



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Our Ref: RG31850-LB

21 July 2021

Response to Stroud Local Plan

I write to respond formally to one aspect of the Stroud Local Plan, which is the proposed development of 2,500 houses on land at Whaddon.

I do so because this proposed development, although in Stroud District, borders Gloucester City and my constituency boundaries on Grange Rd / Stroud Rd and at the railway line between Grange Rd and Naas Lane tunnel.

There is a lot of history to the land (G2) in this corner of Whaddon Parish, Stroud District and Grange Ward.

Longer serving SDC officers and councillors will recall that the last Labour government, under the guise of a Regional Spatial Plan and through the unloved SW Regional government, approved such an idea in principle in 2007-9. Both the Labour MPs for Stroud and Gloucester turned a blind eye to it.

I did not - I have campaigned against a development continually and consistently here since 2008, along with many Conservative City and County Councillors. We got it first kicked into touch and then kicked out (along with regional government).

And there it should have stayed as residents and elected representatives on both sides of the district/city border have continually shared my view that such a development would be disastrous for the perennial traffic build up on Stroud Rd at the St Barnabas roundabout - one of three south western entrances to the city (along with the A38 and Bristol Road). The last survey, to some 11,000 residents of Grange and Tuffley wards, had an unusually high response rate and an almost North Korean response of c97% firmly against the proposal.

And this is not - to anticipate the obvious objection of nimbyism - because either I, Councillors or Gloucester City residents in general are against development and housing, to provide more and affordable homes for our children and grandchildren. Far from it: we and I have continued to support and encourage new homes throughout the City.

In fact I facilitated the stock transfer of housing from Council to Gloucester City Homes through a government write off of £50 million housing debt precisely to enable (and require via HM Treasury) GCH to develop its first new Social Housing for a generation - a programme which, initially enabled by the government's Estate Regeneration Fund, GCH continues to develop for its homes in Matson, Podsmead and Kingsholm in particular.

We have at the same time focused on a series of brownfield developments that mean Gloucester has seen more houses built over the last decade than almost any other constituency its size (5 sq kms).

The City Cabinet Member for Housing and I have agreed with the Council's Head of Place a list of every small and big site in the city that we absolutely agree should and must be

developed, with (where necessary) encouragement of landowners. I have asked Councillors to look at building up as well.

But the St Barnabas roundabout is different, for there is no way round this bottleneck that any planner or Highways guru has been able to propose - and that includes an extremely expensive flyover proposal taking traffic beside bedrooms.

Meanwhile the JCS requirements of a city whose footprint (excluding Robinswood Hill) is running short of both brownfield and greenfield opportunities have obliged to call on the Duty of Co-operation and be attracted by the possibility of an SDC approval for the development of Whaddon Valley as a means of closing our estimated shortage of 6,000 homes by 2040.

While I understand the numbers game, and that co-operation eg around the Hunts Grove/Kingsway boundary is a very helpful one, this does not detract from the St Barnabas issue.

The current agreement is that SDC will, before making any planning decision, publish a plan on traffic mitigation along Stroud Rd which will be scrutinised by Gloucestershire Highways, after which Gloucester City will then comment, and SDC decide on what to do.

Of course none of us should predetermine what the mitigation plan holds and how Highways responds. I will be looking closely at what we might call the optimistic override: eg Developers will give a free bike to every new resident in Whaddon Valley, who will use that for getting to the city centre. I cycle, and I can tell you now that is not how many residents will be travelling up the hill very often.

'New analysis of traffic shows that apart from rush hour to St Peter's School and work traffic levels could comfortably accommodate 2,500 homes' extra traffic'. We are not yet back to normal but we will be before long. Previous traffic figures are the key. Residents in Whaddon Valley will travel to Haresfield to shop. They won't.

So I am extremely sceptical about any 'solution' that allows for this substantial new village. But Whaddon Valley is quite long, and if a much smaller development close to Naas Lane end of the valley were proposed, with a school and a supermarket (the other side of the barn and the brook in the middle of the valley from Grange Road) then that might be a very different proposal.

And that perhaps is the key to a way forward that enables SDC to help its urban neighbour, Gloucester to be reassured about the impact in traffic, Whaddon itself not to be overwhelmed around its historic church and Gloucester to see a way forward to some of our housing challenge, without depending on Whaddon, and without risking a huge increase to air pollution from traffic jams just as Gloucester aims for ambitious Net Zero and improved quality of air.

I therefore call for a sensible approach by SDC and developers, the JCS and Gloucester City Council that recognises a real logistical problem to the proposed development and deep held rational opposition by many of us to this particular site and its size.

I will have no hesitation in calling any proposal that does not take account of these sensible, healthy and practical concerns.

