

OUR KEY SUMMARY STATEMENT

1. PROTECTING GREEN BELT LAND AND ITS FUNCTIONS

The following group statement on the Local Plan registers our strong and firm objection to the removal of green belt status from any of the five sites proposed for housing. There are no exceptional circumstances to justify removal of Green Belt status. **We adamantly wish to keep all Green Belt land around Dronfield as Green Belt, fulfilling the same vital functions as it does at present** (NPPF 80):

- To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.
- To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one other.
- To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.
- To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.
- To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging recycling of derelict and other urban land. (

In addition to these functions, the Green Belt land around the present settlement limits of Dronfield, where housing is proposed, serves further special and important functions:

- Provision of outdoor, green recreation space for sports.
- Access to further open green space, countryside and footpaths.
- This quality green space is of key importance as Dronfield is significantly lacking in green space, outdoor sports and children's play space within its present settlement limits. (Based on 2011 population figures, Local Plan 7.6 p126).
- Some of the land is arable farmland.
- The land has high value "landscape character" and "visual amenity"
- These are terms used in the Strategic Green Belt Functionality Study (2.20, p20) which states that such factors should be "robustly taken into consideration."
- All five parcels of Green Belt land have ecological importance in terms of conserving flora, fauna and wildlife habitats. The proposed site at Coal Aston is part of the Moss Valley Conservation Area.

2. EXPLORING OTHER OPTIONS FOR HOUSING

Green Belt land should only be built upon in "exceptional circumstances" (NPPF 89, p20-21). **NEDDC have not provided valid evidence that any exceptional circumstances exist.**

All options for building on brownfield sites have not been adequately explored or presented to the public in the present Local Plan. The district council have ruled out smaller brownfield sites for assessment. The housing requirement calculations (Strategic Housing Market Assessment) have omitted to factor in building on smaller brownfield sites, which could yield around 1000 houses over the remaining plan period. Additionally, the high end of a wide range of predicted need has been used. The amount of housing needed has therefore been substantially overestimated. **There can be absolutely no exceptional circumstances to build on Green Belt, given these significant errors and grey areas within the calculations.**

No attempts have been made, or are underway, to bring 133 vacant homes back into use

in Dronfield, and a total of 731 vacant homes across NE Derbyshire. (Freedom of Information Request submitted to NEDDC, March 2017 – see Appendix A).

Before planning to build on Green Belt NEDDC could and should have explored options and availability of brownfield sites with neighbouring councils. Given the close proximity of Chesterfield Borough and Sheffield City regions this is negligent.

Chesterfield Borough Council is at an earlier stage of planning. Nevertheless, suitable sites to bring forth plans for 4,600 homes on brownfield sites with 1000 reserve homes on greenfield are presently being assessed. It appears that there will be a more than adequate supply of homes for the predicted future increase in the borough's population (11,500), without resorting to building on Green Belt. (CBC Draft Local Plan Jan 2017).

Sheffield is one of 73 councils piloting the government's brownfield register scheme. This aims to make sure brownfield plots are found and listed so that they are readily identifiable for developers to speed up building. Sheffield is one of 15 councils with the most brownfield land in need of regeneration in England. **With so much brownfield land in a close neighbouring council district, there is no justification to build on Dronfield's Green Belt land.**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/first-areas-to-push-for-faster-brownfield-land-development>

3. INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE SUSTAINABILITY OF DRONFIELD

Dronfield is not a sustainable town that could accommodate a 10% increase in population over the plan period without incurring many infrastructure problems.

The district council has designated Dronfield as the most sustainable settlement in the whole district (Local Plan, Settlement Hierarchy, Table 4, p35). This is based on its being the largest settlement in the north of the district and it having a railway station.

Size is a thoroughly crude and inaccurate measure of sustainability and is no substitute for doing infrastructure assessments in a timely way, alongside housing planning. Dronfield already has a large amount of housing relative to an only modest amount of facilities and over-stretched public services. There is already a degree of urban sprawl at the outer edges. The council's assessment of Dronfield's sustainability holds no validity whatsoever; it is irresponsible to existing and potential new residents to allocate such high numbers of houses.

Dronfield railway station will not be able to provide sustainable travel without having a negative impact on the environment, pollution, road congestion and road safety.

Parking at Dronfield station is already limited with no space for expansion. "Overspill" parking on nearby roads exacerbates congestion and road safety problems, notably around schools. The already sprawling nature of Dronfield's housing, up steep gradients and narrow roads from the train station, contributes to many train commuters travelling to the station by car. All 5 proposed housing sites, being at the outer reaches of town, do not provide sustainable sites for accessing the train station.

The road infrastructure of Dronfield would be overwhelmed by 1720 more cars (based on an average of two cars per household).

Congestion and pollution would increase and pedestrian safety will worsen.

Many of the roads in Dronfield were built for a village, not a large town. They are narrow / winding / steep and already congested with traffic and on-street parking. Widening or

upgrading such roads will simply not be possible.

It is unclear in the Local Plan how access would be gained to the new sites and which roads would be used. We consider none of the potential roads to offer safe, sustainable capacity for the increase in traffic.

Several streets leading from the outer limits of town (notably in the south of Dronfield where 655 houses are proposed) have very narrow pavements and no pavement on some stretches. Road safety will worsen and pedestrians (particularly children walking to and from schools at key busy times) will be at greater risk.

The future provision of primary and secondary school places has not been considered in the Local Plan. The proposed new housing in Dronfield would not reach usual thresholds for building of new schools; 1000+ for primary, 6000+ for secondary (Local Plan 9.65, p223-4)

Schools in Dronfield hold high reputations and are historically and currently extremely popular. Capacity is already an issue for some schools, with some class sizes over 30. The head teachers of Dronfield Henry Fanshawe, Dronfield Infants and Dronfield Junior Schools have all confirmed that they have not yet been approached by Derbyshire County Council or any other local authority regards future provision of school places.

Limitations to expanding schooling provision for the south side of Dronfield render the plans for 655 new houses on the south side of town completely unsustainable.

Dronfield Infants and Dronfield Junior School stand adjacent to each other on very small plots with no room for extension of school buildings and very limited accessible outdoor play space already. These are the only schools within feasible walking distance of the 655 new houses proposed across the south of Dronfield.

Other public services and amenities are over-stretched or lacking. NEDDC have not yet provided a plan and the feasibility of delivering necessary improvements is questionable.

GP services in Dronfield are already overstretched with long waiting times for routine appointments. GP provision is usually factored on one full-time equivalent GP to serve 1,800 patients. A new surgery would not be forthcoming on these numbers, GP recruitment is very difficult these days and ability to extend existing practices has not been explored.

The police station is only open for limited hours at present, hence reporting local crime is already difficult.

Dronfield will soon have no banks with the announced closure of the two remaining banks. Thus Dronfield will not be a sustainable town for those without internet banking facilities (this may apply to many of the town's large elderly population) or for local businesses needing to regularly deposit cash takings.

Callywhite Lane has been failing to attract businesses for over 10 years so the deliverability of the proposed industrial extension is questionable. Without new road access from Chesterfield Road (which may be prohibited by logistics and cost) even greater HGV traffic at the difficult junction at the bottom of Callywhite and Green Lane would result.