# September Knebworth Parish News

## Local Plan

I'm sorry to have to return to this old chestnut, but the project to develop a new Local Plan for the District continues. There are, potentially, significant impacts to the District Council budget if a Local Plan has not been submitted for inspection by March 2017, so the District Council has decided to press on with producing a plan.

A meeting was held on 20th July at North Herts Leisure Centre with a single item on the agenda: to consider the proposed draft. In terms of sites, the plan has additional sites totaling several thousand dwellings across the District, and an extra site in Knebworth, labelled KB4, with an additional 200 houses or so. This will extend from the junction of Oakfields Road and Oakfields Avenue in the north to the rear of Haygarth in the south, enclosing the school playing fields and the houses in Swangley's Lane.

The council meeting heard public participation from a number of groups, almost exclusively speaking against the proposals. The council heard a presentation from the Executive Member for Planning, and then a prolonged debate involving nearly every member of the council. The resolution to endorse the draft plan was carried by thirty two votes to seven, with five abstentions (which included me). Under the NHDC constitution, the final decision to submit the plan for consultation will be taken at a special Cabinet meeting in September.

'Consultation' in the above context is a collection of responses for review by the Planning Inspector. It is expected that formal submission of the consultation and draft plan to the Secretary of State will happen no earlier than March 2017. It may well be 2018 before the Plan is approved.

The window of opportunity for submitting responses to the consultation will begin some time around the middle of October. It will run for the statutory period of six weeks: no longer! I suggest that if you plan to submit any comments, that you examine the proposed plan now, ready to submit them when the consultation begins. Note that if you submitted comments in response to the Preferred Options consultation in December 2014 and that you believe that the updated plan does not fully address your concerns, you should submit your comments again in October. Remember that this time the comments will be examined by the Planning Inspector, on behalf of the Secretary of State, and **not** by the planning officers in NHDC.

The latest sites for removal from the Green Belt can be obtained by searching for "draft emerging allocations knebworth". They are on both the Parish Council website and the NHDC one.

The full detail of the Emerging Local Plan may be obtained from <http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/planning/planning-policy/emerging-local-plan.>

## Joint Waste Collection and Street Cleansing Contract

A contract for waste collection and street cleansing in the District is not the most exciting topic imaginable. However, it does account for around 45% of all North Herts District expenditure, so getting it wrong could have catastrophic consequences for the Council budget. It has been decided to go out to tender jointly with East Herts. By doing this there will be an elimination of duplication in management of the contract, and, we are are confident, a reduction in unit costs. Before we can do this the contract specifications for North and East Herts have to be brought into line: not least the termination date of our current contracts, but also in some detailed aspects of waste and recycling. To let the contract will take quite some time, but the decision has now been made to move forward with the tender process.

## Other District Council Matters

There are concerns about a number of NHDC projects slipping behind time, or going over budget, in some cases both. You may have seen these referred to in the local press or on social media. The most pressing is probably the North Herts Museum project, in Hitchin. Although things have not proceeded smoothly, I am optimistic that a first class facility, comprising the refurbished Hitchin Town Hall next to a newly-built museum, including a high class restaurant, will commence operation in the reasonably near future.