

Pirton Parish Council



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North Hertfordshire District Council  
Planning Policy  
Gernon Road  
Letchworth Garden City

29 November 2016

Dear Colleagues,

This letter is the response of Pirton Parish Council to the Proposed Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan 2011 – 2031.

Pirton Parish Council is the Qualifying Body for the Pirton Neighbourhood Plan, currently submitted to the NHDC under Regulation 15 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General Regulations) 2012. Pirton Parish Council through its Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group has worked closely with the NHDC to ensure that the Pirton Neighbourhood Plan is in general conformity with the current planning policies and also that it will be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the Proposed Local Plan.

Pirton is a “Category A” village within the Proposed Local Plan and must be prepared to take more development than villages in North Herts which have few or no facilities. Although significantly smaller than some other Category A villages, Pirton expects to expand its housing by a minimum of 17% (allowing for windfall infill) over the period of the Proposed Local Plan. However, more important than percentages is that all housing development is focussed on delivering the type of housing needed in Pirton, and that it conforms to the Design and other policies in both this Proposed Local Plan and in the emerging Neighbourhood Plan.

We **agree** that this version of the Proposed Local Plan has been:

- **Positively prepared.** In developing our Neighbourhood Plan we have used a significant amount of the objective NHDC research and data collection which informs this Proposed Local Plan. We can attest to the objectivity of the evidence base.
- **Justified:** We broadly approve the strategy as the most appropriate, as it places emphasis on growth, both for housing and for business, within our towns. Clearly rural centres must take some expansion, to provide homes and sometimes work for current and future residents, and to ensure that rural communities thrive. North Hertfordshire is a surprisingly rural district for an area so close to London. The Proposed Local Plan is right to preserve this rural character for North Herts.
- **Effective:** We encourage the NHDC to continue to support Neighbourhood Planning as a key vehicle for delivering their Proposed Local Plan.
- **Consistent with National Policy:** We have found that the Proposed Local Plan appropriately follows both policy and spirit of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

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Parish Councillors:
Mrs A Smither (Chair),
Mrs D Burleigh, Mr T Gammell, Mr M Goddard, Mr O Lister, Mrs C-A McConnellogue, Mrs J Rogers, Mrs A Webb

Strategic Objectives

We support the Proposed Local Plan's Strategic Economic, Environmental and Social objectives. For example, from Pirton's perspective, we wish to see housing development that, through good design, protects and enhances the character of Pirton; that maintains and enhances our historic environment and assets as well as our natural environment, and our open and green spaces. Development should sustain the vitality of our village, including providing and supporting opportunities to work in Pirton, and encouraging tourism. SOC4 refers to rural communities and neighbourhood planning; we would encourage North Herts' more urban areas to consider Neighbourhood Planning as a tool to assist their communities to meet the challenges of the development that they will be accommodating under this Proposed Local Plan. ECON 8 is particularly important as local infrastructure comes under pressure from development.

Housing

The Proposed Local Plan records that "the population is increasing...more people are living on their own, people are living longer and households are becoming smaller". These conclusions confirm the results of surveys within Pirton undertaken for the purposes of neighbourhood planning. These features, combined with the Proposed Local Plan's policies on housing mix and design, must drive housing development whilst not ignoring the needs of larger families or households which can afford larger properties.

We also draw attention to SP8 (f) Housing regarding affordable homes; also the emphasis on smaller homes, and a welcome allocation for self-build homes. We welcome the NHDC's realisation (HS2) that "shared ownership" affordable housing is particularly problematic in an area of high market value properties, and support the emphasis on affordable housing for rent, although we are unclear as to when "the issue will need to be taken into consideration".

Development Generally

Pirton Parish is a rural area beyond the Green Belt. We welcome policy SP5 which provides some protection from inappropriate unrestrained development in our rural setting, and affirm the management policies at CGB 1 to 3. We draw attention to SP6 "Sustainable Travel" and SP7 "Infrastructure Requirements and Developer Contributions" as policies of importance to Pirton, given the inadequate level of public transport to the village and parish, and the need for attention to be paid to the expansion of local facilities including Pirton Village School if Pirton is to successfully integrate development. Management policy HC1 is welcome; however, thought needs to be given in relation to each proposal for development to the ongoing upkeep of new facilities.

Design

We draw attention to SP9 "Design", and support its emphasis on good design that responds positively to its local context. Of course interpretation of this strategic policy, as well as policy D1 will be key to producing development that enhances an area and promotes integration of communities. Our own emerging Neighbourhood Plan places emphasis on design and character issues. Pirton has a Village Design Statement that is considered as Supplementary Planning Guidance. We have updated this document with a full Pirton Character Assessment and expect that this document, which contains detailed design matters, will be similarly adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance.

Transport and Parking

We welcome policy T1 and the recognition of the issue of highway safety. The roads into and out of Pirton are narrow and winding, and safety is an issue that dominates the concerns of residents considering new development proposals. Emphasis must be placed on developing and encouraging the use of sustainable modes of transport; and encouraging home working where appropriate to reduce travel. In the meantime Pirton remains a village heavily dependent on the use of cars, with associated and unwelcome car parking difficulties on older, narrow streets. This has driven our decision to increase above the NHDC parking standards the number of parking spaces we expect new development to provide.

The Environment

Policies SP12 and SP13 and their respective management policies are important to Pirton Parish with its significant green and open spaces, its position within the Chilterns AONB and with the village lying within the setting of the Chilterns AONB, and the significant breadth of flora and fauna recorded within the area. There are 55 Listed Buildings and 4 Scheduled Monuments in the Parish, the vast majority within Pirton Village itself. A large part of Pirton Village is a conservation area. All these contribute greatly to the character of parish and village. The strategic policies clearly owe a great deal to the relevant policies in the NPPF. It is regrettable that we have to await further "guidance" in relation to these issues, as interpretation and enforcement will be very important to everyone involved in a planning application. Nonetheless, these policies are positive about the contribution to be made by our natural and historic environments to community identity, health and well-being, and economic activity such as tourism, and as such are to be welcomed.

Infrastructure/Implementation/Monitoring

The Proposed Local Plan rightly highlights the issue of implementation particularly around infrastructure. We appreciate that this is a complex area, requiring the positive contribution and participation of many organisations. It will be essential that the NHDC employs sufficient experienced planning officers to ensure constant and consistent communication and negotiation across all relevant bodies.

Pirton is likely to experience a negative impact from increased traffic arising directly as a result of any East of Luton development, which will be tempted to use the roads around Pirton as a cut through to avoid Hitchin, unless appropriate measures for dealing with traffic issues are implemented. Likewise the significant development planned for Ickleford will affect the A600 route from Pirton to Hitchin, Letchworth and Stevenage. Attending to these adverse impacts across North Hertfordshire must be a prime consideration for the NHDC.

We again endorse the NHDC's recognition of the part to be played by Neighbourhood Planning Areas in the effective delivery of this Proposed Local Plan. We would like to see targets set for Neighbourhood Planning against SP1.

Yours sincerely,

(Mrs) Alison Smither
Chair, Pirton Parish Council.