

(By email)

I would like to raise the following point relating to land use planning and economic growth. When considering the desired use of specific sites within their area, local authorities will often designate them as 'Proposal Sites' within the local plan or possibly write a planning brief. As soon as this happens, the value of the site in question adjusts to reflect this change.

However, this can then have a negative effect in encouraging the redevelopment of the site.

For example, if you assume that a local authority has a playing field or a community building which it decides is surplus to requirements and it designates it as a site for housing development, overnight its value will increase dramatically as the owners would now expect a much higher price for this site. The problem is that it then becomes a far less profitable proposition to a housing developer and consequently the chances of it being redeveloped for the identified use within the plan period are significantly reduced.

What can happen is that the housing developer pursues the redevelopment of other non-designated, non-housing sites within the borough. Especially attractive, can be employment sites, more so if they have a recent history of neglect of maintenance, non-renewal of leases, offering of short-term lets only etc. Despite the existence of local plan policies to resist the loss of such sites to other uses, they often are redeveloped for either housing or mixed-use (usually 90%+ housing and poor quality business space) in the face of despair from local residents/Councillors at the state of site. Despite the Council's Economic Development Team being aware of both businesses and business space developers who would jump at the chance to buy the site at something close to its existing use value rather than the hope value that a housing developer could afford.

The result is that the authority ends up with a playing field that remains undeveloped and a housing development in the wrong place (in terms of its land use strategy). Furthermore it has also lost jobs or the ability to accommodate them. I have worked in and with land use policy teams at both Croydon and Merton and have witnessed this type of problem on many occasions - the end of the plan

period is reached and more than half the proposal sites remain undeveloped as investor demand has been satisfied on other less suitable sites within the area. There is nothing I have seen in Merton's emerging LDF to suggest to me that this situation will change.

I have no obvious answers, but it seems to me that the practice of identifying specific sites for higher value uses is fundamentally flawed. Maybe, it would be better to stick to zoning wider areas for particular uses and safeguarding particular non-conforming uses the authority would like to see remain within them. Changes of use of other non-protected uses within these areas would then be considered on a site by site basis informed by the LDF core policies and knowledge of local needs/demand.

Regards

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