

# **MINUTES OF A PARISH MEETING HELD ON 5<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 2014 TO INFORM PARISHIONERS ABOUT THE BASILDON LOCAL PLAN CORE STRATEGY**

## **PRESENT**

In the Chair, Cllr. Dick Wellborne, Chairman Ramsden Bellhouse Parish Council (RBPC).

Elected Members:

Borough Cllr. Terri Sargent,

Borough Cllr. Stuart Allen,

Parish Cllr. Ernie Skinner,

Parish Cllr. Ian Batley.

Officers:

Karen Plumridge, Clerk to the Parish Council,

Sarah Thompson, Team Manager Planning Policy, Basildon Borough Council (BBC)

Matt Winslow, Service Manager – Planning Policy & Regeneration Strategy, BBC,

Chris Baines, BBC

Approximately 180+ residents of Ramsden Bellhouse.

Cllr. Wellborne opened the meeting by introducing the visitors and explaining that there would be a presentation during which there would be no interruptions followed by a question and answer session. He stated that the poor communication about the proposed planning policies had not been the fault of the planning department at Basildon Council, and that the Parish Council was setting up a list of email addresses so that future important information could be conveyed to residents quickly. Forms were available at the meeting for residents to leave their contact details.

Sarah Thompson and Matt Winslow presented an outline of the Core Strategy, its background in legislation and the point it had reached in the process of becoming an adopted policy document. The consultation earlier in the year had resulted in 3,300 comments.

Between 2011 and 2031, 16,000 homes, 240 Gypsy and Traveller Pitches and 49Ha of Employment Land would be required in the Borough, but 3,500 homes had already been built or given planning permission and 24 of those are in Ramsden Bellhouse. It was calculated that 9,100 homes and 11Ha of employment land must be provided in the Borough's Green Belt.

The Core Policies to be overhauled were Environmental Protection, Green Belt – plotland infill, Housing Mix/ Affordable Housing/ Specialist Housing, Employment/ Business Support and Infrastructure Provision/ Funding.

The next consultation in the process would be in 2015.

Contact details for BBC policy planning were provided as follows:

Website: [www.basildon.gov.uk/basildon2031](http://www.basildon.gov.uk/basildon2031) Email: [planningpolicy@basildon.gov.uk](mailto:planningpolicy@basildon.gov.uk)  
Register on the consultation database: <http://basildon-consult.limehouse.co.uk/portal>

The meeting then opened for questions from the floor;

Question 1: Why do we need affordable homes in Ramsden Bellhouse?

Answer: It is a national requirement that housing developments of a certain size must include affordable housing, but the affordable housing can be provided through off site contributions.

Question 2: There is presently a road frontage width requirement for plots in Ramsden Bellhouse. Will this continue?

Answer: The Local Authority is required to review all of its planning policies, so Saved Policy BAS BE13 from the Local Plan 1998 will be reviewed. At this stage it is not known whether it will change. This is a policy that residents might want to comment on and those who register with the planning database will receive notification when policies are reviewed.

Question 3: Schools are at full capacity. How will they cope with the expected population increase?

Answer: As part of the Local Plan, the Council are required to set out what schools need to be upgraded and where. This is considered in the Infrastructure Baseline Study and will be discussed at the Examination in Public. BBC is required to work with the local education authority (Essex County Council) to deliver what is needed. The role of the Study is to identify what infrastructure is required to offset what will be caused by the development proposed. Once the Core Strategy is adopted BBC will be able to charge the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) on development, so developers should cover the cost of enlarging schools, improving roads etc. CIL cannot be charged until the Local Plan is adopted. Presently BBC can charge Section 106 payments, but these are not as beneficial to the area as they only apply to larger developments.

Question 4: Is Ramsden Bellhouse still white land?

Answer: There is presently no such thing as white land. There are areas on the map which have no notation, but none of those are in Ramsden Bellhouse.

Question 5: Ramsden Bellhouse is low lying and the existing drainage can't cope with ordinary rainfall.

Answer: Present planning policies were written before the recent flooding events. They have tried to tighten the drainage requirements in the Local Plan, and there have been changes to building regulations. All new development will be monitored by the Sustainable Drainage Approval Body, which in this area will be the County Council. Essex County Council has a flood investigation team. BBC can put RBPC in touch with the relevant officers.

Question 6: This area has never been against development. Has BBC identified areas which will be less contentious?

Answer: The Council have carried out a number of studies and assessment to ensure the most appropriate sites are considered for development. These include a review of the Green Belt, landscape, historic character, settlement size and character, transport and infrastructure, etc. Further, all sites submitted to the Council have been assessed to determine whether they are suitable for development, whether the land-owner wants the land considered for development and whether development on the land is viable. BBC will have to justify why it has chosen certain areas and omitted others when the Plan goes to the Planning Inspectorate for Examination.

Question 7: What is the Timetable of the Plan?

Answer: The entire Local Plan is at least four years away from adoption.

Question 8: When will my house be compulsorily purchased?

Answer: Homes will not be compulsorily purchased. Land has been proposed for development by landowners, but BBC does not check with the Land Registry to find out whether the land actually belongs to those proposing it. As part of one of the assessments, the Council send a letter annually to the person who submitted the land to the Council to check that the information they have on record is accurate. If your land has been put forward for development without your knowledge you need to talk to BBC.

Question 9: Can we have a similar meeting to this one at the next stage of the Plan process?

Answer: Yes. This will be arranged through the Parish Council. RBPC is setting up an e-mailing list to keep everyone informed.

Question 10: Will anyone admit to putting land forward for development?

One person present did.

Question 11: Are the 200 houses allocated to the three serviced settlements going to be evenly distributed amongst those villages?

Answer: The numbers will be decided at the next stage of the Plan.

Question 12: How is it decided where affordable housing is to go?

Answer: Policies identifying where affordable housing is to go have to be justified. It will not necessarily be located with the housing development it is associated with. The Core Policy as it is currently written proposing that sites of 10 dwellings or more should provide 36% affordable housing unless it can be demonstrated that this contribution would render a site unviable.

Question 13: How permanent is the Green Belt?

Answer: The Green Belt can change in exceptional circumstances. . Boundaries can be adjusted periodically through the planning policy process. The present boundaries were confirmed in the 1998 Plan and were different from the previous Plan.

Question 14: The character of the village would be changed by the building of 60+ houses.

Answer: BBC will take into account the character of an area. Character has been controlled by policy, but the policy could change.

Question 15: Why was 200 the number chosen for the three villages?

Answer: The availability of sites was taken into account. The next version of the Plan could identify numbers for each village.

Question 16: How many have already been built in the villages?

Answer: 24 in Ramsden Bellhouse, 6 in Bowers Gifford and 11 in Ramsden Crays.

Question 17: What are the present sizes of the villages?

Answer: The Settlement Hierarchy Topic Paper sets out that Crays Hill and Ramsden Bellhouse have a population of around 600 people to the nearest 100. Bowers Gifford has a population of around 900 people to the nearest 100.

Question 18: How were the housing number forecasts reached, and who made them?

Answer: The Duty to Co-operate in the Localism Act means the Local Planning Authority (LPA) must look at the needs of the wider area. They must take into account the economic needs of the A127 corridor and internal migration, such as London Workers/commuters moving into the Borough. LPA must meet economic needs for example, how much housing is needed to support economic forecasts and job creation. The Local Planning Authority must also consider natural growth as well as international mitigation, in line with national policy. The calculations will be tested by the planning inspector who will examine the logic behind the Plan. If the Inspector decides that it has not been based on national policy it will be found unsound. The whole process would have to be done again and there could be a risk that if a Local Plan is not put into place, the LPA's planning powers removed.

Question 19: How have the numbers for gypsy/traveller pitches been arrived at?

Answer: National Policy says that BBC must meet need. The planning inspector will determine whether BBC has acted reasonably in reaching the number.

Question 20: As the new policies relaxing the rules about development in the plotlands, would planning applications there be looked on favourably now?

Answer: The proposed policy to allow building on vacant plots in the plotlands has not been adopted yet, so might change. There have already been attempts to achieve planning permission on the basis of the draft policy, and these have been turned down on appeal. Until the policy has been adopted, applying for planning permission is taking a risk.

Question 21: Will the settlements of Wickford, Crays Hill and Ramsden Bellhouse be prevented from merging?

Answer: BBC recognises the importance of keeping the settlements separate and preventing coalescence.

Question 22: Under SoS Nick Boles said that Green Belt boundaries would be changed only under exceptional circumstances. What amounts to exceptional?

Answer; The exceptional circumstances are the reviews undertaken in the creation of the Local Plan. Eric Pickles was reported as having said that it is likely that BBC will have to alter its Green Belt boundaries to meet its development needs in a recent appeal decision.

Question 23: The side roads are private and maintained at the expense of the residents. Many of the verges are owned by the adjacent householders. Widening would require their co-operation and agreement.

Answer: This may be an impediment to some of the sites being developed.

Question 24: Can a community say what development it wants?

Answer: There is a process called Neighbourhood Planning whereby this can happen. It has to be confirmed by a referendum.

Question 25: Who proposed the sites for development in Ramsden Bellhouse?

Answer: There was a Call for Sites by BBC in 2007/8 when landowners put forward their land for consideration. This process is now reviewed on an annual basis.

Question 26: If there was a change to balance of power at BBC following an election, would the Strategy change?

Answer: National policy drives what requirements have to be met and the planning inspectorate judges it by set criteria and evidence. Producing the Plan has a cost and BBC doesn't want to carry out abortive work.

Question 27: There have been instances when land is proposed by others than the land owners. What does BBC do to check?

Answer: BBC does not do a Land Registry check, but writes to the applicant every year to ensure that the details are up to date.

Question 28: Can we be sure that there will not be development on the 6 proposed sites in Ramsden Bellhouse until the Plan is adopted?

Answer: At the moment the application and appeal process are following the policies in the 1998 Local Plan.

Question 29: What else will happen if the Plan doesn't accept the housing allocations?

If the Plan is not adopted there will be no funding for infrastructure. There would be hostile planning applications ie. in sites where we wouldn't want them to be. The SoS could step in and prepare a Local Plan for the Council and remove the Council's planning powers. There would be a risk of accusations of failure to comply with statutory responsibilities and leaving decisions on the future development of the Borough in the hands of developers and the government. It would also be harder to

implement other Council Strategies if they require a certain land or development response.

Question 30: Aren't there enough traveller sites?

Answer: The Government tells the LA that they must be provided. BBC doesn't have a choice. The 240 pitches are over a 20 year period. If BBC doesn't provide them, there might be pitches where they are not wanted.

Cllr. Wellborne closed the Meeting, thanking those present for their attendance, and saying that more of these sessions would be arranged throughout the consultation process.

The Meeting closed at 9.30pm.