Town Centre Uses

Do you have specific comments about any of the Retailing and Other Town Centre Uses policies?

YES

BRAG broadly supports the Council, though there is a lack of vision and ambition with regards to promoting cultural and performing arts. If DBC are serious about the massive growth targets and the claimed positive impacts of the Garden Communities, then surely it is time to plan a replacement for the Pavilion, which closed in 2002.

Section (17) Climate Change and Sustainability

Do you have specific comments about any of the Climate Change and Sustainability policies?

YES

DBC should be applauded for declaring a climate emergency and BRAG supports many of the sentiments in this section, including the specific point 3.i *“supporting retrofitting schemes to the existing building stock to meet higher energy efficiency standards.”*, but SP10 doesn't go far enough with regard to new developments. At the very least all developments on Green Belt should be net carbon neutral with immediate effect.

It is not enough for DBC to call a climate emergency and then develop a housing growth plan that locates developments in remote unsustainable locations that will by definition work against the worthy aims of the Climate Emergency initiative.

As outlined elsewhere, BRAG does not accept that Green Belt release is required or that exceptional circumstances exist to change the current Green Belt boundaries, but if there are releases developments need to be carbon neutral regardless of when they are brought forward.

In 2017 existing residential buildings produced 58% of the Borough's greenhouse gas emissions. While it might sound facetious, reducing the amount of new development will naturally reduce the effects on climate change, so it is imperative that DBC are not allowed to plough ahead under the illusion that the numbers set out in the plan are required. This will protect the environment more than any Climate Change and Sustainability policy can, however well written they may be.

It is also true that a single large-scale development or new town in one area offers the opportunity for infrastructure investment such as district heating, renewable energy and carbon neutral transport modes etc. that smaller developments cannot. BRAG accepts that the Garden Communities of north Hemel, HH01 and HH02 has that scale.

In contrast, the proposals for South Berkhamsted and the other ridge-top Green Belt sites on the southern perimeter of the town will remove bio-diversity, and introduce non porous surfaces and pollution to a densely populated, high traffic area. In short, these sites can only contribute to the catastrophic effects of climate change, regardless of policy statements.

The Green Belt land between Berkhamsted and the A41 had previously been designated as an important 'Green Lung' for the town. That designation has clearly been dropped completely. In truth, if DBC had wanted to be bold and display a real commitment to the 'Climate Emergency' the plan could have highlighted how the health of those 'Green Lungs' could be improved by potentially using the land to expand historic woodland along with other bio-diversity improvements, rather than losing productive land in the chase for 'targets' that don't exist – inevitably facilitating the further clogging of the towns arteries and adding to the Climate Change problems.

BRAG is grateful to CPRE Herts for publishing its initial reactions to the Plan. BRAG agrees entirely with CPRE's assessment on this subject, viz

“The proposed local plan fails to demonstrate a pathway to local carbon reductions. This is a requirement of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), and the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act. An evidence-based carbon reduction plan is also required to meet the national climate obligations of net zero by 2050.

To meet legal obligations in the NPPF and the 2004 Planning Act Section 19 (1a), Local Plans need to demonstrate how emissions for the area will be radically reduced in line with carbon budgets – a carbon reduction pathway specific to the area. Local Plans also need to effectively show how these carbon budgets will be regularly and effectively monitored. The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) recently communicated this requirement to all planning authorities. The plan as proposed by DBC fails to address these requirements.

Climate Change Committee (CCC) Sixth carbon budget report Dec 2020 contained a set of recommendations for Local authorities to consider in helping them meet their Climate Emergency objectives. There is no evidence in the proposed plan on how these recommendations have been considered.

ClientEarth has put local authorities across England on notice, warning them that they will violate their legal obligations and risk legal challenge if they do not introduce proper climate change plans. Local Plans need to contain evidence-based carbon reduction targets and ensure these targets are then central to their new planning policy. The proposed plan does not meet these obligations.

The proposed plan has clearly prioritized economic growth over considerations for the climate emergency. In so doing, it has failed to take account of legislation and recommendations from various bodies on how carbon reduction plans have to be integral to the development of local plans.

Several local authorities in England (e.g., Greater Cambridge, Reading and Liverpool City) have developed integrated local plans that take account of climate change, biodiversity, well-being and social inclusion. There is no evidence in the proposed local plan of such an approach.”

As part of BRAG’s response to the 2017 ‘Issues and Options Consultation’ the following points were made:

- Water and sewerage – Proposals are not environmentally sustainable in particular in respect of water. The demands of new residential development in this respect are contrary to the ‘Vision’ for the Borough
 - The environmental consultants make reference to there being a problem with water supply, but do not state that what is proposed is unsustainable. At the time of responding the River Bulbourne is dry and Tring reservoirs are at the lowest level residents can remember. These feed the canal system and we are at the highest point between London and Birmingham. In addition water flow in the River Gade is very low. Both the Gade and Bulbourne are chalk streams which are protected under the Water Framework Directive – and its translation into British Law. Any increase in housing in the current situation will lead to a further lowering of the aquifer and the Bulbourne never returning and the Gade drying up. Dacorum has just spent millions of pounds improving the Water Gardens in Hemel Hempstead which are dependent on the Gade for their water supply.
 - It has been suggested by consultants that water can be brought to Berkhamsted providing mains capacity is increased but this would appear to depend on there being sufficient aquifer capacity in the River Colne catchment area, which there is not, and water being imported from East Anglia. The Anglian Water region is under

severe stress and was in supply deficit in 2015. Surplus water for other regions is unlikely.

- Hence any build in Dacorum before major infrastructure water systems have been put in place will result in significant damage to our environment locally and are unsustainable. The Region requires a water ring system that will move water from the NW of England to the South. Rather than accepting that it is up to third party utility suppliers to meet demand, Dacorum should be robustly arguing that until that sustainable water is available, no significant building of new houses should occur.

DBC's reply was a stunning "*developers have a right to connect and development cannot normally be resisted on the grounds of inadequate water supply or sewerage capacity.*" If DBC do not regard water supply and sewerage capacity as fundamental part of sustainability, then the Borough is in trouble.

Indeed, BRAG would query whether the Borough is correct in their assertion. Things may have moved on but BRAG does know that in the 70's there was a moratorium on house building in South Devon until improved sewage disposal facilities were built, and in Herefordshire due to pollution there is a moratorium on all house building in the River Lugg's catchment area.

During a very wet winter reservoirs are now full, but we all know that this is a temporary situation and the flood/drought cycle caused by climate change will only exacerbate the problems and BRAG understands that Affinity Water is committed to reducing abstraction year on year to the tune of 12% by 2025, while DBC are planning massive growth in demand. It really doesn't stack up.

Again, BRAG thanks CPRE Herts for doing more work on this subject:

"a) The level of new housing proposed will put a severe strain on water supplies in the Dacorum area especially during dry summer months. Until new water supplies are available from elsewhere in England, which will not be until the 2030s, the only option would be to extract additional water from the chalk aquifer which in turn would damage the borough's chalk rivers which are classified as priority habitats under section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. The proposed plan as presented is largely silent on new sources of water supply and on how it will protect the three designated chalk streams in the borough (the Gade, Bulbourne and Ver).

Paragraph 174 of the NPPF states that plans should promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, and paragraph 175 states that where significant harm to biodiversity cannot be avoided then planning permission should be refused. The NPPF Glossary states that priority habitats are those habitats included in the England Biodiversity List published under section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (s 41 sites). Chalk rivers are included in the section 41 list.

The 2010 Water Cycle Study (part of the evidence base for the Strategy, produced for five Hertfordshire LPAs including Dacorum), was based on two growth scenarios presented by the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy. For Dacorum Scenario 1 was 9,000 new homes in the plan period 2006-31, and Scenario 2 was 17,000 new homes (680 dwellings a year for 25 years). The Study concluded that Scenario 1 (across the Study area) would not allow any water surplus past 2030, while Scenario 2 would require additional imports of water from 2024 during critical periods.

b) The proposed increase in housing will require substantial investment in infrastructure in order to transport and treat wastewater and sewage. The proposed plan makes no mention of how improvements in wastewater and sewerage infrastructure will be funded and the time period for their completion.

The Adopted Core Strategy 2006-2031 for Dacorum Borough states that ‘developers should ensure that there is sufficient capacity at the relevant wastewater treatment works. It also states: ‘The most pressing (infrastructure) issue is that of sewage treatment infrastructure, which will need significant upgrades to serve the development proposed in the wider area, including that in Dacorum.’

The current proposals make no mention of the specific need for sewerage infrastructure improvements (para 10.4 on page 49), although Policy SP7 sets out the mechanism for delivering infrastructure which places responsibility for funding with developers. Policy DM35 (on page 126) states that development which would cause a significant increase in water pollution (among other effects) will not be permitted.

The 2010 Water Cycle Study sets out a long list of wastewater treatment and sewerage issues across the five Local Planning Authority areas which needed to be addressed to accommodate the growth levels proposed at the time. It states (on page 4): ‘a number of potential growth locations are located to the opposite side of existing settlements with regards to the Waste water Treatment Works (WwTW) or trunk sewers. Any network upgrades required through the existing settlement will be expensive and disruptive, and may therefore be cost prohibitive, particularly if funded by developers.’”

Nowhere in this Plan is there any detail how this vital infrastructure will be delivered. Proceeding with a plan with such excessive growth numbers in the belief that developers will fully fund the infrastructure and assuming utility providers will simply deliver under their statutory obligations, would be reckless.

Section (18) Environment and Biodiversity

Do you have specific comments about any of the Environment and Biodiversity policies?

YES

BRAG supports the policies in this section that help mitigate harm caused by development and help preserve the environment/biodiversity of the area. That said, it doesn't matter how extensive or well written the policies are in this section, they should not and indeed cannot trump the protection Green Belt is legally afforded by the NPPF. In that respect this Plan and DBC have already failed by promoting 850 hectares of Green Belt for development on the premise that the Plan must aim for a 'target' that really is not a 'target'.

All measures which protect the Environment and encourage Biodiversity are welcome, but this has to be seen against a background of significant increases in new homes and employment in the Borough.

The potable water supplied to the Borough comes from aquifers. Policy DM33 makes no reference to the increased demand for water resulting from this growth. The Environment Agency has restricted the amount of water Affinity can abstract from aquifers and Affinity's long-term plan requires significant investment and cross-country cooperation and will produce little real growth in supply to the area until after 2030.

With this background DBC propose "*working with partners to help restore river flows*" and under Policy DM33 "*avoid the need to abstract water from the ground, in particular the Rivers Ver, Gade and Bulborne catchments*".

These chalk streams are acknowledged as a globally rare habitat. Figure 7 shows they flow through the heart of the Borough. For development to be sustainable improvements to the environment and biodiversity must be delivered alongside new homes and infrastructure.

The only conclusion one can reach is that the growth proposed in this draft Plan is unsustainable development and should be rejected.

Section (19) Managing Development in the Countryside

Do you have specific comments about any of the Managing Development in the Countryside policies?

YES

'The Managing Development in the Country' section is at best muddling and confusing, but at worst malicious.

In paragraph 19.5 it lays out the NPPF's five key purposes of the Green Belt. And then in 19.6 explains "*The NPPF states that Green Belt boundaries can only be amended in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of a Local Plan (paragraph 136).*" But critical NPPF text is omitted that states "*where exceptional circumstances are **fully evidenced and justified***".

19.6 does continue "*In Dacorum, we consider that there is a combination of factors that exist that together constitute the exceptional circumstances that require us to amend the Green Belt boundaries. The Sustainable Development Strategy sets out these challenges and establishes why a planned review of Green Belt Boundaries is justified to meet development needs.*" And again in 19.7 "*We explore the justification for this in the 'Sustainable Development Strategy' chapter of the Plan.*"

However, section 4 is titled 'Sustainable Development in Dacorum' and it spans just a single page (two if you count the map) of this 368-page document, while containing only 3 numbered paragraphs and one policy SP1. BRAG cannot discuss either the evidence or justification because nothing on that page resembles evidence or justification.

BRAG has dug deeper into the myriad of supporting evidence documents and can only find DBC's assertion that the Government's 922dpa housing 'need' assessment must be accepted as a target as justification for the Green Belt releases. DBC's argument being "*Any option below the standard methodology would have to be robustly justified*" (paragraph 5.8 of The Development Strategy Background Topic Paper).

BRAG repeats, given that Government has made it clear the numbers are NOT targets and Green Belt should be afforded the highest protection, BRAG fails to understand why DBC Planning felt unable or unwilling to make a case that can be "*robustly justified*".

DBC seem to have mis-understood their responsibilities. Paragraph 136 of the NPPF is clear '*Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified*', and not the other way round.

Paragraph 1 of Policy SP11 is badly written, in particular the sentence "*The Green Belt boundary has been reviewed to land in defined Growth Areas to meet identified need over the lifetime of the Plan and to allow for other minor consequential changes.*"

BRAG is unsure of the exact meaning of this sentence, but it could be construed that the Green Belt boundaries changes proposed are minor. They are most definitely not – Berkhamsted's urban footprint will increase by a massive 31%.

Section (20) Delivering Great Places

Do you have specific comments about any of the Delivering Great Places policies?

YES

'Delivering Great Places' lacks punch given the overall damage this Plan will do to the setting of Berkhamsted.

It is noted that paragraph 20.10 states that *"We have also set up a Community Review Panels as a way of facilitating early active engagement to ensure the development delivers high quality design and empowering communities and we will look to expand these further."*

This would suggest that DBC are pro-actively engaging with communities, but this is not BRAG's experience in recent years. BRAG worked very closely with DBC through the development of the Core Strategy and the Public Inquiry, when BRAG attended more sessions than any other independent body.

However, subsequent to the 2017 'Issues and Options' Consultation DBC have failed to engage with BRAG – evidenced by their failure to reply to emails. This is not the actions of a public body who wish to engage with the community.

BRAG also has grave misgivings about the 'masterplan' procedures. None of the developments in Berkhamsted have completed as their masterplans dictated, with developers being allowed to change often major elements to the detriment of the development and the town as a whole.

Indeed, BRAG was involved in the original masterplan for Hanburys. That site has yet to be developed but that original masterplan has been ripped up and replaced without involving the community.

To be clear, developers rarely intend to stick to the masterplans that gain them permissions and historically DBC have displayed a lack of rigor to enforce those masterplans.

Section (21) Sustainable Transport Connectivity

Do you have specific comments about any of the Sustainable Transport and Connectivity policies?

YES

BRAG is concerned that the Plan only goes into any detail about Hemel Hempstead and later in the delivery Strategies paragraph 23.119 states *“As a settlement area, the County Council consider that Berkhamsted already has a sustainable transport network in place.”*, despite going on to *“identify congestion as a key challenge in Berkhamsted resulting in constrained roads, difficulties with bus movements, and limited cycling infrastructure.”*

BRAG does not agree that a sustainable transport network is in place. It is true that there is an excellent mainline railway but pre-pandemic it was running at capacity, while the station itself is not well served by public transport and is situated at a distance (3-4km) from the Green Belt ‘Growth Areas’ promoted in the Plan.

Ignoring the lack of bus services in other directions, BRAG disagrees that the *“key interurban Aylesbury-Hemel-Watford bus route”* provides a *“good public transport service”* as described in the Topic Papers.

The 500 route described in 23.119 is a commercial service operated by Arriva and only operates 3 buses per hour Monday-Friday, 2 buses per hour on Saturdays and a single hourly service during Sunday shopping hours. There is no evening service or early services on Saturdays, while it also suffers reliability issues due to its length.

As 23.120 concedes *“There are few opportunities for new road capacity in the town”* due to the topography and historic built nature of the town. The county’s engineers comment that the traffic lights at the single main crossing operate at over capacity.

Berkhamsted does not have a sustainable transport system in place and promoting growth on valley side and ridge-top Green Belt locations will only reduce those sustainability credentials further.

Section (22) Healthy Communities

Do you have specific comments about any of the Healthy Communities policies?

YES

BRAG welcomes the sentiments of Policy DM59, but as paragraph 22.14 concedes *“the Council does not directly deliver healthcare facilities”*. Healthcare facilities have failed to increase in line with growth in the past, and there is nothing in the policies that reassures the community that this trend will be reversed.

The policies DM62 starts promisingly - *“The development of land currently in use for sport or leisure provision will not be permitted”* – as does DM63 – *“The loss of designated open space will not be permitted”*.

Unfortunately, both those statements are immediately followed by the word *“unless”*, which is seemingly the magic link word that allows this plan to afford precious little protection to either land currently in use for sports/leisure facilities or open spaces in Green Belt.

Haslam Field (BK03) is a sports ground owned by Berkhamsted School, which has been an important part of the Town since 1541. Haslam Field was gifted to the school and, at a meeting with the school’s Headmaster around the time of the Core Strategy inquiry, BRAG was told by the school that it was a legal condition that they could not develop the land – it was gifted to be used as sports fields.

Presumably, the school have found a legal way round these conditions, but clearly at the very least promoting the land goes directly against the spirit of the gift and the benefactors stated wishes, while BSGCA has reported that there is a shortage of pitches available to the community.

If the pitches are *“surplus to requirements”* to the school, they are clearly not to the community. DBC should not be framing policies that allow the removal of Haslam Field from Green Belt. If the sports’ field is surplus to the school’s current requirements it should be passed to BSGCA to use until it is no longer required when it would be returned to the school.

Similarly, the dichotomy between losing large swathes of open space in Green Belt and a set of ‘protective’ policies is impossible to reconcile. Indeed, we have all become even more aware of the importance of our green space during the pandemic. Our green belt has afforded us space to unwind and regenerate.

Research has shown that levels of green space present during childhood are associated with lower risk of a wide spectrum of psychiatric disorders later in life, such as depression, anxiety, and substance abuse. We have a responsibility to the next generation, and the protection of our green belt is essential.

This plan removes areas that have become and are becoming increasingly popular walking/rambling routes and easy access to the wider countryside. Removing these areas will further increase the need to travel for recreational walking/hiking/running purposes. Over the pandemic residents have not flocked to the likes of Velvet Lawn to do laps of a sports’ field, but rather the immediate and wider countryside. The benefit to both mental and physical health of these spaces are immeasurable.

Section (23) Delivery Strategies

Hemel Hempstead Garden Communities Delivery Strategy

Do you have specific comments on the Hemel Hempstead Garden Communities Delivery Strategy?

YES

The delivery strategies go hand in hand with the Housing Strategy and Settlement Hierarchy, so BRAG would like to refer back to the windfall analysis, which is a fundamental part of how much growth Dacorum can accommodate.

The table below illustrates the importance of how windfall calculations affects the amount of Green Belt release required to meet the 'non-target' of 922dpa.

	Based on data from:			
	Table 2	Para 7.6/7.9	Last 14yr ave	Last 5yr Ave
Windfall rate (dpa)	133.8	200	306.2	346.3
Total Windfalls Across Plan	2408	3600	5512	6233
Dwellings Required In Green Belt	5642	4450	2538	1817

Currently there are two parcels of Green Belt in North Hemel, HH01 and HH02 with a total capacity of 5500 homes due to be released now, but 4000 of these homes held for future development.

Based on last 14-year windfall average the requirement to build 2538 homes in the Green Belt could be accommodated comfortably in HH01/02 in this Plan period.

If the more conservative view taken by the Council of a windfall average of 200dpa, the Green Belt homes requirement of 4450 can also be accommodated in HH01/02.

The net effect is that DBC could achieve its target of 922dpa by releasing all of HH01 and HH02 now with the added benefit to Hemel that only this scale of development can bring and remove from the Plan the need to develop on Green Belt elsewhere in the Borough, a housing strategy that fully aligns with the current Core Strategy settlement hierarchy which was ratified by the planning Inspector in 2013.

Of course, BRAG does not accept the 922dpa as a legitimate target, but if the Council truly believe the Hemel Garden Communities Vision:

“Hemel Garden Communities: creating a greener, brighter, more connected New Town.

In the heart of the Golden Triangle between Oxford, Cambridge and London, Hemel Garden Communities will grow and transform into a greener, more connected New Town, building on the best of its heritage and culture. Transformation of existing neighbourhoods and the wider area, and the creation of new neighbourhoods, will support healthy lifestyles for everyone. Hemel Garden Communities will be home to inclusive, integrated neighbourhoods connected by a green network, and thoughtfully designed places with engaged communities, all underpinned by digital connectivity, a self-sustaining economy and pioneering green technology driven by Herts Innovation Quarter.”

then DBC should be moving heaven and earth to bring that vision to reality within the plan period and not safeguard the dream to 2050.

Berkhamsted Delivery Strategy

Do you have any specific comments on the Berkhamsted Delivery Strategy?

YES

Given the housing targets promote a dangerously flawed starting point and DBC's vision for Berkhamsted is contrary to the health and wellbeing of current and future residents, BRAG finds it impossible to agree in any way with DBC's Berkhamsted Delivery Strategy.

In short, this is a strategy that prioritises developer lead demand over protection of the Green Belt or the health and wellbeing of both current and future residents.

Policy SP1 really isn't worth the paper it is written on. Thus far the Council has failed to hold developers to agreed Masterplans to the detriment of both the development and community, while points 1 to 8 simply rolls out statements that are little more than aspirational catchphrases, such as *"successful new communities"*, *"best approach to"*, *"best practice"*, *"comprehensive green infrastructure"*, *"multifunctional space"*, *"an exemplar in sustainable living"* etc. etc. etc.

BRAG particularly takes issue with *"5. promote sustainable travel choices by delivering an integrated and accessible development with walking, cycling and public transport prioritised as well as the transport outcomes detailed in the Berkhamsted and Tring Sustainable Transport Strategy."*

As highlighted elsewhere, the Transport Strategy is anything but sustainable and merely tinkers at the edges with minor junction amendments in Berkhamsted, while building on steep valley sides and ridge tops at a distance from the town centre/facilities that cannot and will not promote walking, cycling or public transport.

Likewise, *"6. an exemplar in sustainable living with a particular focus on reducing energy consumption as well as generating energy from renewable and low carbon sources and delivering other significant environmental enhancement to ensure climate resilience"* is simply an aspirational mantra with no hard and fast policy to back it up. All new developments need to be carbon neutral and anything less is failing to display any serious commitment to overall carbon reductions.

And then point 7 assures us that DBC will *"deliver the infrastructure requirements set out in the Dacorum Local Plan Infrastructure Delivery Plan for Berkhamsted"*. Unfortunately, there is nothing in this plan that suggests the infrastructure issues will be addressed and BRAG points to its response to section 10 (Delivering the Infrastructure to Support Growth).

Section (24) Proposals and Sites

Proposal & Sites Hemel Hempstead Garden Communities

Do you have specific comments on the Hemel Hempstead Garden Communities Proposals and Sites?

YES

HH02 North Hemel (Phase 2)

Capacity 4,000. Identified for removal from Green Belt now and safeguarded for development post 2038. Given that the Council aspire to Garden City status, HH02 should be combined with HH01 now to provide a new vibrant, dynamic community of 5400 new homes and 21st century infrastructure which will boost the Garden City plan and meet all the Council's strategic objective.

Such an extension to Hemel has the scale to help regenerate its New Town core but also provide significant benefits:

Accessible location. Provide benefits of scale development- sustainable, minimise energy consumption, enable renewable energy technology, decentralise heating, support public transport initiatives and avoid harm to environmental assets.

BRAG accepts that this could be a real opportunity for the Borough to develop a vibrant 21st century extension which will help regenerate its New Town core, but not by delaying and destroying Berkhamsted and Tring in the meantime.

HH03 Hospital site.

Should not be considered for redevelopment until a clear sustainable NHS strategy for this part of Hertfordshire (incl. Watford and St Albans) which recognises the current unsatisfactory provision and allows for population growth, is confirmed and initiated.

HH06 Civic Centre Site.

Should be reserved for cultural uses to meet DBC promise to replace the Pavilion.

Proposal & Sites Berkhamsted

Do you have any specific comments on the Berkhamsted Proposals and Sites?

YES

This is a crucial section because the promotion of the majority of the Growth Area sites come as a direct result of DBC Planning changing the policy of Green Belt protection based on the perceived exceptional circumstances that the 922dpa figure is a sacrosanct target that must be adhered to despite Central Government consistently giving directives that it is not a target.

It is important to note that the Core Strategy (endorsed by Councillors) rejected a number of sites in Berkhamsted giving detailed reasons for rejection – yet now Dacorum planning are ignoring their own robust reasons and arguments for rejection simply on the basis that there is a target to hit.

The reasons previously given by Dacorum Borough Council for rejection still hold good and are itemised under each of the sites below, followed by BRAG's additional comments.

Bk01 - Land south of Berkhamsted

Core Strategy rejected this option for the following reasons

- Strong countryside/Green Belt boundary.
- Development would be highly visible from this prominent ridge top location.
- Erosion of buffer between bypass and existing built up area.
- Poor relationship to town centre services and facilities, employment land and station.
- Important transition area between the town and open countryside would be damaged.
- This could also set a precedent for further development of land southwards to the A41.
- Not well related to existing housing.
- Visual impact on important gateway to town from A416 and A41.
- Proximity of A41 bypass.
- Potential impact on the setting of Ashlyn's Hall.

In addition BRAG makes the following objections

This land has been promoted many times before and the largest parcel within Bk01 has been robustly rejected by previous Planning Inspectors – *“The present Green Belt boundary runs along the rear boundaries of the properties fronting Upper Hall Park which in my view forms a clearly defined, firm and defensible limit to the built-up area. In its present open and undeveloped condition, the site contributes to one of the primary purposes of the Green Belt, namely preventing the outward spread of the urban area and safeguarding the adjoining countryside from encroachment.”*

Nothing has physically changed. Indeed, the Stage 3 Green Belt Review commissioned by DBC clearly supports the strong boundaries that exist now, while conclude that *“strengthening”* to the new boundaries would be required only if the land is released i.e. releasing the land from Green Belt would weaken the strong defensible boundaries that previous inspectors have referred to.

Furthermore, the review's Landscape Findings labels Bk01 as *“Moderate-High”* for both Susceptibility and Sensitive, but that summary includes the *“moderate”* label for the land to the furthest west of Bk01 which is physically detached from the larger parcels to the east where the majority of building would take place. On its own this land would be given a *“High”* rating.

Site Appraisals raise significant issues:

- Substantial loss of Green Belt land and major southward expansion of the town on the open upper valley sides up to the A41.
 - The loss of productive farm land.
 - Impact on the Green Gateway into the town – impact on transition area from urban to countryside
 - The land is not well related to existing services and facilities in the town centre.
 - Located at a distance from the town centre which would discourage walking and cycling – in addition the gradient between the town centre and the site may make walking and cycling difficult
 - Additional traffic created by the site could add to existing problems in the AQMA at Northchurch
 - Located near A41 – noise levels could affect health and wellbeing even with the proposed acoustic bunds in place
 - Large-scale development will place significant pressure on local infrastructure, particularly the local highway network.
 - The ability of these roads to accommodate additional traffic should be tested, particularly Swing Gate Lane and any potential to upgrade it. How can it be kept as a secondary access?
 - Capacity of Shootersway / Kingshill Way junction and other local junctions will need to be confirmed, especially given cumulative impact of existing and other promoted development.
- Sustainability

Site Appraisal acknowledges that the distance from key facilities and services and its valley ridge location would discourage movements by foot or cycle

Site Appraisals all negative issues – mitigation relies on

- The proposal offers opportunity to create a new planned neighbourhood expansion of the town with a range of associated local services and facilities. It is of a size to deliver larger-scale infrastructure and contribute to improving transport links through the creation of an east-west link road (connecting Swing Gate Lane with Chesham Road), although this will need to be tested. It also allows potential to secure a range of social, leisure and community facilities.

BRAG gave evidence at the Core Strategy showing that the so called benefits are unlikely to materialise, are not sustainable or are simply required to facilitate the new development itself, giving no benefit to the wider community and indeed would pile extra stress on the already creaking infrastructure. In particular:

- Proposed east-west link is promoted as benefit to the wider community. However, at the Accessibility session of the Core Strategy Hearing the Inspector accepted the conclusions of all attendees (including DBC and Herts County Council Highways Department) that the 'link' could not work as promoted by the developer and was simply required to facilitate the proposed new development. As such it cannot be accepted as benefit for the community as a whole and is shocking that it appears as such in a DBC site appraisal. It is likely to generate rat runs – cutting out road system around Chesham Road (which is one-way for the majority) and Shootersway – leading to unintended consequence of massive congestion as cars are forced down Swing Gate Lane – which does not have the capacity – and then additional traffic on all the Hall Park estate roads as cars seek to avoid traffic jams with A4251
- Additional 2000 cars (c6,000 car movements per day) – contrary to local plan policies and creating increased greenhouse gas emissions.
- Parts of this ridge top location would be highly visible from AONB land and intrusive

- Commuter estate – lack of community cohesion – no contribution to vision of a ‘sustainable and vibrant market town’
- Suggestion of new primary school – rejected by DBC at Core Strategy.
- Affordable housing – cut off from town and all facilities – requirement for car – will not generate vision of ‘inclusive community’
- Not appropriate siting for growing elderly population. An increasing elderly population will have more reliance on cars etc and the distance from town and all vital facilities will be a key factor in their integration into the community or isolation from it.
- Previous suggestions to improve traffic flow in Swing Gate Lane by banning parking totally unfeasible and detrimental to community.
- Additional dangers of steep roads in winter. In recent years, bad winters have become a regular occurrence and, in some cases, freezing conditions have lasted for several days. Most roads leading south out of the valley were not cleared or treated and buses either found them impassable or proceeded with great difficulty. Refuse collection had to be cancelled and four wheel drive vehicles had difficulty in coping. The inaccessibility of the hills caused many drivers to abandon their cars on the London Road, exacerbating travel problems. The weather-related accessibility problems for any developments on the valley ridge will require some form of snow clearance programme. This definitely has not happened in recent years mainly on the grounds of cost and once, we believe, when there was a national shortage of salt. We can find no evidence that this particular issue has been addressed.
- Sustainable travel aspirations are unrealistic. Cycling is the least popular mode of travel and, during BRAG’s traffic surveys, it was very rare to see a cyclist, especially ascending the hill. With long, very steep gradients, some of which are 1:11, cycling is accepted not to be a realistic alternative form of transport.
- Walking is a popular mode of travel for those living within one mile of the town centre or the railway station, currently, 12% of commuters walk. In the DfT ‘Sustainable Travel Towns’ initiative, walking trips per person grew by some 13%. If applied to Berkhamsted, the numbers walking would increase to just 13½% but again the steep gradients would not promote walking in this site. We accept that bus travel offers the best hope for reducing car use but many of the ideas put forward in the Strategy Document and supporting papers do appear over-optimistic. A large proportion of Berkhamsted residents already live within ten minutes of a bus stop and usage, for any purpose, remains low.
- Suggestion of ‘bus loop’ not viable solution as clearly demonstrated at Core Strategy Inspection. Berkhamsted bus routes have decreased in recent years. Would not meet requirement for 850 homes to reach employment, schooling etc in rush hour or have any significant impact on car journeys
- **Important issue** – TRL states *“The scale of development at this site is out of scale with employment opportunities in Berkhamsted and therefore it is likely that many of the new dwellings will be occupied by commuters to other towns/areas for work. Whilst the site is situated within 2km of the railway station there remains the likelihood that a high proportion will commute to work or make their journey to the station by private car.”*
- Berkhamsted railway station and commuter line to Euston is already at full capacity – pre-pandemic.
- Suggestion of local services and facilities shown not to be viable at last Core Strategy inquiry – BRAG has letters from commercial surveyors relating to local retail provision not being a sustainable option.

Berkhamsted Residents Action Group (BRAG) Response to DBC Draft Local Plan Consultation

- Suggestion of local employment opportunities in 'local centre' or business units – generate more car journeys – not viable anyway.
- GP / health provision – town struggling to meet current demand. National shortage of GPs – unlikely that a new practice would be established on South Berkhamsted site – significant distance to current practices.
- Suggestion that *“this increased number of residents in the town would make facilities and shops more viable”* – they have already identified the difficulties in accessing the town and facilities – will either massively increase congestion and drive away business from the town – or will commute out and use other towns and facilities – in either case providing NO 'sustainable Prosperity' to Berkhamsted
- Impact on wildlife – reduction on wildlife corridor – forcing wildlife to cross A41 – TRL recognises loss or damage to habitats including Long Green wildlife site and Brickhill Green wildlife site
- Development of site threatens ancient woodland (Long Green), while environmental policies suggest this would be an ideal area to plant more trees and expand existing woodland rather than creating more pollution.
- Suggestions of managed woodland doubtful – who would have responsibility?
- Area of Archaeological significance affects part of the land.
- Site appraisal says the 'Potential linkages with B-h2 could be explored' – would exacerbate all the problems and block wildlife corridor even more.

Bk02 British Film Institute

The local objective to *“Support the British Film Institute to consolidate on their site”* has clearly been dropped.

Presumably the only reason this is included is because BFI have indicated they wish to move. Site specific requirements are a nonsense.

Bk03 Haslam Playing Fields

Berkhamsted School has been an important part of the Town since 1541. BSGCA has reported that there is a shortage of pitches available to the community. Haslam Field was gifted to the school and BRAG were told by the school that it was a legal condition that they could not develop the land – it was gifted to be used as sports fields.

Presumably, the school have found legal way round these conditions, but clearly at the very least promoting the land goes directly against the spirit of the gift and the benefactors stated wishes. If it is surplus to the school's current requirements it should be passed to BSGCA to use until it is no longer required when it would be returned to the school.

- Some distance from the town centre.
- Important transition area between the town and open countryside.
- New building could set a precedent for further development of land to the A41 bypass.
- Site is too small to offer scope for additional town-wide leisure space.
- Very close to the A41.
- Fails to meet Dacorum or Berkhamsted Vision other than provide housing numbers
 - facilities and services not accessible

- Public transport cannot be used and provision for walking and cycling not viable – suggestions that residents would walk to and from the town on any pathway provided through Bearroc is absurd
- Situated at ridge top location at a distance from employment, retail, health and community services.
- Negative impact on adjacent AONB and concern for existing Tree Preservation Orders
- Site of archaeological significance
- Not recommended for removal from Green Belt
 - Exits onto Shootersway an already overstretched road. One of the major concerns of the Council in granting permission for development at Bearroc was the traffic that would be generated. Any additional development in this area will exacerbate the problems of traffic congestion and air pollution. Additional traffic created by the site could add to existing problems in the AQMA at Northchurch
- No public transport within reach. Suggestions that this development would increase the viability of new public transport provision is unrealistic. Little likelihood of commercial viability for even a few services per day and majority of journeys would be made by car
- Sustainable travel aspirations are unrealistic. Cycling is the least popular mode of travel and, during BRAG's traffic surveys, it was very rare to see a cyclist, especially ascending the hill. With long, very steep gradients, some of which are 1:11, cycling is accepted not to be a realistic alternative form of transport.
- Walking is a popular mode of travel for those living within one mile of the town centre or the railway station, currently, 12% of commuters walk. In the DfT 'Sustainable Travel Towns' initiative, walking trips per person grew by some 13%. If applied to Berkhamsted, the numbers walking would increase to just 13½% but again the steep gradients would not promote walking in this site. We accept that bus travel offers the best hope for reducing car use but many of the ideas put forward in the Strategy Document and supporting papers do appear over-optimistic. A large proportion of Berkhamsted residents already live within ten minutes of a bus stop and, generally, the services to the town centre and further afield are good but usage, for any purpose, remains low.

Bk04 Land Between Hanburys and A41

- Some distance from the town centre.
- Important transition area between the town and open countryside.
- New building could set a precedent for further development of land to the A41 bypass.
- Site is too small to offer scope for additional town-wide leisure space.
- Very close to the A41.
- Fails to meet Dacorum or Berkhamsted Vision other than provide housing numbers
 - facilities and services not accessible
 - Public transport cannot be used and provision for walking and cycling not viable – suggestions that residents would walk to and from the town on any pathway provided through Bearroc is absurd
- Situated at ridge top location at a distance from employment, retail, health and community services.
- Negative impact on adjacent AONB and concern for existing Tree Preservation Orders
- Site of archaeological significance

- Not recommended for removal from Green Belt
 - Exits onto Shootersway an already overstretched road. One of the major concerns of the Council in granting permission for development at Bearroc was the traffic that would be generated. Any additional development in this area will exacerbate the problems of traffic congestion and air pollution.
- No public transport within reach. Suggestions that this development would increase the viability of new public transport provision is unrealistic. Little likelihood of commercial viability for even a few services per day and majority of journeys would be made by car
- Sustainable travel aspirations are unrealistic. Cycling is the least popular mode of travel and, during BRAG's traffic surveys, it was very rare to see a cyclist, especially ascending the hill. With long, very steep gradients, some of which are 1:11, cycling is accepted not to be a realistic alternative form of transport.
- Walking is a popular mode of travel for those living within one mile of the town centre or the railway station, currently, 12% of commuters walk. In the DfT 'Sustainable Travel Towns' initiative, walking trips per person grew by some 13%. If applied to Berkhamsted, the numbers walking would increase to just 13½% but again the steep gradients would not promote walking in this site. We accept that bus travel offers the best hope for reducing car use but many of the ideas put forward in the Strategy Document and supporting papers do appear over-optimistic. A large proportion of Berkhamsted residents already live within ten minutes of a bus stop and, generally, the services to the town centre and further afield are good but usage, for any purpose, remains low.

Bk05 Blegberry Gardens (land adjacent to)

Core Strategy identified the following reasons against development on this site

- Some distance from the town centre.
- Important transition area between the town and open countryside.
- New building could set a precedent for further development of land to the A41 bypass.
- Site is too small to offer scope for additional town-wide leisure space.
- Very close to the A41.

In addition BRAG makes the following objections

- Fails to meet Dacorum or Berkhamsted Vision other than provide housing numbers
 - facilities and services not accessible
 - Public transport cannot be used and provision for walking and cycling not viable – suggestions that residents would walk to and from the town on any pathway provided through Bearroc is absurd
- Situated at ridge top location at a distance from employment, retail, health and community services.
- Negative impact on adjacent AONB and concern for existing Tree Preservation Orders
- Site of archaeological significance
- Not recommended for removal from Green Belt
 - Exits onto Shootersway an already overstretched road at a point opposite to the large new development – Bearroc [Taylor Wimpey]. One of the major concerns of the Council in granting permission for development at Bearroc was the traffic that would be generated. Any additional development in this area will exacerbate the problems of traffic congestion and air pollution. Additional traffic created by the site could add to existing problems in the AQMA at Northchurch

- No public transport within reach. Suggestions that this development would increase the viability of new public transport provision is unrealistic. Little likelihood of commercial viability for even a few services per day and majority of journeys would be made by car
- Sustainable travel aspirations are unrealistic. Cycling is the least popular mode of travel and, during BRAG's traffic surveys, it was very rare to see a cyclist, especially ascending the hill. With long, very steep gradients, some of which are 1:11, cycling is accepted not to be a realistic alternative form of transport.
- Walking is a popular mode of travel for those living within one mile of the town centre or the railway station, currently, 12% of commuters walk. In the DfT 'Sustainable Travel Towns' initiative, walking trips per person grew by some 13%. If applied to Berkhamsted, the numbers walking would increase to just 13½% but again the steep gradients would not promote walking in this site. We accept that bus travel offers the best hope for reducing car use but many of the ideas put forward in the Strategy Document and supporting papers do appear over-optimistic. A large proportion of Berkhamsted residents already live within ten minutes of a bus stop and, generally, the services to the town centre and further afield are good but usage, for any purpose, remains low.

Bk06 East of Darrs Lane

Land between Durrants Lane / Bell Lane / Darr's Lane (two sites)

Core Strategy rejected this option for the following reasons

- Strong countryside boundary.
- Impact on landscape/Chilterns AONB.
- Impact and visibility of development on valley sides.
- Poor relationship to town centre services and facilities, employment land and station.

In addition BRAG makes the following objections

- Fails to meet Berkhamsted Vision other than provide housing numbers
 - facilities and services not accessible
 - Public transport cannot be used and provision for walking and cycling not viable – suggestions that residents would walk to and from the town on any pathway provided highly unlikely
- Suggestion that it is relatively close to shops at Northchurch risible – steep gradient and distance'
- Parking at Northchurch already insufficient – no capacity for additional cars from ridge top
- One of the major concerns of the Council in granting permission for development at Bearroc was the traffic that would be generated. Any additional development in this area will exacerbate the problems of traffic congestion and air pollution. Additional traffic created by the site could add to existing problems in the AQMA at Northchurch
- No public transport within reach. Suggestions that this development would increase the viability of new public transport provision is unrealistic. Little likelihood of commercial viability for even a few services per day and majority of journeys would be made by car
- Suggestion of 'bus loop' therefore not viable solution. Berkhamsted bus routes have decreased in recent years. Would not meet requirement to reach employment, schooling etc in rush hour or have any significant impact on car journeys
- Site falls within area of Archaeological significance
- Adjacent to Chilterns AONB
- Same arguments on accessible housing – distance from facilities and services

- Sustainable travel aspirations are unrealistic. Cycling is the least popular mode of travel and, during BRAG's traffic surveys, it was very rare to see a cyclist, especially ascending the hill. With long, very steep gradients, some of which are 1:11, cycling is accepted not to be a realistic alternative form of transport.
- Walking is a popular mode of travel for those living within one mile of the town centre or the railway station, currently, 12% of commuters walk. In the DfT 'Sustainable Travel Towns' initiative, walking trips per person grew by some 13%. If applied to Berkhamsted, the numbers walking would increase to just 13½% but again the steep gradients would not promote walking in this site. We accept that bus travel offers the best hope for reducing car use but many of the ideas put forward in the Strategy Document and supporting papers do appear over-optimistic. A large proportion of Berkhamsted residents already live within ten minutes of a bus stop and, generally, the services to the town centre and further afield are good but usage, for any purpose, remains low.

Bk07 Land at Lockfield, Northchurch

Core Strategy identified the following reasons against development on this site

- Site is insufficient on its own, but could be phased with other land.
- Some distance from the town centre.
- Next to the Chilterns AONB.
- Site is too small to offer scope for additional town-wide leisure space.
- The canal bridge on New Road is narrow and results in poor pedestrian access to local facilities.
- Visually prominent site.
- Proximity to railway line.
- Impact on setting of the canal.

In addition BRAG makes the following objections

- Close to canal – undermines Berkhamsted Vision “protecting key historic and environmental assets such as the Grand Union Canal and the River Bulbourne”
- Close to Northchurch AQMA
- Traffic congestion at junction of North Road with Northchurch High Street will be exacerbated
- Safe access to New Road will be a challenge given how narrow the road is beyond the Canal bridge
- Parking difficulties and concerns for safety of children attending St Mary's School
- Noise from railway
- Distance from town centre services and vital facilities

Bk08 Rossway Farm (land between Shootersway and A41)

- Some distance from the town centre.
- Important transition area between the town and open countryside.
- New building could set a precedent for further development of land to the A41 bypass.
- Site is too small to offer scope for additional town-wide leisure space.
- Very close to the A41.
- Fails to meet Dacorum or Berkhamsted Vision

- facilities and services not accessible
- Public transport cannot be used and provision for walking and cycling not viable – suggestions that residents would walk to and from the town on any pathway provided through Bearroc is absurd
- Situated at ridge top location at a distance from employment, retail, health and community services.
- Negative impact on adjacent AONB and concern for existing Tree Preservation Orders
- Site of archaeological significance
- Not recommended for removal from Green Belt
 - Exits onto Shootersway an already overstretched. One of the major concerns of the Council in granting permission for development at Bearroc was the traffic that would be generated. Any additional development in this area will exacerbate the problems of traffic congestion and air pollution. Additional traffic created by the site could add to existing problems in the AQMA at Northchurch
- No public transport within reach. Suggestions that this development would increase the viability of new public transport provision is unrealistic. Little likelihood of commercial viability for even a few services per day and majority of journeys would be made by car
- Sustainable travel aspirations are unrealistic. Cycling is the least popular mode of travel and, during BRAG's traffic surveys, it was very rare to see a cyclist, especially ascending the hill. With long, very steep gradients, some of which are 1:11, cycling is accepted not to be a realistic alternative form of transport.
- Walking is a popular mode of travel for those living within one mile of the town centre or the railway station, currently, 12% of commuters walk. In the DfT 'Sustainable Travel Towns' initiative, walking trips per person grew by some 13%. If applied to Berkhamsted, the numbers walking would increase to just 13½% but again the steep gradients would not promote walking in this site. We accept that bus travel offers the best hope for reducing car use but many of the ideas put forward in the Strategy Document and supporting papers do appear over-optimistic. A large proportion of Berkhamsted residents already live within ten minutes of a bus stop and, generally, the services to the town centre and further afield are good but usage, for any purpose, remains low.

Bk09 Land at Bank Mill Lane

Core Strategy rejected this option for the following reasons

- Encroachment of the urban area along the valley bottom and into adjoining open countryside.
- Distance from the town centre services and facilities, employment land and station.
- Impact on setting of the River Bulbourne.
- Reduction in the degree of separation between the town and Bourne End

In addition BRAG makes the following objections

- Expansion of town to east – would significantly alter Gateway to Berkhamsted
- Located in Berkhamsted Conservation Area
- Impact on adjacent AONB
- Risk of flooding identified in assessment
- Distance from town centre – walking or cycling route to town adversely affected by any additional traffic to/from South Berkhamsted
- Suggestion of provision of local play space – edge of town not a practical site

- Adjacent site delivered NO affordable homes – suggestion that this site will deliver 20 affordable homes
- Suggestion of specialist elderly person’s accommodation on site – at a distance from the town centre facilities and services – residents won’t be walking and cycling to the town

Green Belt and at the entrance to the Town. Contains the River Bulborne. Should be kept as it is but if developed a more appropriate use could be the retirement/care home proposal submitted to the council.

Bk10 Hanburys

Already adopted, but is an example of master planning failure. BRAG was invited to participate in planning the development with the owner’s representatives and the DBC planners. What is currently proposed bears no resemblance to the agreed Master Plan and has been changed without reverting to the local community.

Bk11 Billet Lane (Jewson site)

Provides premises for a number of local concerns serving the communities’ needs and provides employment. Replacement with residential dwellings is unthinkable and not only demonstrates the lack of real understanding of the nature and needs of Berkhamsted, it is also a contradiction of the Council’s objective of providing 116,500sqm of industrial/warehouse floorspace for which they acknowledge there is a land shortage in the Borough.

Bk12 Berkhamsted Civic Centre and Land to the Rear of High Street

Given Dacorum Council’s track record, redevelopment will see the loss of the largest community accessible facility, the hall, from the Town. Local community groups supported by the Town Council have an interest in a transfer as a Community Asset. Disposal by the Borough for development conflicts with Policy DM64 Community Facilities and DM65 Community Stewardship and Management Preference to retain.

Bk13 Gossoms End / Billet Lane

Lidl are understood to be seeking a developer purchaser to provide the foodstore and parking on a leaseback basis and build the residential element to its own account. Any element of affordable housing in the existing consent should be retained.

Are there any other sites in Berkhamsted that you think should be included in the Plan?

NO

The ‘Bullbourne Cross’ proposals being promoted Thakeham and the Berkhamsted Sports Ground Charitable Trust should be rejected for all the same reasons BRAG rejects the Green Belt developments contained in this consultation document.

The zero carbon credentials that Thakenham advertise for the proposed development are the bare minimum that DBC should be demanding from developers and they do not outweigh the damage done by building on this Green Belt site, which completes the coalescence of Berkhamsted and Bourne End.

Section (25) Sustainability Appraisal

Do you have any comments on the Sustainability Appraisal that accompanies the Plan?

YES

The SA conclusion 7.1 states that the Council have been successful in achieving their SA objectives *“by maximising the levels of development in the existing urban areas the amount of greenfield land needed will be minimised, thereby reducing the scale of these effects.”*

But DBC’s Plan does nothing of the sort. The facts simply do not support that conclusion. Look at the numbers – excluding windfall, only 23% of the planned development to 2050 is on Brownfield sites, leaving 77% to be built on Green Belt or Greenfield sites (64% Green Belt). This is not a ratio that in anyway suggests that the DBC have effectively analysed urban capacity correctly or maximised *“the levels of development in the existing urban areas”*.

BRAG notes that CPRE Herts have come to the same conclusion that DBC underestimate potential brownfield regeneration opportunities:

“The proposed local plan fails to take into account the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic and recently expanded permitted development rights, both of which are likely to result in much greater conversion of commercial space (especially office and retail) to residential use. The potential for such windfall provision of housing throughout the borough is likely to be much higher than that identified in the proposed plan. As a result, such a windfall many of the proposals for development on Green Belt and greenfield sites outside of existing towns and villages are likely to be unnecessary.

Dacorum Borough Council should consider promoting mixed use living spaces in town centres. This has the potential to provide much needed affordable housing and provide a sustainable transport solution for local communities. The plan lacks a vision for the long-term future of retail and leisure parks that create better people friendly places and that are not designed around cars. A good example of mixed-use living spaces in town centres is the recent re-development of a retail park in Watford.

In the light of recent events (Covid and Brexit) and trends in the retail sector, the government has announced a new approach to promotion of redevelopment and changes to the way our urban land is used, in particular the reconsideration of how much, and which existing retail, industrial and commercial land and premises can be more efficiently and sustainably used in a different way. The now-expanded permitted development rights allow commercial space to be converted to residential (as well as adding additional storeys on top) without need for planning permission.

This new opportunity appears to have been ignored in the preparation of the proposed plan.”

In response to section 7 (Housing Strategy), BRAG touched on the potential increase in urban development opportunities with changing work practices post-Covid, but we can also look to the past to see how DBC are failing to plan to maximise *“the levels of development in the existing urban areas”*.

Again, this was covered in BRAG’s response to section 7 (Housing Strategy) but it bears repeating here to highlight exactly how absurd conclusion 7.1 of the SA report is.

In section 7, paragraphs 7.6, 7.9 and Table 2 are confusing when comes to windfalls. Both 7.6 and 7.9 state that 200 homes pa have been used but Table 2 only shows 2,408 in total which equates to 133.8dpa.

Paragraph 7.9 states *“Our analysis indicates that windfall sites will play an important part in the housing programme (at 200 homes pa). They are made up of a wide range of small to large sites from a variety of sources that have been calculated using historic delivery rates and expected future trends. We believe it is justified based on past local evidence and is a reliable source of supply across the Plan period.”*

But DBC’s Urban Capacity Study shows windfalls have come on-line at the rate of 306.2dpa (4,287 total) over the last 14 years. In projecting forward for the totals in Table 2, DBC have effectively reduced their windfall expectation by a massive 56% from what has been achieved in the last 14 years.

DBC clearly have a different view of *“expected future trends”* than most other observers, including Government, who expect increased windfall urban development as working practices change post Covid and change of use applications increase.

This is not BRAG being pedantic or over-zealous in pointing out the discrepancy between Table 2 and paragraphs 7.6 and 7.9, these numbers are of critical importance when it comes to offering our precious Green Belt the protection that the NPPF demands.

Even if taking the windfall rate of 200dpa mentioned in paragraphs 7.6 and 7.9, urban capacity over the life of the Plan would increase to 12,146, which equates to a near 100% uplift over the 341dpa requirement suggested by the 2018-based ONS housing need projections for Dacorum.

Figures from the past 14 years and the knowledge of changes in working practices will almost certainly lead to windfall completions in excess of 50% higher than the 200dpa quoted in paragraphs 7.6/7.9 and more than 129% higher windfalls than quoted in Table 2.

The table below illustrates the importance of this point and how it affects the amount of Green Belt release required to meet the ‘non-target’ of 922dpa, and also illustrates just how DBC have not at all produce a plan that even attempts to maximise development in existing urban areas.

	Based on data from:			
	Table 2	Para 7.6/7.9	Last 14yr ave	Last 5yr Ave
Windfall rate (dpa)	133.8	200	306.2	346.3
Total Windfalls Across Plan	2408	3600	5512	6233
Dwellings Required In Green Belt	5642	4450	2538	1817

And the table does not account for increased change of use windfalls that is accepted by Government as likely to be a trend going forward. Nor does it reflect the now-expanded permitted development rights highlighted by CPRE Herts, but the final column (Last 5yr Ave) suggests the windfall trend for Dacorum is already increasing.

Conclusion 7.1 goes on to say *“In addition, allocating sites in the most sustainable edge of settlement locations will also help to reduce adverse effects, particularly those relating to transport.”*

Again, this is a statement based on aspirations rather than a conclusion derived from facts. At least in terms of the growth areas being promoted around Berkhamsted. Yes, they are edge of town, but situated on steep valley sides (some gradients in excess of those found on the Tour de France) and ridge top locations at some distance from the town centre, facilities and the railway station. They will certainly not *“help reduce adverse effects, particularly those relating to transport issues”*.

With respect to Berkhamsted, these locations can only do the opposite and add to the adverse effect, particularly those relating to transport issues.

The SA report seems to give a large weighting to the transport connectivity of Berkhamsted. While Berkhamsted is served by a very good rail service, that service was at capacity (pre-pandemic) and BRAG takes issue with bus services being portrayed as good.

The *“high frequency bus service (No.500)”* referred to in C31 only operates 3 buses per hour Monday-Friday, 2 buses per hour on Saturdays and a single hourly service during Sunday shopping hours. There is no evening service or early services on Saturdays, while it also suffers reliability issues due to its length.

Berkhamsted does not have a sustainable transport system in place and promoting growth on valley side and ridge-top Green Belt locations will only reduce those sustainability credentials further.

The SA report Appendix C does identify the chronic issues revolving around water and wastewater, but as BRAG has highlighted elsewhere there is nothing in the plan to address these issues. DBC’s usual answer is that *“developers have a right to connect and development cannot normally be resisted on the grounds of inadequate water supply or sewerage capacity.”*

BRAG would query whether the Borough is correct in this respect. Things may have moved on but BRAG does know that in the 70's there was a moratorium on house building in South Devon until improved sewage disposal facilities were built, and in Herefordshire due to pollution there is a moratorium on all house building in the River Lugg's catchment area.

Overall, the SA report suffers from the usual confirmation bias traits that accompany analysis that requires specific outcomes to be justified.

DBC’s plan is clearly set out on the premise that we have a large housing target to hit, how do we do we achieve that target it?

Good planning plans for the right houses in the right places.

So, the questions should be, what does our Borough need and how best can we provide for that need?

The SA report would look completely different given the latter questions.

Section (26) Evidence Base

Do you agree that the Evidence Base that accompanies the Plan is adequate, up-to-date and relevant?

NO

There is no doubt that the evidence base is extensive and very, very weighty. Certainly, DBC have produced more material than any respondent could possibly digest within the time frame of this consultation.

Many members of BRAG believe the whole process is deliberately weighted against their inclusion, a belief exacerbated by being overlaid with material/evidence that has little bearing on the process and conclusions, while it also offers no evidence that DBC have done anything other than dismiss their views expressed in the last Issues And Options consultation.

Nearly 95% of respondents to the 2017 consultation didn't agree with the proposed approach to Green Belt and Major development sites. Yet, despite the sheer amount of reports supplied, there is precious little evidence that DBC have explored how to give the Borough's Green Belt the protection that the NPPF demands.

BRAG produced its own Green Belt report (Berkhamsted Town Council adopted and forwarded to DBC), but despite claiming to engage the Community (a claim repeated in this Plan) DBC ignored BRAG's submission in favour of desk-based reports compiled by consultants who had no knowledge of the area. BRAG's report clearly identified confirmation bias throughout the reports.

Confirmation bias exists throughout DBC's evidence base. In simple terms, a question is asked and consultants formulate reports to confirm the required answer.

In this case, the question mostly revolves around how to provide a plan that facilitates a housing target supplied by Government, rather than asking what is an appropriate target for the Borough? There is absolutely no attempt to provide evidence that the Government numbers are right or wrong for Dacorum, despite 95% of the residents clearly telling DBC the numbers were wrong in the 2017 consultation.

The evidence base is absolutely the right place for DBC to challenge the Government numbers and the methodology, but they make no attempt to do so.

The 2016 South West Hertfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) identified a housing need of 756dpa for Dacorum, but that was dumped in 2020 SHMA for the 1023dpa based on the Governments Standard methodology, which is based on national requirements rather than local needs.

That 1023dpa was then replaced for this consultation with 922dpa target based on a Government algorithm that later discredited and dubbed the 'mutant algorithm'. The reason the 'mutant algorithm' has been dropped since the publication of DBC's plan is because it was challenged.

The evidence base is absolutely the right place to challenge the Government algorithms and numbers and why excessive houses cannot be accommodated in Dacorum.

DBC are now likely to claim they must accept 1023dpa, but like the 'mutant algorithm' the Standard Method needs challenging – it employs an affordability coefficient to 2014 ONS data.

The NPPF requires the latest data to be used so it is illogical that the Government should enforce numbers based on out-of-date data. The 2018 ONS based projections represent the latest data and if the Standard Methodology is applied to the latest ONS growth predictions, Dacorum's housing need would be calculated at 497dpa.

Growth predictions by ONS have reduced between 2014 and 2018; one might surmise that Brexit and an international pandemic will have reduced growth rates further. Indeed, the birth rate has been falling steadily since 2012 when it peaked at 1.93 (2.1 is required to maintain a steady population) and is now down to 1.60 in England, and even lower in Scotland.

This doesn't necessarily mean the population is falling, because older people are living longer, but if you factor in a Brexit brain drain which has already started, the return home of many EU nationals (also already started) and the Government's policies on immigration, then one might possibly anticipate that we will follow the trend in Spain, Germany, Japan etc. where populations are falling.

This may not fit in with Governments 'build, build, build' mantra, but DBC have a responsibility to the Borough and its residents, both current and future, to build the right homes in the right places.

The first step in that is exploring what constitutes the true need of the Borough and the true ability to fulfil that need within the constraints of the Borough, including Green Belt as dictated by the NPPF. DBC have palpably failed to do this.

Nor have DBC considered the effects of the current pandemic within their evidence base, despite request from many community bodies and organisations, such as BRAG, who also requested a delay to this reg 18 consultation to give DBC more time to do so.

BRAG has highlighted worries and discrepancies about the way DBC have handled windfall calculations (see sections 5,7 and 25). DBC state their windfall predictions *"have been calculated using historic delivery rates and expected future trends. We believe it is justified based on past local evidence and is a reliable source of supply across the Plan period."*

However, the last 14 year average for windfalls have come in at 306.2dpa (346.3dpa over the last 5 years) and there is no justification or evidence presented to suggest the Council should lower future windfall projections to 133.8dpa (asper Table 2) from either the 14 year or last 5 year averages, especially considering evidence of changing working practices post-pandemic.

Despite its excessive bulk, the Evidence Base that accompanies the Plan is clearly not adequate, up-to-date and relevant for Dacorum's needs.

BRAG's members also disturbed by the inaccuracies within the main consultation document, specifically the highlighting of land as open space that has already been developed and giving a large private garden open land status.

BRAG understands that technically all sports fields are 'open land', but it is stretching the definition to include a private garden, private tennis courts, fully enclosed private football pitches and school grounds that cannot be accessed by the general public. BRAG's members believe the Council are clearly being misleading in trying to indicate there is more Open Space within the town than there actually is.

Section (27) National Policy and Guidance

Do you think the Plan is consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and supporting guidance?

NO

For full analysis and detail BRAG refers DBC back to responses to other sections, but it is clear that this Plan is not consistent with the NPPF.

- a) The fails to use the latest data to calculate the Boroughs needs
- b) Without giving any justification the Plan accepts the Standard Methodology numbers as a strict target when Government has made it crystal clear that these numbers are NOT targets
- c) The Plan fails to take into account the natural constraints of the Borough, and so fails to provide protection for Green Belt as required by the NPPF
- d) No evidence is given as to the '*exceptional circumstances*' to plan for building on Green Belt that passes the tests included in the NPPF.
- e) The Plan promotes sites that cannot be regarded as sustainable or well served by public transport.

Section (28) Any other comment

BRAG is a member of the 'One Voice Alliance', a collection of organisations who, despite having different priorities, all share serious concerns and strong objections to the DBC Local Plan. We are all completely dismayed by the approach taken by Dacorum's Planning Officers and apparent endorsement by many of our local Councillors.

The mission statement of the One Voice Alliance is:

'We, the Chiltern Society, Chiltern Countryside Group (CCG), Grove Fields Residents Association (GFRA), Berkhamsted Residents Action Group (BRAG), Kings Langley & District Residents Association (KL&DRA), Berkhamsted Citizens Association and Tring in Transition as the 'One Voice' Alliance, oppose the 'Dacorum Local Plan - Emerging Strategy for Growth' because:

- 1. Whilst the policy on biodiversity is clear, the emerging plan is not explicit enough in terms of **how** Dacorum Council will work with developers and other stakeholders to mitigate Green Belt loss, increase biodiversity and meet National and Hertfordshire's goals for climate change and carbon reduction*
- 2. The proposed number of houses to be built should be significantly lower than the target to reflect **actual demonstrable need** for housing and the high proportion of Green Belt and AONB land in Dacorum, with a primary focus on affordable starter homes*
- 3. A higher proportion of the houses should be built on brownfield land, or established through conversions, in the existing urban areas of Hemel Hempstead, Tring, Berkhamsted and Kings Langley, and **away from areas located in the Green Belt** (which should only be used in exceptional circumstances) and the Chilterns AONB and its setting.*

While not members of the Alliance, the Chilterns Conservation Board and CPRE Hertfordshire are working closely as advisors to the One Voice alliance."