

Aireborough Neighbourhood Forum

Site Allocations Issues and Options – Housing Response

We understand that site allocation choices have been made between a combination of Leeds officers and councillors, with the Leeds SHLAA¹ panel (which consisting of a number of developers and housing professionals) acting as technical advisor on ‘the market’. Very little local resident and business input has been had up to this stage in the process; we understand the point of the site allocations issues and options consultation is to gather the evidence from local people on the suitability or not of these sites for housing. We have, therefore, gained and analysed the response from over 700 people, from all over the Aireborough Neighbourhood Planning area of Guiseley, Yeadon, Hawksworth and High Royds. This is their view.

1. Chronic issues with infrastructure must be addressed first, as Aireborough has been overdeveloped for its current capacity.

The site allocations take no heed of the fact that Aireborough has been overdeveloped in the last 10 years in relation to its infrastructure capacity. The numerous new, dense, housing estates on what was once employment land, has led to a change in the way the area works (ie people no longer live and work in the area), with the result that Aireborough now has chronic infrastructure problems – which have seriously affected the standard of living. Infrastructure issues were ‘spontaneously’ referred to by over 85% of the people who input to the evidence gathering, with the following being mentioned often and frequently.

- The biggest and most serious crisis is that there is now a lack of school places for primary school children. Not because of a higher birth rate (as is often reported), but because of an influx of families to the newly built family homes. The secondary schools are also reaching overcapacity. This has led to crisis and unsuitable remedies being put forward, resulting in local outrage.
- By far the biggest issue is that our roads: the A65 and A658, in particular, are now ‘gridlocked’ (the word used most frequently by people), ‘chocked’, ‘congested’ and making life difficult. This is not just at rush hour, but at weekend, when the commuters return home and need to go about their daily life, and visitors pour in to the local retail parks (we do not mind visitors, but need the facilities to deal with them). The overload on the road is causing them to fall into disrepair.
- We have a lack of places at local doctors, dentists, and medical facilities in general leading to long waits for appointments. This particularly affects our retired population, which is proportionately higher than that of Leeds (16% in Aireborough to 12% in Leeds overall). Retired people are less able to travel long distances to seek medical care, so are therefore being disadvantaged.

¹ Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment

- Nothing has been done to increase or upgrade community facilities, in the light of this increase in population (11% increase in Guiseley between 2001 and 2011.)

Therefore, **the people of Aireborough do not agree with any more housing**, until at least the current infrastructure problems, brought about by past overdevelopment, have been rectified through investment. They then want to know that any further housing has had the infrastructure it needs thought about and planned, as part of a proper neighbourhood development plan, first not last, and when crisis hits.

“Don’t be ridiculous there is not enough infrastructure to support any more house building”²

“As a resident along the A65, additional housing will only create more congestion and misery for local residents this must be one of the busiest areas in Leeds”

“What if any infrastructure has been put in place to cope with all these houses? Most of them will have at least one car most of them will have children. All the cars will spill out into the streets during the two rush hours, are there enough school places. What about sewage disposal; can Esholt sewage works cope with this. Have these matters been discussed or are we never to be informed. I will not put my vote to any of this until I know how Leeds City Council are going to deal with issues, until then they have only my vote of no confidence.”

2. Current site allocations are unbalanced; there is an overemphasis on housing stock surplus to local requirements. Available land, of which there is not a great deal, is needed for schools, medical facilities, community amenities, future food production and green infrastructure.

Following the development of nearly all our brown field sites, the land that is left is crucially needed for infrastructure, first and foremost. Ings Lane (site 3026) for example was frequently mentioned as a potential site for a new school. This would be of huge benefit to the community, whereas, 535 houses on the same site would create urban sprawl, linking Guiseley and Menston. Available land also needs looking at in conjunction with employment – our employment submission emphasises the need in the NPPF for people to be able to live and work in an area, to make it sustainable. Aireborough is fertile ground for business start-ups, and has an issue with a lack of suitable premises and supportive business zones for businesses. So, again, we would want to consider local employment need alongside that of any further housing on the same site.

There is also the point of future requirements for life’s necessities, such as food – with a growing world population, food security is a growing issue, if historic farmland is built on, then it cannot be used to produce food. In the past Leeds has suffered from short-sightedness; a classic example being the demolition of Aireborough Grammar school which was replaced by houses; now, these

² Quotes in red, taken from specific ANF research on site allocations.

and other houses mean we are in desperate need of the school that was knocked down!! We would like to think about future needs, like education, food production, and trade, and take them into account in the balance of land use.

Finally, local housing needs are in categories that have not been a priority for developers in the past – we need retirement bungalows, single person property, first time buyer homes and social homes for local people. We do not see the benefit to the area of developers fulfilling the demands of non-residents for family homes, in what was once a green location. Suggestions for the design of the houses that are needed, fit with local characteristics, and include terraces - which use land in different quantities to current housing figures, but which are not popular with developers. Any housing built, needs to meet local requirements.

In essence, Aireborough now has limited available land left for all its requirements (including green infrastructure, see below). The priority must be for uses that make life in the area sustainable; not unnecessary types of housing, or uncharacteristic design, that add to issues. It may well be that Aireborough cannot accommodate the 2,300 houses that Leeds wants to build in the area. We have said in our comments to the core strategy that we do not think targets are based on evidence of local need. Local people consider that Leeds should look for housing needs (not demand) targets, to the many empty properties in the Leeds district and on brown field sites near the City. This includes the huge swath of land in Leeds City Centre South, where Leeds Sustainable Development Group would like to build a large number of much needed family housing. Or, indeed to Holbeck, where flats and back-to-backs have been knocked down and not replaced, whilst families have been moved elsewhere.

“Aireborough is already overdeveloped and land especially brown field sites on the edge of Leeds City Centre ie in Holbeck/Hunslet, should be built on first.”

“The Aireborough region, specifically Guiseley, is already overdeveloped and the road infrastructure to support the community is insufficient. Schools are also over capacity. Plenty of land along A65 old mills/dairy works near city which is unused.”

“Building in Aireborough should be very, very limited to small plots only. Aireborough cannot take any more housing there is insufficient infrastructure. Poor train services, vastly overcrowded roads in terrible condition and permanently full of traffic. Schools overcrowded. Council stop destroying our area and green space.”

3. Site allocations, as they stand at the moment, will destroy a local amenity for wellbeing, and the social, cultural and landscape character of this area.

The final point about site allocations is that the majority of them are on greenbelt sites. This seems to be totally against the much repeated strategy of ‘brown field land first’ – one that has been repeated to us by Government ministers, who have specifically been to look at Aireborough. In a ‘semi-rural’ location like Aireborough, the greenbelt is our ‘park’. Suggesting building on many of

these sites, is like suggesting to Londoners that you build on Hyde or Regents Park. Areas like Wills Gill (1256), Coach Road (1311), Banksfield/Shaw Lane (1255) are where people go to walk, play, relax, take the dog. The fingers of greenbelt, reaching down into Aireborough, mean that many people are within easy walking distance of recreation, something that is necessary for wellbeing according to the Government's own health criteria. With the density of the new housing estates, and the lack of garden in traditional terrace housing, this green space for exercise and leisure is needed more than ever. Where are children supposed to play for example? When houses have gardens the size of pocket handkerchiefs, and they are not within easy and safe walking distance of green space. By filling the surrounding greenbelt with houses more people are being disadvantaged in health outcomes.

There is also the case that Aireborough's green spaces, reaching into the built environment, are part of the landscape characteristic of the area. Therefore, just filling in the gaps, as many of the site allocations seem to have done, is actually destroying Aireborough's character. In addition, by doing this, important historic areas, like Nether Yeadon (sites 2126,1104,3033), or environmental areas like the Ings (site 3026) in Guiseley (a name that means marsh land, and is important for both local drainage and wildlife) are lost, to the detriment of the area, the county and the country as a whole.

"Reutilise land that is already built on, but keep open space for people in the area to enjoy and promote wildlife etc. Let's keep some green space and countryside for people and families to enjoy; our children need open space to play in and people to exercise their dogs. Traffic is very bad in the area and will become worse."

"There needs to be a balance. We should not rush to destroy our greenbelt areas to meet housing targets. When it's gone it's gone. Creating a dense large urban area should be avoided ie effectively filling in the spaces between Leeds and Bradford."

"Too many cars and houses in what was once a village and is now part of Leeds urban sprawl. I could not believe my eyes when I saw the proposed draft for new housing in this overburdened area. Why has Leeds chosen to ruin what was once a lovely area to live in? We have a plethora of traffic lights from Rawdon to White Cross which do not aid the flow of traffic but which cause bunching and endless queues. Pavements have been substantially widened to reduce traffic flow and endless housing with little though to schooling shops or extra parking. Why does Leeds have to make Guiseley a sprawling, congested attachment to a city it didn't used to belong to?"

Few of these issues have been taken into account in the SHLAA panel's market view, or the officer assessment of suitability. We, therefore now attach the assessment by local residents of the various sites.