

Tring Town Council

Response to Dacorum Borough Council's Issues & Options Local Plan Consultation

Attached is Tring Town Council's response to the above consultation in the prescribed format. The following gives the rationale behind the Town Council's answers.

It is vital to appreciate the geography and the consequential history of the Town. It is a small market town serving the local villages on the edge of the Chilterns; whilst in Hertfordshire, it is surrounded by Buckinghamshire. Until the development of Hemel Hempstead as a new town, the largest population centre was Aylesbury.

The Place Strategy in Dacorum Borough Council's (DBC) Core Strategy summarises Tring today as:

"Tring remains a successful compact market town surrounded by farmland and delivering a high quality of life and prosperity for its residents and business community. Its built and natural heritage has been retained and enhanced".

It has achieved this because it has grown organically as its own entity through a very strong sense of identity; the town is a prime example of sustainable development. That sense of community was evidence during the preparation of Tring's Town plan:

- Caring, generous people
- Vibrant with lots of clubs and societies
- Friendly – an outcome of a mystery shopping study in Tring
- Inclusive – a good mix of all ages
- Long term residents – the sense of belonging has been passed through the generations

Hence perpetuating that sense of community is the Town Council's prime objective. To achieve this means that the following trends must be addressed:

- The growth of internet shopping and the changing face of the High Street
 - A range of long established independent retailers have closed
 - The Town's last bank will close in June 2018
 - The edge-of-town supermarket has drawn shoppers away from the Town centre
- Recognising that the growth of car transport is unsustainable
 - Streets are clogged as practically every household has at least two cars
 - There is a lack of town centre car parking
 - Despite a large extension there is insufficient car parking at Tring Station
 - Traffic in the High Street frequently grinds to a halt through deliveries and buses (It is testament to the patience of Tring residents how stoically this is accepted)
- The growth in house prices
 - is pushing away young families and threatening to unbalance the population
 - with the change in permitted rights, employment land is being lost (even within a designated General Employment Area) to residential development where the best profit is to be had
- Caring for an ageing population, especially those suffering with dementia
- Protect the environment

- Utilise the eco-friendly techniques available to reduce energy usage, emissions, water consumption
- Protect the natural habitat

The Town Council has, and is, trying to do what it can given its limited powers to tackle these issues:

- It has worked to promote tourism, supporting the 'Enjoy Dacorum' and 'Visit Herts' initiatives
- It is a transition town and a fairtrade town
- It is working to achieve dementia-friendly status
- It is working with DBC to provide social housing
- It has funded the creation of the Tring Retail Forum and jobs shows in Tring

But to have significant success Tring needs DBC through the Single Local Plan to acknowledge and embrace these issues. Any growth in Tring must be on a sustainable basis address i.e.

- Integrate with the existing community
- Be accompanied by the necessary infrastructure – education, health, transport, etc.
- Retain Tring's market town character
- Protect the countryside

These requirements mirror the adopted Core Strategy's Policy for the Distribution of Development CS1:

"The market towns will accommodate new development for housing, employment and other uses, provided it:

- a) is of a scale commensurate with the size of the settlement and the range of local services and facilities;*
- b) helps maintain the vitality and viability of the settlement and the surrounding countryside;*
- c) causes no damage to the existing character of the settlement or its adjoining countryside; and*
- d) is compatible with policies protecting the Green Belt and Rural Area"*

It must not be forgotten when looking at these points, that Tring is already taking 500 houses under the adopted Site Allocations. This alone will place the existing infrastructure under pressure.

Tring Town Council is looking for:

- Provision for local employment. This will give vitality to the community; boost the economy; engender involvement in the community and minimise travel to work. The employment provided must suit the local needs:
 - There are over 900 registered companies in Tring – these are predominately very small. Hence the need is for small units/offices to which these home businesses can migrate and grow
 - The local secondary school – the second largest in the county – is an excellent source of potentially skilled labour
 - The need for commercial development is recognised in the draft Local Plan. Warehousing would be inappropriate:
 - It is land hungry
 - Generates low levels of employment

- Is inappropriate to the gateway site (see below)
- Provide ‘affordable housing’ that is truly affordable for young families and key workers in order to achieve the right balance within the population and to attract or retain public sector employees e.g. teachers and social workers:
 - Social rented housing
 - Shared-ownership including key worker schemes
 - Starter homes
- Effective alternatives to using the car. Hertfordshire’s draft Local Transport Plan highlights a fundamental shift in policy with “A move away from a focus on car based investment and capacity enhancement. These are now seen as a last resort”.
- Quality housing developments. Take the opportunity to incorporate:
 - Environmentally-friendly building features that exceed minimum standards
 - Access to sustainable forms of transport
 - A mix of housing types
 - The minimal impact on the countryside especially the Chilterns A.O.N.B.
- In addition to the infrastructure mentioned above, more sports facilities to remove the existing deficit and cater for the growing demand.

The Town Council considers that this can be achieved by a mixed development on site Tr-h5 Dunsley Farm.

- It is a large site offering mixed use:
 - Employment land
 - Sports facilities (adjacent to existing facilities)
 - Housing
- It is the site with the least impact on the A.O.N.B. The Green Belt assessment was “Part of the site is identified as less constrained and the area is recommended for further assessment”
- It is closest to the town centre. This will make the task of integrating the growth with the existing community as easy as possible
- It is a ‘constrained’ site with a natural boundary
- It is a Town ‘Gateway’ so will need sympathetic development

How much land is need for each application is not clear yet, but looking at an illustration of the possibilities based on Option 1A, a mixed development might look like:

- 10 hectares allocated to housing (at 30 dwellings per hectare)
- The Brewery, Farm shop, etc. take up less than 1 hectare
- 15 hectares for sports facilities (based on Tring Sports Forum’s response anticipated need)
- Employment – 7 hectares
- Open Space – 4 hectares

Finally, consideration of the housing need that can be accommodated in Tring, whilst meeting the criteria set out in Policy CS1, and throughout Dacorum.

The extend of protected land – Green Belt and the Chilterns A.O.N.B. – and the rightful application of Policy CS1 preclude anything beyond a modest contribution from the market towns, larger villages

and rural areas. The existing allocations under the Site Allocations document take up that capacity already.

This would point to the lowest level of housing provision included in the consultation options as being the most likely to be achievable on a sustainable basis. The ability to absorb higher levels of housing growth is dependent upon the extra houses being taken solely by Hemel Hempstead.

The level of housing growth that can be accommodated in Tring, over and above the 500 dwellings already allocated, is the number that can be accommodated on Tr-h5 having firstly made the necessary provision for employment, sports facilities and open space whilst protecting the gateway to Tring and the setting of the A.O.N.B. The figure of 300 would appear to be of the right order.

12th December 2017