

## Webinar – Final Additional Q&A's

**The Neighbourhood Plan is proposing sites that sit within green belt.**

**The Neighbourhood Plan Group and the Parish Council say they want to consult with residents, then why are they ignoring previous consultation that explicitly says that building on Green Belt is not wanted and why a year later are they continuing to pursue a proposal that residents have overwhelmingly said they do not want?**

It is true that most residents who responded to the 2018 survey said that they did not want to build in the Green Belt (though it is also true that at our open days, a number of attendees did identify places within the Green Belt where they were prepared to see some development). The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group overwhelmingly does not want to build in the Green Belt.

However, as we have stated a number of times, our village is uniquely constrained in terms of identifying sites for development; we are surrounded by Green Belt and RAMSAR sites, much of the village itself is in a conservation area, and most is in Flood Zones 2 and 3. The settlement area is very heavily developed. All of this has made identifying sites within the settlement boundary (which was our priority) extremely difficult and has meant that any site of any significant size is located both outside the settlement area and in the Green Belt. A number of the sites within the village that we originally identified as suitable have proved unachievable – generally because the landowner was not prepared to develop (such as the BT site, as you know).

After years of searching, we have been left with only a few small sites scattered through the village which added together come to less than half the total of 94 homes that we have been tasked to deliver.

It should also be noted that our formal Call for Sites produced not one single site within the settlement area; all the sites put forward were within the Green Belt and most were not adjacent to our boundary. East Herts' own Call for Sites several years back produced similar results.

Furthermore, our surveys of residents' opinions also produced a strong majority in favour of the provision of more affordable housing. In general, only larger sites of more than 10 houses are obliged to include any affordable housing; and it is only in the Green Belt that sites of any size

can be found. Of the sites within the settlement boundary, it is likely that only one will produce any affordable housing at all (the Chapelfields garages site). We have sought to reconcile conflicting priorities as best we can with our choices.

**An alternative proposal of sites has been presented by a member of the three parishes that is a modified copy of a proposal by residents of Stanstead Abbots.**

**This plan is as follows:**



**This plan also provides a fairer split over the three parishes as follows:**

**Total by parish:**



Thank you for submitting this alternative plan. However, there are a number of problems with your suggested figures.

Firstly, the number of dwellings either already built or with planning permission/under construction is not 29. Our figures show that there are at the moment a maximum of 23 dwellings in this position (and this is presuming we are allowed to count the small development of 4 dwellings constructed on the Hoddesdon Road just outside the settlement area, which is by no means certain). [23 max]

Secondly, as was suggested in the webinar, some sites may fall away due to new information being received. One of the most likely to is SASM H8, the land east of Amwell Lane. There are a number of obstacles to developing this site, it has several significant trees and a pumping

station; furthermore, and most importantly, we have been unable to obtain an answer from the landowner (EHDC) as to whether they are prepared to develop it. [0]

In third place, two of the sites you identify will not produce the numbers you suggest. SASM H6 is expected to produce 10 dwellings, not 12. Given an amendment to reduce the height of the suggested dwellings was accepted, the total number of dwellings here may be less than 10. [10 max]

The key site is the Netherfield Lane brownfield site. There are several problems with the figure of 34 dwellings you suggest. This site is what is called a non-conforming brownfield site within the Green Belt. As such, although planning permission is required to develop, it does not need to be formally released from the Green Belt. However, if it is not released, a developer can only build on the “cube” of the existing buildings. This means that although the site is quite large enough to accommodate 34 or more dwellings, it will actually only deliver around 20-25 (and we understand that the landowner has submitted an application for outline planning permission for 20 units). This will be further constrained by the need to accommodate the employment units to which the landowner has had to commit in order to obtain planning permission, as there were so many objections to the loss of employment facilities when the first planning application went in (which was, I believed, for around 30 dwellings). Finally, the site has significant issues with ground contamination by a “lamppost graveyard”, which will cost a very substantial amount - £300-700,000 estimated – to deal with. This means that the owner has a very good basis for demonstrating in their viability assessment that they cannot afford to provide any affordable housing on the site. [20]

If the site were to be released from the Green Belt, on the other hand, the number of dwellings it could contain would certainly increase. However, that would have the effect of producing a small island of buildings outside the settlement area, not immediately adjacent to the boundary; this would make drawing a new defensible Green Belt boundary around the village to include this island very difficult. It would also make the field behind the Almshouses uniquely vulnerable to future development in that the landowner could argue quite logically that this was now an “infill” site. It would still not provide any more affordable housing as the problem with contamination remains a significant cost to the development of the site.

Finally, the split of dwellings between the three parishes that make up the Joint Neighbourhood Plan settlement area. Much is being made of the concentration of new homes in one or other part of the village/parishes, but this is not something which we as a Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group can take into consideration as criteria for assessing and choosing sites. This is because the serious lack of sites in the settlement area means that we essentially have to take what we can get, regardless of where it is situated. The sites we have selected within the settlement area are in fact fairly well scattered through the village, but because we have had to

make up the numbers with a Green Belt site (and this is of necessity a larger site), this cannot help but weight development towards one area.

So, the figures in fact look more like this:

- Homes which have been built & occupied since April 2017/homes with planning permission or under construction 23 [max]
- SASM H3 Land east Netherfield/south of Roydon Rd (brownfield only) 20
- SASM H5, Land south of South Street 6
- SASM H6, Land to the west of Amwell Lane 10 [max]
- SASM H7, Two garage sites on Abbots Way 7
- SASM H8, Land to the east of Amwell Lane 0

**Total** **66**

This is well short of the target 94. No plan that only identified two thirds of the expected allocation is going to get EHDC approval, unfortunately.