

To: [REDACTED] Planning Officer

From: [REDACTED]

Observations on The Local Plan Review

Area of Interest: Berkeley, Sharpness and Newtown

Central Government is driving the very large increase in house building across the District.

The Garden Village concept is highly aspirational and is open to interpretation.

The Local Plan Review is making a case for:

- The building of 2,400 new homes (over and above the CRT and Focus School developments) is proposed under Options 3 and 4 of the Review.
- A Garden Village that will inevitably link the two existing villages of Newtown and Sharpness with the small town of Berkeley in a north-south alignment into a larger town. The flexibility of the Garden Village concept would appear to be stretched.

A policy change in the Government's house-building programme could see more houses added to the 2,400 proposed homes. In addition, reports suggest that a development consortium has drawn up proposals to build 5,000 homes. Some clarification is urgently needed on the maximum numbers.

Options 3 and 4

- Option 3 would suggest Berkeley, Newtown and Sharpness should restrict development to "small to medium sites to meet local needs" Even so, this Option would allow for 2400 houses to be built.
- Option 4 includes "significant growth, either as an expansion of an existing settlement, or to create a new settlement."
- Berkeley, Newtown and Sharpness developments do not represent 'a new settlement'. Neither is it an 'expansion'. The village of Newtown would be dwarfed by the developments.
- Stroud District Plan considers both Options 3 and 4 as highly reliant on the car.

The observations in the Local Plan of 2015 remain relevant. The Plan said:

- "Villages are no longer the self-contained settlements they once were."
- "Decline of rural public transport"
- "Overall there is a significant net outflow of people working in larger centres like Bristol, Gloucester, Cheltenham and Swindon"
- "The Local Plan expressed an employment aspiration that development up to 2031 will generate the equivalent of two new jobs for every new allocated home built"

Issues surrounding Employment

The Garden Village concept encourages employment opportunities near to village homes to reduce vehicle pollution and alleviate climate change.

- The case for 2,400 in Berkeley and Newton is strongly linked to employment opportunities at Gloucestershire Science and Technology Park and the Docks.
- However, the Technology Park and Docks cannot provide the number of jobs that the proposed housing development will generate over time.
- The development of skilled technical training and jobs and the ease of commuting will draw commuters in from other areas of the District.
- Workers will commute from the Berkeley, Newtown and Sharpness developments to other areas both within and outside the District.
- Improving public transport to meet the needs of commuters is highly aspirational.
- Cam railway station serves only those commuters travelling to Gloucester, Bristol and beyond.
- Commuters from the Buckover and Wisloe developments would also be using the station, exerting more pressure on the station and parking space.
- A rail link from Sharpness to a station near the Prince of Wales is only suitable for Heritage railway uses.
- The prospect of a new main line station at the Prince of Wales is unlikely given the proximity to Cam & Dursley railway station.
- The Berkeley Heath road junction would be overloaded both by commercial vehicles heading to and from Sharpness and by local and tourist car transport.

Berkeley town centre

- Berkeley residents and those from surrounding villages use Berkeley shops for convenience shopping only. Bus services from surrounding villages are very limited or absent. Inevitably villagers use their cars. Parking in Berkeley town centre at busy times is often at a premium.
- Residents of the 2400 new houses proposed in Options 3 and 4 who wished to shop in Berkeley by car would be unable to because of the inadequate car parking. Additionally, the small convenience stores would find it hard to cope.
- As the building cycle reaches a critical mass community facilities will tend to gravitate there.
- The Berkeley GP surgery is small and has limited parking. Inevitably the surgery would relocate to the new development where parking spaces would be improved
- A supermarket and post office would be attracted to the development.

There is a high risk that the present vibrant feel of the town centre would largely be given over to tourists.

TRANSPORT ASSESSMENT

“Based on existing travel patterns and the locations of the potential growth points, is likely to be reliant on the car. However, due to the scale of growth proposed, there is the opportunity to provide non car based alternatives.”

- The non-car based alternatives mentioned above might refer to walking and cycling. Though excellent for health and local trips they do not address the real issue of the car.
- Rural public transport has been declining over many years. There is no reason to think that this situation will be significantly reversed.
- Added to this is the reluctance of people to travel to nearby towns (Thornbury and Dursley) by public transport for supermarket and other shopping excursions.
- The Plan Review does not take into account the anticipated increase in electric and hybrid cars to reduce the environmental impact of motor transport.

From the above I conclude that the building of 2,400 houses in Berkeley, Newtown and Sharpness provide no advantages for transport problems than Option 2.

CONCLUSIONS

I understand that the building distribution Options provided in the Plan Review are only “serving suggestions” but they may limit thinking around the subject.

Fairness in the distribution of building developments around the District is important for community cohesion.

I favour a combination of Options 2 and 3 – wider distribution AND dispersal.

Each settlement should make some contribution, however limited. This must include the Cotswolds.

Taking the numbers in the Options at face value, I want to see a fairer distribution along the M5 corridor.

Looking at Option 3, numbers at Hardwicke and Cam and Wisloe should be increased and some development should take place in Whitminster.

Berkeley, Newtown and Sharpness

Requiring the settlements of Berkeley, Newtown, Sharpness, Wanswell, Brookend and Hinton to bear a very significant burden is counter to fairness.

The increased traffic flows through the above settlements and through the rural roads leading to the A38 would be counter to the much stated advantages of the area for leisure cycling and horse-riding

Berkeley town centre is at risk of losing its heart.

In my view the maximum number of new houses in the Garden Village should be 1200 and should be separated from Berkeley and Newton by a green belt. It should not extend to Hinton.

Thank you for your consideration of these thoughts.

