

Theresa Villiers MP: Statement for examination in public of draft Local Plan

Corrected version following attendance at the hearing on 9th November 2022 at Hendon Town Hall.

Thank you for permitting me to make further representations to this examination of a local plan which will have such a major impact on this borough over the next 15 years.

When I addressed you at an earlier stage of the process I set out why I thought the housing targets, and various other aspects of the plan, were not 'sound' because they were not an appropriate strategy taking into account reasonable alternatives and based on proportionate evidence.

I have the same reservations about a number of the allocated sites and would ask that these be deleted, or at least that the proposed unit capacity is reduced.

I appreciate that this creates a potential problem with providing the evidence that the proposed housing targets can be met.

But in my view that just demonstrates even more clearly that neither the 2364 London Plan figure nor the 3060 SHMA number can possibly be met without violating long held planning principles and destroying much of what makes Barnet the great place that it is.

So I feel that I must speak out against the targets and the sites list. I believe that the cumulative impact of the development of many of the sites on the list could have a major negative impact on my constituents.

Turning firstly to site 2, North London Business Park, I would strongly argue that there should be no increase in the unit figure of 1350.

Based on the extant planning permission, this figure would already involve a huge population increase.

This draft plan should not give the tacit green light to making these blocks of flats even larger and taller, as proposed in the more recent planning application.

The Osidge Lane Community Halls in site three would be much missed by the community and I hope the council will not permit them to be bulldozed and replaced with flats.

The flood risk from Pymmes Brook must be considerable.

It seems a short-sighted plan to build homes in such a vulnerable location when flooding is expected to worsen as our climate changes.

Moving on to site 16 in East Barnet Road, I would say that 110 units for is excessive.

I can see a case for some new residential redevelopment here.

There are other examples along the road of positive and proportionate new homebuilding.

But New Barnet is already being asked to accommodate extensive additional housing at Victoria Quarter and in a number of other locations identified in this list.

I do not believe that local infrastructure could readily cope with the cumulative impact of 110 flats here, together with so much other nearby building.

That includes the 201 units on gasholder site 2, and the hundreds of flats likely to be built at Victoria Quarter, once the 14 year long debate on its future is resolved.

And it includes New Barnet Sainsbury's (site 22). Losing this anchor store and cramming 199 flats on to the site would be a massive blow to the town centre.

I do not see how these capacity figures could be delivered in New Barnet without high rise blocks which would be wholly inconsistent with important elements of this draft plan and destroy the suburban character of the area which is so much valued by so many people who live here.

The intolerable impact on roads, parking and local services would be intensified if site 52 at Kingmaker House stays in the plan.

Already rejected for planning permission because of its local impact, I regret that it appears in this list.

Moving on to High Barnet, I fail to see why the Army Reserve Centre features as site 43 since I received a clear assurance from Ministers at the dispatch box that this facility is needed for operational purposes and that the MoD has no plans to close it.

It would therefore seem unrealistic to pray this in aid in seeking to establish a five year land supply of locations which could contribute to delivering new homes.

In any event, 193 units would be excessive and discordant with surrounding homes.

I would now turn to the most controversial High Barnet site of all, the station car park.

As I set out in my earlier presentation to this examination in public, this is a car-dependent suburb.

Removing parking facilities at stations will significantly constrain the economic opportunities of many of my constituents.

Elderly and disabled people will find it particularly difficult to access the public transport network without the option of parking their cars.

Bus services are limited, especially outside peak hours and the hill is steep climb for anyone with mobility impairments.

The viability of building here must be very doubtful.

The TfL plan is currently stalled after the developer apparently pulled out of the scheme.

Even before their application ran into the sand, they had been forced to abandon the proposal to build over the wooded area on the northern half of the site - just as well, considering that the A1000 is visibly collapsing in this location and hardly looks like a great place to put up new blocks of flats.

There is huge opposition to the Mayor's proposals to build over station car parks around London. The Cockfosters scheme in neighbouring Enfield was vetoed by the Transport Secretary because of the loss of parking facilities. The Arnos Grove scheme is also delayed.

High Barnet tube station car park is an important park and ride facility which should be retained.

If this proposal stays in the list then it should *only* cover the area at the bottom of the hill which is currently occupied by various businesses.

And the height and number of dwellings there should be moderate.

This is the gateway to Barnet (using this term in its old geographical sense rather than as the name of the entire borough).

It is the first site you see as you head up towards the settlement of Chipping Barnet which as existed since Anglo Saxon times.

The high rise blocks in this location which would be needed to deliver the number of flats proposed would be entirely inappropriate.

Just as we should retain park and ride facilities in High Barnet, so we should at Totteridge and Whetstone, Woodside Park and Finchley Central tube stations.

For those reasons, I oppose site allocations 30, 53, 55.

600 units at Totteridge station and 556 at Finchley Central are especially objectionable.

There is no way these could be delivered without a degree of densification which is unacceptable in a low-rise suburban environment.

The massive tower block proposed for Finchley Central is just appalling.

600 new flats around Totteridge tube station would blight the area and change it permanently.

The suggestion that these station developments will be car free only intensified my concerns.

Residents of these new blocks will inevitably own cars and so building without off-street parking will only displace vehicles on to neighbouring roads.

I want to conclude by highlighting some grave concerns about the proposal to include the Whalebones on the land supply list.

I appreciate that you have heard from the Barnet Society on this matter, and I am sure their knowledge, expertise and long involvement with Whalebones will have meant they provided you with valuable insights.

I was particularly struck by their description of the Wood Street conservation area as encapsulating 800 years of Barnet history, with its church and market place chartered in 1199 at one end, and open fields at the other.

As the Society point out, building over some of these very last remaining fields in Barnet would completely contradict the Conservation Area Character Appraisal Statement.

The presence of Whalebones in what was merely the Regulation 19 draft Local Plan led council officers to decline to defend the Barnet Planning Committee's rejection of the plan to build 152 dwellings there. Thus illustrating the crucial impact of this local plan and this examination of it.

And yet the appeal inspector, Jonathan Price, responded positively to the defence mounted by the Barnet Society and others of us who refused to give up the struggle.

He rightly described the fields as “a cherished relic of Barnet’s historic rural hinterland”.

I hope that you, Sir, will adopt the same approach as Inspector Price. If the planning system is here to do anything it is here to protect green enclaves like Whalebones.

Its future is in your hands. The future health and happiness of this whole suburb is in your hands. I hope that you will feel able to strike out from this list Whalebones, and a number of these sites, as excessive, inappropriate and undeliverable.