

22nd August 2020

Dear Planning Policy Team,

Due to pressure on life and time, I am basing some of my comments largely on your Summary document, but have looked in greater detail at some of the Appendices (see below). I have used ***bold italics in quote-marks*** to identify quotes from your Summary and Chapters.

The scale of Test Valley means that I have to concentrate mainly on my own area, but, to start with an overarching comment, **I feel that TVBC and all councils will have to start resisting pressure from central government – who are listening far too much to vested interest, ie developers – to build houses on green fields** and fight against *“presumption in favour of [any greenfield] development”* (paraphrasing current Local Plan para SD1). I have a permanent underlying depression about, and fear for, Britain's countryside in general, but, for the purposes of my comments, I write specifically about the area in which I live, Palestine and Grateley Station.

I am genuinely afraid that this (and other areas) of the Test Valley will become a hideous, characterless sprawl of housing, increasingly ignoring area character to pack in numbers and completely overlooking the desire (and huge investment) of many people to live in a **spacious place overlooking open countryside**. I believe local character is supposed still to be a huge part of planning consideration – Sections E2 and E4 of the current Local Plan – but it has gone very wrong at the lower end of Mount Hermon Road and in Peach Grove in Palestine: houses built too close to neighbours, houses overfilling their plots, etc.

A general comment about the future Local Plan: **please, please, make local character an important planning consideration in ALL areas and not just so-called ‘special residential’ areas**

I had lived in Campbell Close only three months as at July 2000 when there was a meeting in Grateley Village Hall, packed literally beyond the doors with people who were sick of the constant threat of losing all they had invested in living in this area because they happened to overlook (endangered) open fields. That fear became a ghastly reality for me in April 2007 when I caught a surveyor in the field behind my house taking photos, including of my garden, on a Monday afternoon (when he clearly hoped no-one would be in), who, when challenged, informed me that there were plans to build 35 houses behind mine. As a single person with limited finance, I had struggled to afford even a semi-detached former council house in the

countryside and the thought of losing even more of its value made me quite ill for a while. It turned out that the surveyor's statement was wrong – the actual proposal was the six permanent rental houses of Streetway Close.

Not to tell too long a story, but I have included the above paragraph to illustrate the absolute *fear* that I constantly feel about my home area. While much of what I am saying could be described as emotive, if you are aiming to make this an area of **“high quality of life”** and **“open spaces for healthy lifestyles”**, you need truly to consider people's feelings about the Test Valley countryside and their *mental* health.

The first step in **“protecting the local environment”** (page 2, Summary document) and **“the Borough's environmental assets”** and hence **“tourism, rural economy...”** (page 3) is to stop treating housing provision as the major issue every time a local plan is reviewed. Make the **“high quality of life”** (page 3) your main aim instead.

Realising that there is still *some* need for more housing, I would comment that:

- a) With the shrinking in number and size of shops in town centres, first-time flats for young people could increasingly be supplied above retail premises in those centres – I believe your Council has been considering this more (I spoke to one of your officers at the Guild Hall in the lead-up to the last Local Plan), but I feel that it needs to be a *much* more strongly recommended alternative to greenfield building.
- b) **“...housing for an ageing population”** (page 2, Summary doc) – one very definite thing to do, instead of building yet more houses, is to **stop allowing people to mow down bungalows and put large houses in their place**. Many (if not nearly all) older people **do not** want to live in new bungalows on the edge of towns or even villages. **They want to live in an established place with a mature garden and every bungalow that is destroyed by some greedy developer reduces the stock for such people.**

I would add a caveat here, that there should be control over people deliberately creating seemingly disused brownfield sites by giving notice (and, I suspect, bribes) to companies to clear out of business areas so that they can be put forward for house-building. As an example, I refer to Grateley Business Park – there was a flourishing removals and storage company there, which had invested what must have been large sums in improved warehousing: yet suddenly, they were gone. Such behaviour leads to unnecessary workforce upheaval and the **end of rural work opportunities**. There is another former business site, in Palestine, which had a good-size work-shed and plenty of parking, etc, space: this, as far as I could deduce, was left mouldering when its then occupier left, ie it was not re-advertised for business, until the owner felt it was safe to put in for housing planning permission. Blatant lies have been told about a large agricultural business in Palestine, implying that it is not viable and is therefore land suitable for housing (it is on the SHELAA document) – yet that business has kept running for *many* years since.

If all the places put forward in Palestine – by people who are not in the least short of money and who, in some cases, do not even live here - were to be built on, this

would cease to be the spacious rural hamlet many of us chose to live in and become instead a large commuter suburb – **what then of all the points in your summary document concerning the “desirable rural environment” ?** - Vast amounts of traffic (people in the further reaches of Palestine already *drive* to the station every day), pollution, crowding, social problems – and less people coming for the lovely walks, etc, and contributing to the local pubs and shops as they pass by, thereby undermining the desirable **“tourism”** and **“the Borough’s environmental assets, which also important in making the area an attractive business location”** (Summary document ref Chapter 6).

Your Chapter 5 – Housing

- a) I strongly disagree with changing the parish-based approach for ‘HMAs’ (your para 5.15), as this is a well-established way of identifying places and ties in with parish council input to planning applications.
- b) While very small amounts of housing added to some villages might be desirable (para 5.16), one of the chief sources of misery with housebuilding anywhere, especially in rural places, is the current tendency to insist on building next to existing housing. This is not only dreadful for those who chose to live with open space near them, **but devalues their properties**. I have long felt that developers should have to compensate house-owners for this sort of vandalism – after all, if someone goes onto a property and smashes a wall, that devalues the property and is a criminal offence, yet these developers make fortunes from devaluing property by ruining their aspect, which I consider to be criminal damage also. Not only that, but many of them flout the permission they’ve been given and squeeze in more properties, going closer to people’s boundaries than their application showed.

It is my view that payment of compensation should be a statutory requirement for developers (with estate agents supplying the valuations for before and after): **but, much better if council planning departments stopped this encroachment from the start**. There is **no need** for new houses to be built next to existing ones. Perhaps the new Local Plan should include a new rule, that all developments in greenfields **must leave a large “green space”** between the existing houses and the new.

Better still, never give permission for greenfield building – and that includes infill and garden land. (I have been amazed at the number of garden developments that have been allowed, as I thought there was a **national policy** against this – I’m sorry that I do not have time to look into Government Acts about this.)

- c) You can bet that those looking for **“flexible settlement boundaries”** (para 5.26) all have vested interest in doing so. I know of at least six people looking to be (even) richer by selling land outside Palestine’s settlement boundary. Two don’t live here and the others have enjoyed the space and views of Palestine for years and their own houses are well-buffered against development, yet they care nothing about ruining this hamlet for their own gain – I know this is not part of your “planning considerations”, but I have to say that these attitudes contribute considerably to the depression I mentioned

earlier – and I do feel that a lot of the points in your Chapter 5 are very, very dangerous, as potentially weakening current planning regulations and opening up countryside to unscrupulous people. **Too much of this and not one tourist will come to the Test Valley ever again.**

As an example: how long before the relentless filling of fields next to Hilliers Gardens will put off visitors there? I already feel saddened every time I drive up to the Gardens' main gate.

There I will leave it, as I don't wish to dilute comments by making too many of them!