

AGM – Talk on Planning and the Green Belt

By Viv Evans, Chief Planning Officer, Harrow Council

Vicki Wallas welcomed Viv Evans to the 96th AGM. Viv began his talk by introducing himself, saying that he had worked for various councils and in several London boroughs including Harrow and Kingston. He said that the issues were similar in both boroughs. He explained that he would touch on four planning plans and bills: the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, the Harrow Draft Local Plan and the Mayor of London's Plan.

1. **National Planning Policy Framework:** this was amended in February 2025. The **standard method for assessing local housing need** states that this must be done using the government's standard method and that local planning authorities (LPA) must "meet an area's identified housing need". **Green Belt (GB)** – LPAs should review GB where they are unable to meet their identified needs for housing, commercial or other development through other means. The concept of "grey belt" within GB has now been introduced. Harrow doesn't recognise grey belt and will fight it. Strategic planning – LPAs should support economic growth and clean energy through the planning system. **Infrastructure** – new, expanded or upgraded public service infrastructure needs to be considered when planning new developments.
2. **Planning and Infrastructure Bill: Planning Committees** – A national scheme would set out which planning applications should be delegated to planning officers and which should go to planning committees. **Fee Setting** – LPAs would be able to set their own planning fees. **Strategic Planning** – The bill would restore a system of strategic planning across England. **Nature Recovery** – An environmental delivery plan would be drafted by Natural England to outline measures for nature recovery from certain forms of development. **Energy Infrastructure** – The bill would empower the secretary of state to create a financial benefit scheme for eligible people living near new network transmission infrastructure.
3. **New Draft Harrow Local Plan:** Harrow's current Statutory Local Plan is out of date having been drawn up in 2012 and 2013. The Plan sets the policies for the future and will remain in place until the next Local Plan is adopted. The new Plan will cover the period 2021-2041. There will be at least two formal periods of consultation before it is independently

examined by the Planning Inspectorate. The Plan is sound if it is: positively prepared (including meeting housing targets; justified, based on reasonable alternatives and evidence; effective i.e. aspirational but realistic/deliverable; consistent with the NPPF. The Plan also needs to be in *general conformity* with the London Plan. **The Key Strategic Objectives of the Harrow Local Plan:** a) Focus most growth in the Harrow and Wealdstone Opportunity Area; b) Define what height and where it might be acceptable in the Opportunity Area; c) Protect the suburbs from intensive development and tall buildings; d) Other town centres – more modest levels of growth; e) Improve the quality of new development in the borough; f) Look after the culture and heritage of the borough; g) No changes proposed to the Green Belt/Metropolitan Open Land; h) Meet our housing targets (set by the London Plan); i) Secure General Conformity with the London Plan. **Key Detailed Aspects:** a) **Housing** – resist the loss of family-size housing and build more in new developments. Have a target of 50% affordable housing and low-cost rents. B) **Local Economy** – maintain the status of Harrow Metropolitan Town Centre in the London Plan; have a town centre Master Plan; retain existing industrial areas. C) **Climate Change** – net zero carbon development. **Infrastructure** – plan will be supported by an Infrastructure Delivery Plan; retain existing infrastructure, support proposals for new infrastructure; support for EV charging points. **Next steps** – consultation on any main modifications will take place at the end of September with adoption at the end of 2025/early 2026.

4. **London Plan:** the current London Plan was adopted in 2021 and will be out of date by March 2026. It set an overall housing target for London of 52,287 a year with Harrow's target being 802 homes a year. There is strong protection for the GB/Metropolitan Open Land. The New London Plan is likely to have a housing target of 80,000 a year which includes 2,280 homes a year for Harrow, but this is unlikely to be our final target. March 2026 is earmarked for consultation of the draft London Plan with examination in 2026/7 and final adoption in 2027. **Green Belt** – the term was first coined by Octavia Hill in 1875. The Metropolitan Green Belt (MGB) was first formally proposed by the Greater London Regional Planning Committee in 1935. The statutory MGB around London was established by the Green Belt (London and Home Counties) Act 1938. The MGB spans over 500,000 hectares of land and includes parts of

Greater London, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Kent, Surrey, Bedfordshire, and Sussex. The GB's core purposes, as outlined in the NPPF is: a) check the unrestricted sprawl of large urban areas; b) prevent neighbouring towns from merging; c) safeguard the countryside from encroachment; d) preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; e) assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land. **Green Belt review** – Harrow is participating in a GLA Green Belt study (one of 14 boroughs, 4 others declined). The London-wide study will not redefine boundaries, propose parcels for release or consider the development capacity of any parcels that are to be released (these are matters for the LPAs and the Mayor). For participating boroughs, a separate, locally-tailored GB review will be produced. The scope of these local studies and their approach will be the subject for discussion as part of the project working group and individual discussions with LPAs.

Viv Evans finished his talk and opened the floor to questions.

Q: What development sites are new?

A: These are listed on the Harrow website. Plus there are the following: the Kodak site is ongoing. TfL wants to develop the bus station. The Council is speaking to landowners of properties in Harrow town centre with a view to redevelop it. There is a parcel of land at Harrow & Wealdstone station. There is also Byron Quarter and around 1,000 homes at the old Civic Centre. The Council wants to preserve suburban areas.

Q. Residents are concerned about the land opposite the houses on Oxhey Lane.

A. The Council is keeping a close eye on the Enforcement Notice. The Planning Team is satisfied that the new barn being constructed will be used for agricultural purposes. Only agricultural development will be allowed on GB. Another enforcement office has been recruited.

Q. Why was planning permission granted for the barn when there was an outstanding Enforcement Notice on the access bridge?

A. It was judged to be for agricultural purposes. The road is being monitored as are the poly tunnels. Some enforcements can take years to resolve.

Q. What type of housing will there be in the quotas?

A. Harrow has a good track record of delivering the quotes, eg the Kodak site development. Co-living schemes are popular. Harrow needs more family accommodation eg two and three bed homes. It will resist large Houses of Multiple Occupation. A large section of Poet's Corner will be rented accommodation.

Q. What is the future of Pinner Park Farm?

A. There are no proposals to redevelop it.

Q. How many units will the Kodak site have?

A. 3,500 homes when completed. Infrastructure is being upgraded and there is land for a new school.

Q. Once planning permission is granted, is it checked?

A. No. It is really up to neighbours to notice any violations and to report it to the Council.

Q. Where can we find a definition of "grey belt".

A. You will find it in the NPPF.

When the Q and A session was completed, John Cobb thanked Viv Evans and that the planning department was more structured and efficient under him and that he had introduced the new planning portal which was working well.

Sheila Reid