

Letter to Editor
Welwyn Hatfield Times

Dear Sir

We were very pleased to read in your edition of 24 April that Councillor Dean and his Cabinet are considering changes to the draft Core Strategy. And so it should! It is almost beyond belief that the current proposals have got this far!

If the factors set out in our previous letters were insufficient to cast very serious doubt on the quality of the Cabinet's thinking up till now, then the apparent justification of their original decision was all the more worrying.

The Cabinet made a decision to place all the major future housing development around Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield rather than placing some of the development around the large southern villages of Cuffley, Brookmans Park and Welham Green. It decided and stated that doing so would be "perverse" citing opposition from villagers!

It seems that the Cabinet based its decision on a 2009 consultation that the Council reported had produced over 4,000 objections to the potential four broad locations for growth that were close to the large villages. What is unclear is that, of the objections received, most were from the same base of 1,233 separate people or family groupings each objecting up to four times - once in respect of each area - and another time as we explain below. As it is, this results in the odd situation that in the case of one village there are more objectors than residents on the electoral register - possible perhaps, but certainly odd!

The same group of respondents also made it clear that they did not want gypsies or travellers in their area - this was another part of the same consultation - as they felt these would be best accommodated within the larger urban conurbations. So there were a further 1,026 comments in favour of that choice also - helped, in many cases, by the suggestion that one of the sites for this would be on a specific road in the area - and which was never part of the Council's consultation in the first place.

The Cabinet had manifestly failed to exercise its duty to ensure that skewed results should be eliminated from the results of such consultations. Indeed, they had taken the opposite approach: it had endorsed the use of multiple letters from small sections of the community to make decisions which must follow the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Effectively, the Cabinet was legitimising NIMBYism - which is precisely what the entire planning process and the NPPF are intended to prevent.

We are very glad that the Cabinet are now considering reversing their earlier quite "perverse" decision. Everybody knows that these strategic decisions are very difficult but the outcome must be seen to be fair to all parts of the Borough. We are now more hopeful that any plan going forward will have a better chance of success when it is formally examined in public. In the meantime, we will watch developments closely.

Yours faithfully

Garden Village Preservation Society
Panshanger People
Welwyn Garden City Society