



Three Rivers Joint Residents Associations

Monday 20th September, 2021: A press statement by the Three Rivers Joint Residents Association

The Three Rivers draft Local Plan:

Now is the time for everyone to join the fight to protect our Green Belt.

The Three Rivers draft Local Plan sets out options, including housing, for how the Three Rivers district will develop over the next fifteen years. The public consultation closed on 20th August, and we are delighted that more than 2,500 responses were received. This demonstrates how important our environment is to residents of the district, particularly as many residents did not receive any form of communication from the Council about the consultation.

We understand the responses are now being reviewed by Three Rivers District Council. It is the view of Residents Associations across the district that it is essential that people's voices are properly considered by the council and its officers at this critical stage of the Plan forming process.

However, we are deeply concerned by a press release issued on 2nd September by Three Rivers because it contains two significant factual errors and appears to suggest that residents' views will not be considered unless they are to propose additional sites for development, with no consideration over whether the number of new houses proposed is appropriate and whether currently proposed sites are truly suitable for development.

Gary Ansel, who chairs the Joint RAs, says "If uncorrected, the errors could have a devastating effect on our environment and quality of life for both current and future generations. An area equivalent to over 500 football pitches could be concreted over for high density new homes without any clear commitment to enhancing the existing infrastructure, such as roads, rail, education and healthcare facilities, which struggle to cope with current demand".

In their press release, Three Rivers District Council states 'All councils in England are legally required by the government to plan for future population growth and demand for housing. The number of homes required to be planned for over the plan period is set by the Government using a standard calculation. This equates to 630 dwellings a year for Three Rivers'.

The standard method is only the **starting** point in the process of planning for new homes- not the end.

The Council also states that ‘the housing figures are so great that we will be forced by the national guidelines to allocate green belt sites’.

However, as the Council has been advised by the Housing Minister, Government policy makes it clear that having calculated the standard methodology figure, they should then consider the constraints it may have in terms of land availability, such as Green Belt, before setting a figure for the number of houses it will include in the Plan*.

Despite this, from their latest press release, it appears that Three Rivers District Council have made the decision that they **will not consider** land constraints and so are planning to simply build over Green Belt.

Gary adds “From this the Three Rivers Joint Residents’ Association can only conclude that party politics are being put ahead of the interests of our communities. Rather than blaming the Government for political advantage, we call on the Council to properly apply Government policy and reduce the housing numbers to be delivered to reflect the local land constraints, including Green Belt.

It should be noted that independent analysis shows that the level of housing truly required in the District for all its local needs, including ensuring that sufficient homes are built for younger generations, is less than half of that proposed by the Council in their press release”.

The Joint RAs are urging residents to write, phone or email their local District Councillor to express their concerns. They are also calling on each councillor to argue that the Council must stop the process and:

- Complete a thorough assessment of local need. Our analysis indicates the figures have been overstated by about 300%, we have shared this with Three Rivers but it has not been considered.
- Prioritise using previously developed land (‘brownfield’) first. This would result in more affordable, sustainable housing; whereas development on previously Green Belt land tends to result in premium priced properties being built.
- Put forward a figure which represents true local, not national, need, and which safeguards our precious Green Belt.

Editor's notes

The Three Rivers Joint Residents' Association is a council comprising residents' associations (RAs) from across the Three Rivers District. Between us, we represent the interests of around 10,000 households. We are volunteers, whose respective associations rely on donations, and we are politically independent.

Members include:

Bedmond RA

Chorleywood RA

Chandlers Cross RA

Croxley Green RA

Eastbury RA

Kings Langley & District RA

Loudwater RA

Maple Cross & West Hyde RA

Moor Park RA

Oxhey Hall RA

Rickmansworth RA.

The Green Belt is previously undeveloped land, which is protected by law from being built on. 76% of Three Rivers is designated as Green Belt, and it is a major reason why the area is so popular as a place to live in or visit.

*Source: Letter from the Minister for Housing to Three Rivers District Council, 26 January 2021, setting out the terms under which a council should prepare a Plan.