

Objection to plans to develop green belt land within Woking Council's Site Allocations DPD

Paul [REDACTED]

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To: Planning Policy

My objection relates to the planned development of greenbelt land within Byfleet and West Byfleet. It mainly relates to the land South of Murray's Lane and High Road in Byfleet as this is the area most local to me and I am most familiar with.

I strongly object to the proposals to remove land in Byfleet from the greenbelt and the plans for future developments on that land. I have a number of significant concerns about these proposals, and this consultation process which I will detail below:

1. Overdevelopment within Byfleet:

I have very significant concerns regarding overdevelopment and an unfair impact specifically to Byfleet.

Within Woking, Byfleet actually has some of the least green open spaces and greenbelt land. It seems completely unreasonable and unfair to target the area with some of the least green space and reduce this even further.

These proposals remove almost all of the greenbelt from Byfleet whilst leaving other areas of Woking untouched and with a high ratio of green space per population and a continued high level of greenbelt space, compared to Byfleet. This massive erosion of green belt within Byfleet leads to a totally unfair loss and burden on just one small village and a disproportionately high adverse impact on that locality and its population.

These proposals cause urban sprawl which the greenbelt should be maintained to prevent.

Not only is Byfleet severely targeted in the plans for 2027 but also (if I understand the proposals correctly) has a second massive adverse hit and further greenbelt reduction (reducing greenbelt to almost 0) between 2022 - 2040. This is not fair or equal treatment for Byfleet compared to other Woking villages.

Any village that loses some greenbelt land to development should have its remaining greenbelt given greater protection and be exempt from future further erosion.

Byfleet is an island village with 3 exits/entrances only. These are all on one side of the village, relatively close together and all onto Parvis Road. The geography of the area and the fact the village is surrounded by water (Byfleet means 2 rivers) limits access this way.

Byfleet is therefore not a suitable village for significant development or increase in size. It is not possible to significantly change the access/exits to the village and increasing the population within the village will simply lead to even greater congestion - a literal bottle neck, onto the already over capacity Parvis Road.

Even if an additional access/exit was incorporated to the land south of High Road this would still be onto the same stretch of road on to Parvis Road. There are no other access/exit possibilities.

2. Insufficient infrastructure

As well as the geographical constraints on Byfleet detailed above I have a number of significant infrastructure concerns.

I attended the meeting regarding these proposals on 16.7.15 at the St Mary's Centre in Byfleet. At that meeting concerns were raised about the infrastructure simply not being able to cope with this scale of development targeted to a relatively small area. The Woking Council planning representative, Ernest, stated that it had not been felt

appropriate to carry out a detailed study or plan in respect of infrastructure until the actual future planning applications are made.

This seems to be a huge flaw in this process. Surely it is imperative to establish what developments an area's infrastructure can actually support and then determine the level of house building etc that is possible and sustainable. I do not believe that the infrastructure in and around Byfleet can support ANY significant level of development and this needs to be closely examined and assessed NOW, not in the future.

The fact that this has not already been closely looked at, and assessed prior to these proposals is shocking and in my opinion very poor practice. The infrastructure already has the following very significant capability issues:

- Medical facilities: There is no GP surgery in Byfleet. 1 GP building in West Byfleet covers both villages. This GPs has already seen massive increases in the number of people within the area over the last 10 years but has not made any significant increases to the services provided. It is now very difficult to make a GP appointment and surgery is struggling to cope at current levels.

- School places: The reception year intake for 2015 for all Byfleet schools was at full capacity. For the non sibling intake the catchment area significantly reduces each year and, using St Mary's school as an example, for 2015 is now around 0.9 km from the school. 0.9 km does not even cover all of Byfleet. St Mary's has already been increased in size to increase the intake to 60 children per school year group and there is very limited scope to expand any further. Primary school children should be able to attend a school in their local village and this may well not be the case in the future.

- Roads: There is already massive road congestion. Particularly Parvis Road the ONLY exit and entrance road to Byfleet as detailed above.

- Trains: the trains that run through Byfleet are already over capacity. In September 2014 the 7.32am train service from Woking to Waterloo was the MOST OVER CAPACITY TRAIN IN THE WHOLE OF THE UK! It is already running at 173% of capacity (up from 164% only 1 year earlier in 2013). The 7.02am service also features in the top 10 of over capacity trains. The trainline already runs the maximum possible 12 coaches for these services. How can this train service accommodate a significant number of new passengers from new developments all using just a few stations?

- Drainage: Byfleet floods (more detail on this is below). The drains also overflow when there is high rainfall. More building and properties will increase these existing problems.

3. Flooding

Byfleet floods. The last significant flood was December 2013 and early 2014. It was not a one off. Byfleet periodically floods. It is surrounded by rivers. Byfleet = 2 rivers. It is wet here!

Although the greenbelt land earmarked for development in 2027 is not in the maximum flood area it does border fields that do significantly and regularly flood. In some cases being under several feet of water for several weeks.

The land bordering these major flood areas is absolutely essential as fields and trees to help absorb the excess water. The drainage capability of fields and trees is massive compared to that of developed, built on ground. Without these areas bordering the main flood zones less water will be absorbed and the flood water will simply flow into other parts of the village causing worse flooding than ever before.

The danger to life and property that developing these areas could cause must not be underestimated.

I also believe some of the land earmarked for future release is actual flood zone. If that is the case the plans are also irresponsible. The green spaces in Byfleet must be preserved. They are our flood plain and essential to protect/reduce the flooding that occurs.

Experts regarding flooding must be appointed to assess the impact developing this greenbelt would have regarding flooding before these proposals go any further. I do not believe this has been done.

Poor planning decisions have already been made in the past regarding properties in flood areas within Byfleet. Relatively new properties in Viscount Gardens in Byfleet were within inches of flooding only last year and featured on the BBC news. Newer properties should not be built in flood areas but this is still happening.

4. The Greenbelt Selection Process

If I understand correctly the decision to release greenbelt land has already been made and was done in 2009. I have a very high level of concern regarding how these decisions were carried out and the consultation process carried out at that time. I do not know of anyone who was aware of any consultation on this at all or who was aware of the decisions apparently already made. With decisions being made on such an important issue surely there should be a high level of awareness regarding this and the processes carried out. I do not feel that decisions on this have been carried out in an open, fair and proper way.

I also feel that the communication regarding these current decisions has not been adequate or thorough enough. Many people are still unaware of the current situation and the relatively short consultation process taking place. It has been left largely to the Byfleet Residents Association to lead the communication and distribute information leaflets. Why has Woking Council not done this themselves? I would like the whole process on Woking Council's part to be reviewed for openness and suitability.

I have also concerns that the only paid for external report commissioned by Woking Council was for a company to select areas of Woking greenbelt for development. It does not seem like the same level of resource or efforts has ever gone in to trying to find non greenbelt alternatives. All non green belt approaches have been carried out by the councils own staff.

The Byfleet petition which had already been presented to Woking Council and is specifically focused on protecting Byfleet's greenbelt has been totally ignored.

The majority of greenbelt land in Byfleet is owned by West Estates who have no connection to Byfleet other than that they purchased land here.

They have been fairly open in the fact their aim is to make money from this land. I have concerns that the land in Byfleet has been selected predominantly on the basis that it will be an easy sale from the land owner who is pro this land being sold for development to maximise their own profits.

I feel the Byfleet green belt land has been selected based upon administrative ease and financial grounds rather than on suitability and appropriateness.

This is not at all acceptable. I would like the reasons for the land owned by West Estates being the main land chosen within this consultation to be scrutinised, independently and in detail.

I would also like to know why the Byfleet petition has been ignored.

5. Alternatives to greenbelt development

I feel more, but smaller scale developments that are more evenly spread should be given priority. The strategy of each village and town within Woking accommodating a set % of extra houses would be far more appropriate and would allow a far more even distribution of the population. This approach is advocated by Princess Anne and the

Campaign for Rural England. This type of approach is also in fact often a more cost effective approach to meeting housing need as an evenly spread increase in population, rather than large scale development, does not cause the same level of infrastructure difficulties. This approach may however, take longer and be more administratively complex.

Woking Council needs to first properly consider this type of approach rather than large scale overdevelopment. I do not think this has been given proper consideration. I have concerns that alternative brownfield options for new properties are not being 100% utilised. All other options must be FULLY exhausted BEFORE even considering developing greenbelt land. Otherwise there is no exceptional circumstance.

The Government only recently stated "that is it not necessary to build on greenbelt land to meet Government housing targets."

Woking council must listen to and respect this statement. Why should Woking council be different from the rest of the UK? There are restrictions specific to Woking but they are not the only council in the UK that has to overcome issues and they should be able to do it whilst respecting the values and integrity of greenbelt land. The brownfield sites must all be used before any greenbelt changes are even considered.

- Empty buildings - plans are in place to make bringing empty building back into use easier. However, a full and accurate assessment is needed to determine the exact number of privately owned empty buildings within Woking so that these are utilised first. I don't feel that sufficient has been done to make sure all empty properties are used. This needs to be done completely and thoroughly before greenbelt development is considered.

- Excess office and retail space: The plans include more office and retail space.

Woking already has an abundance of empty offices and retail units. How can more be needed when the buildings that are already there are not being used? This is long term non use not short term availability. 2 cases where I have personal knowledge are:
a) 121 Chertsey Road, Woking - this office closed about 10 years ago. It was perfectly serviceable and with it's own car park. It should be a desirable location but it was surplus to requirements as although it was available to let it has stood empty for approximately 10 years and has fallen into disrepair. It is on the plans to be redeveloped into office space again, as well as housing. If no one has wanted office space there in the last 10 years why would they want it now?

b). The Horizons building on Parvis Road/Brooklands Road, Byfleet. These are new offices and there is a permanent sign advertising office space to let. They have never been able to fill the offices to capacity.

This is only 2 examples and I expect there are many, many more similar cases.

I believe the projection made in 2009 for the need for office space is flawed and over estimates the current day and future need for retail and office space. These targets should be reduced and those empty office buildings and retail units used to meet the housing targets. This would better utilise the available brownfield sites.

I hope my comments will be taken into account properly and fairly within this process.

The planned development of this Byfleet greenbelt land is wrong.

Finally I also have queries regarding the plans to build houses at the site of the old Manor School in Byfleet in Magdalen Crescent. Local knowledge has always been that this land was gifted to the children of Byfleet. Additionally it's last use was as a grant maintained school. Like the current academies I understood that the land

therefore is owned by the previous school governors/trustees. Is it therefore actually available to Woking council to build on?

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