

KIRK HAMMERTON PARISH COUNCIL

RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION; HARROGATE DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN, PUBLICATION DRAFT 2018

RIDER A-Response to Part B Paragraph 6

Please give reasons for your answer to 4(1), 4(2) and 5, where applicable

The Parish Council has seen the comments made by the Keep Green Hammerton Green and Keep Kirk Hammerton Green Action Groups (the "Local Action Groups") in their responses to the consultation, in particular their feedback in respect of this question (a copy is attached to the rear of this form for ease of reference). The Parish Council has also had the benefit of reading a final draft of the detailed report prepared by Mr Richard Raper, acting on behalf of the Local Action Groups, which we understand is also to be submitted in response to the consultation. We agree with and fully support the comments made by the Local Action Groups and the observations made and conclusions reached by Mr Raper in his report.

We do not wish to repeat the analysis in Mr Raper's extremely cogent and comprehensive report, which we believe demonstrates very persuasively and clearly the various flaws in the Draft Plan. We would respectfully suggest that the comments of Mr Raper and the Local Action Groups are taken as the principal contribution on behalf of the residents of the local communities which they represent. We would, however, like to present some thoughts of our own, by way of addition to (but not replacement of) the comments of the Local Action Groups and Mr Raper.

Duty to Co-Operate

There is a duty on Harrogate Borough Council ("HBC") to consult those affected by the Draft Plan.

This is not HBC's first attempt to formulate a sound Local Plan. The Parish Council has, over many years, received at regular intervals draft documents inviting comment. That has also been the case as regards the current version of the Local Plan. Despite this, we do not feel that there has been genuine consultation, in the sense of transparency, a willingness to engage, or to take proper account of the responses received. It has been consultation of the tick box variety. Responses are summarised, but ignored. Our comments have been consistent throughout this process, but the proposals do not change in response to those comments, nor do we receive any indication as to why the comments were deemed to be without value.

The majority of the land for the proposed new settlement development lies within the Kirk Hammerton parish boundaries. Yet at no stage throughout the process has any member of HBC with responsibility for the Draft Plan contacted the Parish Council or local residents, or attended any meeting in the village to explain or discuss the proposals.

The proposed development area has changed, when compared to the proposals set out in the July 2017 consultation draft. We had expected the latest Draft Plan to, at the very least, properly identify the area which is to be developed and to include some indication of what the development might involve, but that has not happened. It is stated in the summary in the sites appraisal document which forms part of the consultation that HBC has received a number of documents from the developer which explain its proposals (masterplan, assessments of various matters, etc) so we do not understand the absence of a proper explanation of what is planned, as part of the consultation.

KHPC has approached Oakgate, the developer of the additional land now included, but they have declined more than one invitation to attend a public meeting to explain their proposals. As a result, it is difficult if not impossible to comment in anything but the most general terms on what is proposed.

After 4 years of preparing the Draft Plan, we still have no clear idea of what we are asked to comment on. There could hardly be a more fundamental failure of the duty to consult and there is simply no excuse for it.

The Draft Plan is not Justified

Mr Raper and the Local Action Groups have commented on the reduction in the national requirements for housing and the fact that the requirement for additional housing largely impacts the south of the country, not Harrogate.

The Parish Council has consistently queried if a new settlement is really needed and has pointed to recent new developments in Kirk Hammerton (all of which have been supported by the Parish Council) as evidence that sustainable levels of development can be achieved in villages without destroying their character (the developments are not small, relative to the size of the village – there will be a 15-20% increase in the number of properties as a result, but KH will remain a village, in contrast to the new settlement proposals). We have indicated in previous comments a willingness to work with HBC planners to identify further similar opportunities but this has not been taken up.

With a bit more effort, we find it hard to believe the required new housing cannot be found without the need for a new settlement, especially now that the requirement itself has significantly reduced. We therefore query the assertion underpinning policy DM4 that a new settlement is necessary. The evidence in support of this is has not been produced.

In order to be sound, the Local Plan has to be based on evidence. We have already given examples of where it is lacking, but where evidence is actually available, the draft Plan seems to almost wilfully disregard it. The fact that no changes have been made to reflect the reduced requirement for new housing is an example. Another is the preference for Hammerton as the new development site in preference to Flaxby. Mr Raper's report demonstrates this in detail, but it is obvious to anyone exercising a degree of common sense that, if there really must be a new settlement, the evidence points very clearly to Flaxby as a better option.

Another example of how the draft Plan does not reflect evidence is the treatment of the railway. This is accorded great significance in the draft Plan as a factor in selecting Hammerton as a development site, despite the obvious limitations of the line as it stands and the complete lack of support from Network Rail for any proposals to improve track or station facilities (not surprising in view of the huge cost).

In the previous consultation, in July 2017, members of KHPC attended a session in Green Hammerton at which the developer of the (then) proposed site, CEG and members of HBC Planning sought to explain their proposals. At that time, we were told that the existing stations at Cattal and Hammerton could not support the proposed development, even with further investment. For that reason, a new station was to be built. On 6 March 2018, just before the end of the current consultation period, we attended a further session organised by CEG. Neither HBC nor Oakgate were represented, but we understand that the idea of a new station has now been dropped (presumably on grounds of cost and lack of support from Network Rail).

On the other hand, the planning application submitted by the developers of Flaxby includes a costed plan to provide a station at Goldsborough.

These changes must surely affect the analysis originally carried out (flawed as it was) and the conclusions drawn, so why does the draft Plan not reflect this? Instead, the draft Plan continues to include comments referring to the possibility of a Hammerton transport “interchange”. This is not a draft Plan based on evidence. It’s a fantasy world. The irony is that a park and ride solution is actually available if Flaxby is chosen.

The Draft Plan is not Effective

The Plan can only meet the test of effectiveness if it can be delivered. As Mr Raper points out, even the consultants engaged by HBC itself were unable to report that a development of the Hammerton site is deliverable.

In view of this rather fundamental problem, it is probably unnecessary to give additional examples, but once again the railway illustrates how the current DM4 solution is simply not deliverable. It is obvious that the assumptions made about sustainable transport which underpin DM4 are not going to happen. The desired solution might well be deliverable if Flaxby were chosen as the new settlement.

Conclusion

The Parish Council does not believe that Harrogate’s latest development plan is either legally compliant or sound. We believe that Harrogate Borough Council has breached its duty to co-operate. The Draft Plan is unsound as it has not been positively prepared, is neither justified nor effective and it is not consistent with national policy.