

Everyone agrees that we need a local plan, but it needs to be sound otherwise it won't get past the Inspector.

The draft before you is not based on evidence. In fact, it ignores much of the evidence that you've presented to the public. At least it does in terms of Blackwell Farm, and probably other sites too.

Firstly, there's the **Habitats Regulations Assessment**. This deemed Blackwell Farm unsuitable for major development because of the impact of traffic and pollution on the Thames Basin Heath SPA. The Habitats Regulations Assessment has been ignored.

Then there's the **Landscape Character Assessment**. It's guidance recommends that the Hog's Back landscape, should be **conserved**. Key features, it states, are the panoramic views down across the borough, including views of the Cathedral. Developing Blackwell Farm would blight these views. The Landscape Character Assessment has been ignored.

In fact, the draft plan has been drawn up without any reference to landscape, which is strange, given that the borough's attractive environment is the number 2 reason why businesses locate here - after its rail links. One of the biggest deterrents is its traffic problems.

Which brings me to my next evidence document - the **Transport Assessment Report**. This shows that large-scale development at Blackwell Farm would have **the worst** impact on traffic. Again the Transport Assessment's findings are ignored and this site is put forward regardless.

It seems that the only evidence which has fed into the draft plan is that which shows a demand for business premises and for houses, but this give unjustifiably inflated figures. The **Employment Land Study** predicts an 11% increase in retail employment, when the Centre for Retail Research forecasts an 11% decline in the South East by 2018.

And the SHMA gives a housing figure that's more than double that of neighbouring boroughs.

**The Green Belt and Countryside Study** made a brief appearance - that is until its flaws were pointed out and potential sites re-assessed. The revised assessment, gave Blackwell Farm a higher green belt ranking - one which previously would have removed it from the Local Plan, but this wasn't the answer you wanted so suddenly the goalposts were moved to allow all available land parcels to go forward. The Green Belt Study, too, is now redundant.

Why have you spent thousands of pounds of taxpayers' money on these evidence documents, just to ignore their recommendations and findings? You're being railroaded into accepting a plan that doesn't stack up - there was no point in commissioning this evidence base, there was no point putting it before the scrutiny committee, and there was no point in consulting on it with the public.

Approve this plan tonight, and there'll be no point in having an elected Council either.