

**Statement by Sir Bob Russell concerning Salary Brook Valley:**

1 – As a Borough Councillor, with others with similar vision, I was in the mid-1970s instrumental in saving the southern slopes of what is now the High Woods Country Park from becoming an urban sprawl stretching eastwards from Turner Road to Ipswich Road – an open space visible not only from the adjoining Ipswich to London railway line but also from Colchester Castle Park the other side of the valley.

2 – This great success is one which I wish to see emulated in Salary Brook valley and its eastern slopes, and therefore I support Colchester Local Plan Committee in its opposition to Salary Brook valley and eastern slopes being developed. More on this later.

3 – As the town's Member of Parliament I was instrumental in ensuring that the Garrison Cricket Ground within the former Colchester Garrison was saved from development. I mention this as I also oppose residential development on the Ministry of Defence training area known as Middlewick Ranges in the south of the town.

4 – I feel that the Local Plan should give emphasis to Colchester Garrison which is one of Britain's Super Garrisons, home of 16 Air Assault Brigade, our nation's elite rapid response force. The Garrison is the second largest employer in the Colchester economy and the life of the town. It is a significant employer of civilians. Land currently used for military purposes and open spaces, and civilian job retention and possible job creation associated with Colchester Garrison, should be included in the Local Plan.

5 – As a former member of the Defence Select Committee I critically observe that to dispose of the firing ranges at Middlewick is short-termism by the Ministry of Defence. This land should be retained as a permanent Defence training asset; and the Local Plan should state this.

6 – To allow Middlewick to be lost to housing would be another planning and environmental disaster for Colchester, and lead to the urban coalescence of the separate distinct urban communities in South Colchester of Old Heath, Mountbatten area, Birch Glen and Berechurch.

7 – Urban communities need open spaces. We should not lose either Salary Brook or Middlewick.

8 – In 2014 the then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (the Rt Hon Eric Pickles) accepted my invitation to visit the fields of west Mile End – in the north of Colchester, not far from this Stadium – which as we speak are being lost in a planning and environmental disaster. Having seen what is going on there, I trust the Inspector will agree with me that the eastern slopes of Salary Brook valley should be saved from what is happening at Mile End, and instead become what has been achieved at High Woods Country Park.

9 – I extend an invitation to the Inspector to accompany me on a visit to High Woods Country Park to witness for himself what local people – a position supported by the Borough Council who oppose development on the eastern slopes of Salary Brook –

wish to see emulated on the open land to the east of Salary Brook watercourse as far as the eye can see.

10 – The alarm bells for Salary Brook first rang when I was still MP for Colchester, and I raised the matter in the House of Commons during Communities and Local Government Questions. Word had reach me that landowners and developers were in talks with planners – both Colchester Borough Council and Tendring District Council – to destroy the eastern side of Salary Brook valley with housing, creating an urban sprawl eastwards from Greenstead and Longridge estates up the slopes towards Elmstead.

11 – Below is a report from Hansard of what I said and the Minister’s response.

16<sup>th</sup> March 2015

· [Brandon Lewis](#)

Obviously, the green belt is protected and the Government have made it clear that it should be built on in exceptional circumstances only. Ultimately, local planning is a decision for the local authority, which is locally democratically accountable.

· [Sir Bob Russell \(Colchester\) \(LD\)](#)

The Secretary of State kindly came to Colchester and saw how the planning process failed the residents in the Mile End area of Colchester. Can the Minister give some assurance that the same thing is not going to happen to the east of town, particularly as the land in question is partly in Tendring district and partly in the borough of Colchester?

· [Brandon Lewis](#)

As the hon. Gentleman appreciates, I cannot comment on a particular planning application, but in a general sense there is a duty for local authorities to co-operate, and they should be working together on these matters. Having a local plan—and even more so a neighbourhood plan—is the most powerful way for a local community to have absolute control over planning decisions in its locality.

12 – It is to the credit of both Colchester and Tendring Councils that over the past two years they have worked together because the boundary between Colchester and Tendring meanders and clearly it is crucial that there is a single unified approach.

13 – In the words of Minister Brandon Lewis, now promoted to Cabinet status, it is local authorities which are locally democratically accountable. The clear democratic

view of Colchester Borough Council is that there should be no development in Salary Brook valley and on the eastern slopes.

14 – The Minister’s words are clear: “Ultimately, local planning is a decision for the local authority.” Equally clear is his promise that a Local Plan (quote) “is the most powerful way for a local community to have absolute control over planning decisions in its locality.”

15 – I have addressed several meetings of the Local Plan Committee of Colchester Borough Council, and also spoken at Tendring District Council’s Local Plan Committee. The view expressed by Committees of both Councils is that there should be no development east of the watercourse known as Salary Brook.....with Colchester specifically stating that there should be no development at any point which is visible from the existing Greenstead and Longridge estates.

16 – I also attended two workshops, held at the University of Essex, which purported to be an opportunity for local groups and organisations to be engaged in deliberations about development proposals to the east of Colchester, not just the “garden village” near Elmstead Market but also land between urban Colchester and the proposed “garden village”.

17 – The expressed view of those who attended was quite clear: no development in Salary Brook valley and on the eastern slopes; no development beyond the brow of the hill and tree-line which would be seen by the existing communities of Greenstead and Longridge.

18 – Were these workshops simply a box ticking exercise? Or were they a genuine attempt to engage the public? Colchester Borough Council’s Local Plan Committee took the deliberations of the workshops very seriously, which is why the Borough does not want to see any development on the eastern slopes of Salary Brook valley.

19 – All meetings of Colchester Borough Council are recorded, and are available for the public to listen to. It is fortunate that a resident of Greenstead has sent me a transcript of the proceedings of the Local Plan Committee of 6<sup>th</sup> November, little more than two months ago. This records the Committee’s unanimous decision in respect of Salary Brook and the eastern slopes.

20 – I am not sure if this is contained in the documentation which Colchester Borough Council has given the Inspector, but just in case it has been inadvertently overlooked let me quote the relevant vitally important decision, as follows:-

21 – The recording has me, speaking in the section of the meeting for members of the public, urging the Committee to state: “There shall be no development on the eastern side of Salary Brook which is visible from Greenstead and Longridge.”

22 – The response from the Committee Chairman, Councillor Martin Goss, was: “I agree with you, that I’ve got no objection at all to that wording being placed into the document, and I think we should make that happen, so it will of course be minuted and as I’ve said all these minutes are also going to be part of the Inspector’s

paperwork, a burgeoning pile of paperwork it will be, to inspect, so again, your words will be in writing and obviously audio recorded, but I agree with you.”

23 – The audio recording also has Councillor Goss saying: “Can the committee agree that we include that wording about the slopes, etc etc.....Yep, we’re getting unanimous nods of heads.”

24 – A little later, as confirmed by the audio tape, Councillor Goss reinforces the Committee’s decision with his observation that “it’s certainly strongly and agreed unanimously by the committee.....”

25 – In view of comments made yesterday morning, the above shows there is no inconsistency in what Colchester Local Plan Committee has determined; this is geographic specific; and it shows what the Committee wishes to see as a “permanent buffer” both in size and location in and around Salary Brook valley and eastern slopes.

26 – I ask the Inspector to ensure that in his deliberations and decisions he makes clear that all references to land at “Salary Brook” means ALL the land in the valley eastwards from the existing urban edge of Greenstead and Longridge estates as far as the eye can see, including to the tree-line and beyond. I believe that such strict wording is necessary in order that there is no prospect of future back-tracking or other interpretation by planners, land-owners and developers.

27 – My reading of the plans is that the undeveloped land to the east of the proposed “garden village”, separating it from the existing village settlement of Elmstead, is greater in distance than that to the west of the “garden village” separating it from Greenstead/Longridge. Thus any development to the east of today’s urban Colchester and to the west of the “garden village” would mean that the “garden village” would be even nearer to urban Colchester, a coalescence or near-coalescence which should be prevented.

28 – I make no further comment about the proposal for what is described as a “garden village” in the Parish of Elmstead, in fields to the west of this established village. I am assuming that as this fits Government policy it will be given the go-ahead.

29 – My concern is about the threat to land to the east of the existing urban edge of Colchester and to the west of this “garden village”. Both for those who live in the existing dwellings in Colchester, and for those who will be living in new houses in the “garden village”, it is vital that as much as possible of the land between these two boundaries is retained, undeveloped, with Salary Brook valley and eastern slopes in their entirety being designated as public open space.

30 – It would not be good planning, nor would it be in the interests of existing residents and for new residents, and generations to come, for there to be an urban sprawl eastwards from the current edge of urban Colchester towards Elmstead. An urban coalescence, or the appearance giving the impression of near-coalescence, would be a big mistake.

31 – Such a big mistake would be contrary to what the Prime Minister said earlier this month in her landmark speech on the environment when she promised that the natural world would be (quote) “centre stage” in the Government’s agenda, with a pledge to (quote) “make ours the first generation to leave the natural environment in a better state than we found it.”

32 – The Prime Minister emphasised that we, the present generation, are (quote): “Trustees charged with protecting and improving what we have inherited from those who went before us.”

33 – Any development at Salary Brook would be in breach of the letter and spirit of what the Prime Minister promised only a few days ago.

34 – It is said that Colchester is the fastest growing area in Essex, and one of the fastest growing in the country. Proposals in the Local Plan show further large-scale development. Therefore attempts at this Inquiry by landowners and developers to greedily add further sites – such as Salary Brook valley and eastern slopes – should be resisted. Local democratic accountability must be upheld.

35 – Whatever the justification for a “garden village” in the Parish of Elmstead, this is no justification for there also to be any development in Salary Brook valley and on its eastern slopes.

36 – I trust that the Inspector will therefore uphold the Borough Council’s verdict that residential development in Salary Brook valley and on the eastern slopes should not be allowed; and honour what a Local Government Minister said in the House of Commons in March 2015 and what the Prime Minister said earlier this month.

**END OF STATEMENT**