**Housing Policies – some issues to consider**

It is clear that there is a demand for more housing in Upton because the house purchase and rental markets are buoyant and command a premium above the average values for Cheshire West and Chester. Of course, Upton’s housing market is not isolated but is part of the wider market in Chester, particularly the eastern suburbs including Newton, Hoole, Vicar’s Cross and Great Boughton.

When we have consulted the public on the types of housing that most need to be developed in Upton during the plan period, there appears to be widespread agreement that the main needs are for:

* More “affordable” housing, particularly social housing for rent
* Smaller houses, apartments and bungalows that would be suitable as starter homes for young people or as homes for older people wishing to “downsize” from a large family house.
* Supported housing for older and/or vulnerable people, preferably as part of mixed developments.

The number of smaller properties has tended to be diminished because of the large number of existing 2 and 3 bedroom properties which have been extended. It seems likely that this trend will continue and it would be difficult to formulate policies in the NDP that would control this.

So where should these new homes be built?

In considering suitable sites for housing development in the parish we would probably want to protect the following types of site from development for housing or other purposes:

* Sites in Green Belt apart from those already developed – indeed we would probably wish to ensure that Green Belt boundaries and designation be strictly observed
* Land currently designated for recreational purposes, including the golf course
* School playing fields
* Publicly accessible amenity land, particularly around housing estates.

From a survey of Upton using Google Earth, it is clear that, if we exclude these areas, there is essentially **no** undeveloped land available in the parish.

Any new housing that is developed will therefore have to be built on currently developed “brownfield” sites. Where might these be and would we want to encourage their redevelopment?

The “Major developed sites in Green Belt” defined in the Local Plan (The Countess site, The Dale Camp and Chester Zoo) are the subject of separate policies and won’t be considered here.

Potential sites which could be the subject of redevelopment proposals would seem to be:

* Any pubs or clubs which may close (e.g. the former Gamekeeper), or community facilities which become redundant, together with their parking areas
* Any schools which may close, together with their playing fields. However, in the light of increasing population projections, this scenario seems unlikely in the plan period.
* Development in the grounds of large houses, as has occurred for example on Caughall Road. There are not many such houses left, partly because this is the means by which much of the existing housing in Upton was developed.
* Small-scale redevelopments involving the demolition of an existing dwelling with extensive gardens and its replacement by two or three more compact dwellings.
* Conversion of office or retail space for housing. The former is currently permitted development in any case and there is limited scope for it in Upton. It seems unlikely that the Morrison’s site would become unviable for retail purposes but it is probably the only substantial site not in Green Belt that *could* be developed.

It seems likely that none of these alternatives would be popular with local residents, either because of the loss of valuable local amenity or the change to the character of the area that would be involved. On the other hand, it seems unlikely that a plan that contains no provision for further housing development would be accepted at scrutiny.

There is a particular problem with our wish to promote the development of affordable housing. The requirement on developers to provide an affordable housing element only applies to sites of 15 or more dwellings. Realistically, it is hard to see where any development of that size would be built. If there were land in local authority ownership that could be built on, affordable housing would become more feasible but, again, there are no obvious candidates.

Some questions to consider therefore:

* Do we accept that the “protected sites” listed above should be sacrosanct – or would we be prepared to consider any of them for development (provided it was acceptable within the Local Plan policies)?
* With regard to the “brownfield” sites, the presumption in the NPPF would probably be in favour of such developments – are there any that we should try to resist or control through the NDP?
* The draft Local Plan contains a housing target for Chester but does not break this down into smaller areas. There is provision in the NPPF for and NDP group to request and indicative housing figure for their area from the Planning Authority, in this case CWaC. Should we do so?

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