

# **Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan 2011 to 2029 Public Examination Hearings**

## **Issue 4: (Q8-10) Other Housing Matters Policy SS6 – New Housing in the Countryside Wednesday 14 October 2015**

### **Submission by Dawson Consulting (for Mr Michael Frankham)**

1. It is important that the countryside is protected and where possible enhanced through the planning system. This has generally been done through the definition of Settlement Policy Boundaries. These enclose villages and hamlets, often with a tight line drawn around existing development. While this method of controlling housing growth is used extensively in many areas, there is a concern that it may result in villages being ossified and artificially restricted from normal growth patterns.
2. While everyone respects the need for rural areas to be maintained, there cannot be a sudden stop to normal growth through a local plan policy. This is not equitable or reasonable. Isolated houses in the countryside are not to be encouraged, but housing on the edge, or within villages, will help the process of ensuring viability and a vibrant rural living environment. Such housing would be for both market housing and lower cost affordable schemes. Exception sites for social housing projects is one aspect, but acceptable sites for market houses can be also achieved, if the community is in support, and sustainable principles observed.
3. There are proposed reviews of settlement boundaries, and these may be helpful in providing much needed flexibility. This may take place once a local plan is adopted, but it would be helpful for the inquiry to consider and acknowledge the need for reviews. In the adjoining district of Hart, it is proposed to remove all such settlement boundaries in order to allow for organic growth in local areas.

### **New Housing in the Countryside**

4. The proposed local plan policy framework and approach to housing in the rural area is essentially out-of-date, and is in too rigid a form. It is designed to restrict housing in villages in an unhelpful way. One or more houses on a fresh site, in or close to a village may be perfectly acceptable and viable. Such houses can lead to greater sustainability and viability, and even encourage new facilities and services, in the countryside. Thwarting development cannot be the best way forward for the rural area.
5. In some villages, there is no SPB in place. Instead, there is a nominal one-for-one replacement policy for residential buildings. In these areas where settlement boundaries are absent, this approach is generally adopted by the council. It is a policy to fossilise and suffocate reasonable growth and expansion. It is not appropriate if villages are to regain their vitality and vibrancy.
6. Proposals should be judged on their merits, and by their likely impact and acceptability. Where proposals for the replacement of existing buildings within the countryside are made, the need to foster community needs should be paramount, so long as these can contribute to sustainable development in a healthy manner. A more flexible approach based upon principles and not on a rigid mindset is more appropriate in a rural area. The existence of parish councils and local amenity societies ensures that local opinion can be tested and developed. A greater understanding of the needs of rural areas is needed in the Plan before it can be seen as helpful for the countryside.

7. The reference to previously developed land is not appropriate in a village setting. This applies more in an urban context. In the countryside, land may be used for many purposes, some relating to agriculture and unconventional uses. Such sites are used but may have an uncertain planning status. There may be historic reasons why some sites are unkempt or underused. Structures may be temporary, but have been in place for many years, even predating the planning system itself.

8. The countryside is a rugged place, and it should not be part of the planning system's role to tidy it up or refine it into a pictorial setting. Villages frequently contain old sites with unconventional uses, such as recycling facilities or services better located outside towns and populated areas.

9. Buildings regarded as temporary may be present for many years and have a similar impact to permanent structures. Their renovation and re-use is frequently a welcome factor in and around smaller villages. Such buildings may have become an accepted part of the landscape and their renovation or improvement may be regarded as a benefit in the community.

10. Policies in the revised local plan for the rural area are not flexible, as required by the soundness test. They do not allow for sufficient suitable development (including small scale housing proposals) in the rural area to help improve the vitality and vibrancy of villages and non-urban areas. This can apply both to market and social housing.

### **Aims of the policy**

11. The policy appears to have been prepared with little knowledge or understanding of the way the countryside works. Rural communities can be self controlling and without the need for rigid policies to be laid upon them. While the wider open countryside needs to be protected and nurtured, each village will have its own ideas about how to develop and encourage village life and communities. Village life may not always be harmonious, but it is not assisted by an inflexible policy.

12. The flexibility suggested in the policy is not apparent, and experience shows that it can be applied with little regard to local needs and aspirations.

13. It may be preferable to remove or pare down the policy as drafted. Its usefulness in the past may seem sensible, but patterns of living require new attitudes and a more sympathetic understanding of local needs and possibilities.

### **Conclusions**

14. For the emergent Basingstoke Local Plan, a new approach is needed in relation to the rural area. The system of tightly drawn village envelopes to prevent development despoiling the countryside to been interpreted too narrowly. This has not encouraged the creation of viable living villages, but instead picture postcard units as commuter settlements. There is a need to promote greater rural vitality and vibrancy, and the planning system should play its role in this.

15. Policy SS6 on New Housing in the Countryside should either be deleted, or redrawn to reflect a changing way of life in rural areas. Rural areas are essentially self-sufficient, and well able to articulate concerns about development locally. There is no need for a rigid policy formula that inhibits valuable and important housing development that will contribute to a thriving village and community life.