

The Ripon City Plan – Where Could All The New Homes Be Built?

In previous articles we have discussed our proposed approach for dealing with providing new housing in the City, however, following publication in last week's Gazette of a map showing where all the new homes could be built in Ripon, it is worthwhile revisiting this topic again for clarification.

We have already mentioned in previous articles that one of the challenges in developing a Neighbourhood Plan for Ripon, is that the Local Plan for the Harrogate District is being developed at the same time. This has meant that throughout the last year there has been a steady stream of information published by Harrogate Borough Council which is necessarily part of the process of developing the Local Plan process but is also useful information and evidence relevant to the City Plan and which we need to consider.

The information which has been published about potential housing sites is another example of this and over the next couple of weeks we will need to thoroughly analyse this against our own proposed approach to developing new housing and identify any resolve any resulting issues.

However, first of all let's be clear about the information which has been published and why. As part of the development of the Harrogate District Local Plan, Harrogate Borough Council is updating its previous assessments about the availability, suitability and the likely economic viability of sites. This will culminate in the publication of a Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) and as part of this process the Council issued a "Call for Sites" in September 2014 and a further "call" as part of the Issues and Options consultation in July 2015.

In advance of the publication of the SHELAA, which is expected in Spring 2016, Cllr Rebecca Burnett, Harrogate Borough Council's Cabinet Member for Planning and Sustainable Transport, agreed to a report which suggested that all of the sites submitted were publicised for information. In publishing the details of the hundreds of different sites across the district which have been put forward, Harrogate Borough Council are very clear that, "The inclusion of a site in this document of the SHELAA does not mean that a site will be allocated for development in the new Local Plan. Further detailed site assessment work will be undertaken and sites allocated in accordance with the Local Plan's growth strategy and site selection methodology."

Looking at the published information on the map entitled "Local Plan Sites: Ripon" there are 28 sites showing with an "R" prefix presumably to denote that these are considered by Harrogate to be part of the Ripon settlement and a further 8 sites showing with other prefixes presumably to denote these are considered to be part of the surrounding villages. However, confusingly, not necessarily all of those sites with an "R" prefix are actually within the Parish of Ripon which you may recall is the boundary used for the Neighbourhood Plan. Therefore a number of these sites will not be considered and analysed by the City Plan team as we have no competence outside of our Neighbourhood Plan boundary.

However, in our preliminary draft Ripon City Plan we identified our proposed approach to providing new homes in the City and you supported this. The basis for our policies and approach is that we want to encourage the development of new housing in sustainable and appropriate locations within the existing development limits of the City.

We have been very clear in that we believe that constraints on the city's development are a key factor in our approach to housing and therefore we believe that the risk of flooding, the risk of unstable land (gypsum dissolution) and visual and environmental impact all limit the locations where new homes can be provided in the city.

Furthermore, one of the key drivers for producing a Neighbourhood Plan for Ripon was improving the economy and therefore the City Plan sees some of the identified sites as being opportunities for businesses and increasing employment opportunities rather than providing new housing. Indeed in some locations, the City Plan proposes that sites could be developed in such a way as to providing both new homes and new business opportunities, such as the military estate which we have identified as a mixed-use regeneration area, which would also need to include land for schools and education purposes and open-space and playing fields.

Whilst, the publication of this information means that we now know the sites that are being considered by Harrogate Borough Council as part of the SHELAA and the development of the new Local Plan it does not change the approach and proposals contained within the City Plan and reassuringly all of the major sites put forward within the City boundary have been considered during the production of the City Plan.

If you require any further information, please contact the Ripon City Plan Team:
cityplan@riponcity.gov.uk or call (01765) 604097.