

ICKLEFORD PARISH COUNCIL



www.icklefordpc.com

1 Freewaters Close, Ickleford,
Hertfordshire, SG5 3TQ
Email: mail@icklefordpc.com
Telephone: 07913 839933



Bim Afolami MP
65 High Street
Harpenden
Hertfordshire
AL5 2SL

20 September 2017

Dear Bim,

Housing developments in Ickleford

Thank you again for your time and engagement at today's meeting of north Herts parishes. I know you have captured the key points, and will use these in your meeting with Cllr Lynda Needham. At the suggestion of our District Councillor, Harry Spencer-Smith, I would like to provide you with a little more granularity on the issues that could affect Ickleford because of the proposals in the Local Plan; these might be useful for your meeting with Cllr Needham.

It is important to stress that neither the Parish Council nor our residents are opposed to new housing per se, and accept that our village cannot be immune to such developments. In our formal submission to the NHDC Local Plan consultation we did not object to one of the four proposed sites in the village, and acknowledged that partial development of a second might be acceptable.

Our concerns focus on the extent of the development which is mooted, the impact on a village community, inadequate mitigation against adverse impacts of additional housing and population, certain elements of the process undertaken by the district council in formulating the Local Plan, and the effects of developments in Central Bedfordshire adjacent to Ickleford.

Extent of proposed developments in Ickleford – The NHDC Local Plan lists four sites in Ickleford; IC1 (9 dwellings), IC2 (40), IC3 (150) and LS1 (120). The latter, although it has a different prefix, is in our parish, and the proposed developers of that site have created plans for 185 dwellings rather than the 120 estimated in the Local Plan. Additionally, two 'windfall' sites have become available at Ickleford Manor (19 dwellings, planning permission granted July 2017) and Bowman's Mill (71 dwellings, outline planning application submitted September 2017). Were these to come to pass, 474 new dwellings would be added to a village which currently has 854 homes.

Impact on a village community – Much importance is placed on social, historical and environmental factors in documents such as the NPPF. An increase in housing and population of over 50% in such a short time will transform the nature of our community, destroying the very essence which made most of us want to live in Ickleford. For example, a new, two-form entry primary school is proposed

in the Local Plan, and this will mean relocation from the heart of the village to the periphery, off the A600. The school currently forms part of the 'golden triangle' of school, church and village hall, and is a pivotal part of the community in the centre of the village. Parents and governors are dismayed at this potential rupture of important social and historical bonds, plus the inevitable drive to the new location off a trunk road, with all its sequelae.

Inadequate mitigation against adverse impacts – Effort has been made to address some of the inevitable consequences of the Local Plan – e.g. the proposed new primary school – but these attempts are far from comprehensive. For example, the Local Plan traffic simulation suggests no specific remedial measures are required on the roads in Ickleford. At a reasonable estimate of 1.5 vehicles per home, over 700 additional cars from Ickleford will need to be accommodated, many of which will join the already overburdened roads through the village at peak times. Factor in, also, traffic increases associated with developments in the Central Beds villages adjacent to Ickleford (see below), and further congestion of our roads and increases in air pollution will ensue. Moreover, we are only 2km from Hitchin town centre, where key routes are already routinely grid-locked; the remedies proposed in the Local Plan will be inadequate for the increased volume of traffic which will accompany the Local Plan as a whole. Accepting that roads, schools, GP surgeries, and hospitals are not the responsibility of NHDC, it is nonetheless apparent that north Herts simply won't be able to cope with the changes which will flow from the Local Plan.

The process undertaken by the district council – This will obviously be the subject of the current examination process. However, three points are worth specific mention. First, two sites (IC3 and LS1, comprising 335 new homes) were added to the Local Plan at the last minute, and were therefore not amenable to challenge from us or Cllr Spencer-Smith. Second, NHDC is proposing the vast majority of new homes in the district be built on Green Belt. In Ickleford, three of the four proposed sites are on Green Belt. The latter is supposed to be sacrosanct other than in 'exceptional circumstances'. With huge tracts of the district not designated as Green Belt, placing 80%+ of new homes on this protected land seems illogical and, therefore, 'special circumstances' cannot be proven. Third, is the apparently passive way NHDC approached landowners in the 'call for sites'. We have spoken with the owners of the two 'windfall' sites mentioned above; it seemed strange to us that neither had been included in the Local Plan when the owners clearly had thoughts to develop their sites for housing. Both owners confirmed that they had not been approached by NHDC during the formulation of the Local Plan. At the very least, this suggests that the land chosen for inclusion might not have been the most appropriate in terms of location and association with existing infrastructure. From a layperson's perspective, this seems suboptimal.

The effects of developments in Central Bedfordshire – CBC has recently published its draft Local Plan. This, along with developments already in the pipeline, will likely add 5-6,000 new homes to the villages north of Ickleford (Arlesey, Fairfield, Henlow, Stondon and Stotfold). Vehicles emanating from those communities heading south (e.g. to Luton or M1) will come through Ickleford, adding to the issues mentioned above. Additionally, CBC residents will continue to use services in Hertfordshire adding to the pre-existing strain.

I hope you find this information useful. I would also like to stress the anger and dismay felt in Ickleford about the potential situation in which we find ourselves. The Parish Council took a deliberate decision not to ask residents to write to you on this subject – we felt that reading and replying to multiple similar letters would not be a valuable use of your time. However, we have assured them that we would be communicating their concerns forcibly with you. Therefore, please accept this as the voice of the vast majority of Ickleford residents.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Miles Maxwell', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Miles Maxwell,
Chairman, Ickleford Parish Council

cc Cllr Harry Spencer-Smith