

Stop Harlow North asked all the prospective parliamentary candidates for Hertford and Stortford standing in the general election on 8th June the following question:

"Are you in favour of the proposals in the East Herts District Plan (Policy GA1) to build at least 3,000 houses to the North of Harlow during the plan period, increasing to 10,000 thereafter?"

Thanks to them all for their replies below....

Mark Prisk, Conservative:

"I continue to oppose the building of 'Harlow North' as set out in the local plan's policy GA1. I believe the plans are unsustainable and the building of 10,000 homes goes beyond housing need identified in the plan. If I am re-elected I will reiterate my opposition to this proposal when the plan goes before the inspector in the autumn

More generally, I believe we need a balanced approach to housing, so that homes are matched by extra infrastructure; more homes need to be affordable for those on lower incomes; and backing neighbourhood plans. I have set out these ideas on my website at www.markprisk.com "

David Woollcombe, Green Party:

"Of course, I am sympathetic to your campaign – especially when it is about conserving the lovely countryside around High Wych and Gilston where I used to walk and cycle around growing up.

However, the Green Party said in its 2015 Manifesto that, if elected, it will: "Provide 500,000 social rented homes by 2020 and bring empty homes back into use to ensure everyone has access to an affordable place to live." Clearly, no one wants them in their backyard: we don't want them in Much Hadham. My friends in Buntingford and Baldock are campaigning against similar developments in their areas – and I was a part of the successful campaign to prevent Stevenage development West of the A-1.

But NIMBY-ism only gets you so far: my major complaint about all developments currently being green-lighted in East Herts is that the planning of them is atrocious – in relation to the water and sanitation provision (Rye House is already at its absolute limit!) – road and rail connection, health and education provision and – most importantly for me as a Green Party member – the absence of any legislation about zero carbon building standards. Every new house in Sweden is required to have a ground source heat pump; most new houses in Germany have solar-voltaics and/or passive solar water heating which earn income for the house-holders from eco-friendly power generation. No legislation like that exists in this country.

I, and the Green Party, would urge you to champion that as well as urging you to do all you can to preserve that glorious bit of Hertfordshire countryside and get the houses built elsewhere. But, as my friends in Baldock and Buntingford found out, sometimes you can't win against the brute force, stupidity and – always – big money that gets EHDC agreement for development projects where you least want it. So, if it happens, make sure it is the greenest possible development and that the planners actually have a plan that is fully-costed and scheduled to service the new homes they build."

Katherine Chibah, Labour:

"I do not want to support any projects which place an undue burden on our already stretched local hospital at Harlow and our infrastructure. I would need cast-iron assurances that the housing will be truly affordable and would be accompanied by investment in our local infrastructure. I am also worried about the impact of this development on the green belt as I believe we should be doing everything possible to protect the green belt."

Mark Argent, Liberal Democrat:

I think the Harlow North development should be referred back for further consideration because there are serious concerns at it over-straining existing infrastructure and taking from green belt.

There is an urgent need for more house-building. Liberal Democrats have a manifesto commitment to building 300,000 new homes a year nationwide by 2022. People are usually unwilling to have new homes built near them, but the case was well-made by someone in Sawbridgeworth who I spoke with while canvassing yesterday, who is worried that her children will struggle to find somewhere to live in the area.

From this perspective the Gilston development is attractive because it has a reasonable proportion of affordable and smaller homes and homes in shared ownership.

One significant area of concern is the way the present arrangements for presumed consent in planning tilt things in the direction of developers, so that the timing, nature and location of developments tends to be driven by developers' profit margins, rather than the needs of communities. We are keen to change this.

The proposed Gilston / Harlow North development poses a number of problems:

- there is already a problem with congestion on the A414, particularly associated with the bridge over the Stort, which would need to be upgraded;
- there would need to be adequate public transport between this and railway stations in Harlow and Sawbridgeworth to mean that it does not add to congestion because of people driving to the station;
- in general, there would need to be improvements to roads so that this does not add to congestion in Sawbridgeworth;
- there are questions over sewage: a trunk sewer to Rye House is problematic because that is already running close to capacity, so the developers' suggestion of additional sewage facilities would need to happen;
- there are already concerns over pressure on the Princess Alexandra hospital in Harlow, so additional hospital facilities would be needed;
- the plan involves using a large amount of green belt land, and this is something Liberal Democrats oppose.

An initial build of 3,000 houses still presents problems over the green belt. The infrastructure implications are less serious than for 10,000 houses, but still need to be addressed. I would be keen to ensure that the building of only 3000 houses doesn't become an excuse to ignore the infrastructure issues.

If I become the MP for Hertford and Stortford I would be pushing for the development to be moved so that it does not involve green belt land. If that turns out to be impossible, then I would be seeking the proposals to be revised so that the net effect of its being built is to improve the local infrastructure rather than burden it."