

Response To Consultation On Stroud District Councils

Local Plan Review Emerging Strategy Paper

From Gordon Craig (District Councillor, Berkeley Vale Ward)

SHAPE OF THE PLAN

Perhaps in its consultation stage we should expect a plan to contain a number of significant faults, misplaced assumptions and omissions. If so, this one does not disappoint. The original plan made much of identifying a growth corridor north of M5 Junction 13. This review makes scant reference to that and instead concentrates development to the South of the district where both infrastructure and employment are in short supply and from where the population turns towards Bristol for employment. In addition the emerging strategy paper fails to take the impact on highways fully into account when considered on top of plans from the "West of England Combined Authority" which is embarking on significant expansion of Thornbury, a significant development at Charfield and Falfield and the creation of the new town of Buckover, all right on the border of Stroud District. More particularly it fails to take the long term impact on highways resulting from all of this on top of the lifting of tolls from the Severn Bridges into account. The WECA is very concerned about the traffic implications resulting from the lifting of tolls as indicated in the North Bristol SusCom report dated 1st June 2018 where they quote that "modelling suggesting a 45% increase in traffic by 2028" Indeed the Mayor Of Bristol has been vocal in the media, voicing concerns of gridlock on the Bristol approaches. It is therefore highly likely that the Mayor Of Bristol, The Mayor Of The West Of England and Highways England will voice some objections to a plan that adds to these serious concerns.

I have concerns that the change of focus of the plan from North to South is driven by a blinkered wish to develop Sharpness. I am aware that a particular and influential developer has been pushing the council for some time and I note that all previous papers published in consideration of this site rate ACCESS TO FACILITIES AND SERVICES ELSEWHERE as VERY POOR whilst in the emerging strategy paper dated November 2018 it is rated GOOD. Nothing has changed except perhaps the wish to facilitate the change of focus.

It may well have been acceptable to focus on the South of the district were it the only option open to the council but it is not. Examination of the numbers required Vs available sites indicates that for the purposes of this review, continued focus on the previously identified growth corridor is not only possible but given the good infrastructure and connectivity to employment in Gloucester and Cheltenham it must surely be desirable. And of course immediately prevents the additional pressures on the significant highways issues to the south which will become centred around the Almondsbury Interchange (See attached PLAN document)

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Key features of attached plan

- a) Features a small increase in Windfall/Dispersal to reflect introduction of a dispersal element authorised by neighbourhood plans.
- b) Reduction of numbers in the south of the district , reflecting anticipated highways issues and better infrastructure and connectivity around the previously identified growth corridor.
- c) Development at Whaddon introduced.
- d) Development of land at Morton Valence introduced
- e) Plan produces 1000 more houses than required to allow for growth
- f) Plan leaves space for 760 houses at Whaddon and Hardwicke to fulfil the duty of cooperation with other authorities.

IMPACT ON BERKELEY VALE WARD (Based on feedback from the people of my ward)

Given the nature of the plans and distant location of my ward from the Hub of the district there was great interest in the consultation and the roadshows held in Sharpness and Slimbridge were deemed poorly advertised and lacking in substance. Both David Drew MP and myself were approached by residents to request that a public meeting be held at which planners could discuss the plans in detail and take questions from the floor. These requests were unfortunately met with a blunt refusal. (The CEO of Stroud District Council has been advised by this with a request that the letter be held on file and brought to the attention of the review inspector in due course)

Not put off in their quest for information, Parish and Town councils featured the emerging plan proposals prominently in their agendas and rearranged meeting dates to enable them to respond to the consultation. In addition a residents group formed primarily to encourage input to the consultation. I attended every meeting where I did my best to answer questions and to obtain feedback in order to shape my response in line with public opinion. Here are the key points made.

1. Residents were not against development but felt that any new development should be proportionate to the existing development scale.
2. Slimbridge and Cam residents I spoke with regarding the Wisloe proposals did not wish to see development of a scale that effectively joined up the two communities but would be happy with a much smaller development than that shown in the plans. A number of local builders who own pockets of development land close to the Wislow site but currently outside the settlement boundary felt that limited strategic development might unlock their sites and enable them to be brought forward under windfall.
3. Berkeley residents pointed out that 198 houses are currently under construction but never the less they would be happy to do their bit with the additional 120 contained within the review proposals. They were however very concerned about the proposed development of 2400 houses between Berkeley and Sharpness and sited inadequate local infrastructure, no local employment, very poor connectivity with outside areas and distance from all main centres. There was also significant concern that development on the scale proposed would change the focus point of the area and adversely affect the town centre. It was also pointed out that proximity of the site to a Nuclear storage facility which contains the medium strength waste from a number of UK power stations may impact on saleability of these houses especially as a further 4000 are proposed for development

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over the same time frame just a few miles away in South Gloucestershire. It was felt that nearby alternative availability and concern about the nuclear storage facility may impact on sales and prevent allocated houses here from being built out within the anticipated time frame.

4. Hinton and Hamfallow residents were similarly happy for proportionate development to take place and from that I deduce they mean the 300 houses at Sharpness Docks and the 70 proposed for behind the Focus School at Wanswell. However they too were strongly against the proposed 2400 development. People here point to the inaccessibility of the area and its long history of not being able to attract employment to the long identified employment land. With some concern they also point to the close proximity to an SCA/SPA/ RAMSAR site and also point out that any significant development will be visible to Two AONBs, one on either side of the Severn Estuary.

5. Outlying parishes are concerned mainly about infrastructure and the pressure a large nearby development might put on local roads and other resources but they are happy to do their bit for the plan and it would greatly assist many small communities if limited development were allowed outside of designated settlement boundaries. Examples of elderly people wanting to downsize but stay in their local community where support and long term friends exist were cited. Indicating again that a controlled relaxing of planning restrictions outside of settlement boundaries would be beneficial to rural areas and drive additional windfall/dispersal.

My proposed amendment to the plan addresses these local learnings.

(see attachment PLAN DOCUMENT)

CONCLUSIONS

1. The numbers planned for the South of the District when added to the West of England Combined Authority housing plans for the same area would put huge strain on Ju 14 which is currently at capacity. (The WECA plans are ahead of Strouds) The additional southbound traffic entering the M5 at Ju14 when added to the expected increase in traffic resulting from the lifting of tolls from the Severn bridges will produce a serious risk of gridlock at the Almondsbury M4/M5 interchange. There is an alternative for the Stroud plan and it is likely therefore that Highways England, the WECA and the Mayor of Bristol will object to the plans if they are brought to inspection in their current form.

2. There are significant connectivity issues with Sharpness which have been glossed over in the most recent review paper. This adds a huge risk element to a Sharpness development in the proposed time frame, as commercial pressure from the slightly more advanced and significant nearby development could impact on sales resulting in any significant Sharpness development not being brought forward in the prescribed time frame.

3. Once again I refer you to my alternative plan (see attachment PLAN DOCUMENT)

Please ensure that this paper and the accompanying PLAN are included with the official consultation