

Winchester District Local Plan Part 1 – Joint Core Strategy

Public Examination Hearings: Commencing 30 October 2012

Opening Statement for Winchester City Council and South Downs National Park Authority

Introduction

I am Steve Opacic, Head of Strategic Planning with Winchester City Council. I will introduce other members of the Council's team, and their various roles, at the end of this statement.

The Local Plan Part 1 - Joint Core Strategy, or the Plan as I will refer to it, has been in development for a considerable time – far too long many may say. This has not been for reasons entirely within the Council's control or for the want of trying to put in place an up to date and sound Core Strategy. Both the process for producing development plan documents and the Government's expectation of what they should do has changed significantly since work started on the Plan in late 2006.

Nevertheless, the prolonged process of gathering evidence, developing and considering options and of consulting in various ways and stages has, the Council believes, helped to produce a Plan which it is confident is the best Plan for the future of the District. My Team and I are very proud of the Plan that has been produced and of the process by which it has been developed which, amongst other things, has involved creating innovative consultation processes that have won national recognition.

Planning in Winchester District is a very high profile process about which many people have strong and varied views. Work on developing the Plan has, therefore, been undertaken in the full public gaze and has been poked, prodded and scrutinised in great detail at each stage. Therefore, your examination of it holds no fears for the Council Sir, indeed I am very pleased that we are able to put the Plan before you in order for you to test its soundness and legal compliance. The Council looks forward to having the opportunity to demonstrate to an objective and independent arbiter its firm belief that this is not only a sound Plan, but the right Plan for Winchester's circumstances.

Background to the Plan

Work on the Plan started immediately after the adoption of the 'old-style' Winchester District Local Plan Review in 2006. In line with government advice at the time the intention was to develop a Core Strategy as part of the new style local development framework (LDF). The LDF would also include development plan documents on site allocations and development management policies.

Since the start of work it has been necessary to deal with various changes in process and detail: from compliance with the regional strategy to abolition of regional strategies (or not – yet!); through complete replacement of Government advice by the NPPF; and from boom to recession; and the creation of the South Downs National Park Authority as the Local Planning Authority for the Park. Not surprising then that the process has been lengthy and required a number of detours, but despite some serious buffeting the Plan has been robust enough to come through the storms and we can at last see land in sight.

Because of the history of the Plan's preparation and the advanced stage it has reached, the Council is progressing the Plan as a Core Strategy, covering the key issues for the District and the strategic allocations. It recognises that the NPPF implies that there will be a single Local Plan but feels that there would be considerable delays if it held back the Plan to include those matters which it now proposes to include within a 'Part 2' Plan for that part of the District outside the National Park. Having discussed these matters at an advisory visit from the Planning Inspectorate, it seems that there is no 'in principle' reason why the Council should not develop a 2-part Plan and the NPPF does not rule this out either. The National Park Authority will be developing a National Park-wide Local Plan which, for that part of the District in the National Park, will supersede the District Local Plan Part 1 and make provision for site allocations.

The Local Plan Part 1 will bring forward substantial development, put in place key policies and enable the Council to show that it has an adequate land supply, so needs to be adopted at the earliest opportunity. This will not be a moment too soon, with the NPPF's emphasis on up to date plans, economic growth and adequate land supply, it is imperative that this Plan is put in place as soon as possible so that Winchester can deliver on these requirements.

A Plan that Delivers

And delivery is one key theme of this Plan. That involves putting in place policies and allocations to deliver on a range of 'objectively assessed needs', from housing and employment land, through open space and green infrastructure, affordable housing and sustainable construction, to the need to protect the particular character of the many special places within the District. 'Objectively assessed needs' is a term which will no doubt be mentioned frequently throughout these hearings, but each word of the phrase is important and the Council will look to you, Sir, to apply them throughout the hearings: 'objectivity', not just promotion or opposition to development on the basis of land ownership or place of residence; 'assessment' suggests a robust technical process, not simply assertion or volume of statements; and 'need' goes beyond simply desire or self-interest.

The Right Strategy for each area

A second key theme is to deliver the right things in the right places. Winchester District is large and varied and has long had different policy

approaches in different parts of the District. This Plan is no different and takes account of some key policy overlays – the National Park which now covers 40% of the District, the economic growth strategy of PUSH and, overlying everything, the requirements of the NPPF. But it does not simply reproduce these policy areas, it applies them to develop a locally-distinctive strategy and spatial areas.

For example, in the south of the District, there should not be a conservation strategy on one side of the National Park boundary and a growth strategy immediately on the PUSH side – each side of the boundary is a rural area with the same issues and linkages and should logically have similar spatial strategies. So the Plan seeks to implement its commitment to PUSH by locating development where it is best related to the urban area of PUSH and can best provide housing and economic growth to contribute to the PUSH strategy. On the other hand, it contains policies that will conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Park, but does not seek to be so restrictive as to prevent it from achieving its aims of social and economic well-being.

The Plan, therefore, defines three spatial areas, based on the extensive evidence base and the differences and needs this illustrates, and taking account of the results of consultation. It has also created 3 corresponding spatial strategies:

- The South Hampshire Urban Areas – where large-scale urban extensions can be located contiguously with the urban areas in PUSH and can best contribute homes, jobs and green infrastructure to meet the PUSH strategy;
- Winchester Town – a clearly defined and free-standing town which is a market area in its own right and has particular needs and a special character;
- The Market Towns and Rural Area – the other towns, villages and areas of countryside, including those in the National Park, where the aim is to provide for a level of development to meet local needs and maintain viability, while protecting each area's distinctive character.

The Council is consequently confident that the Plan is locally-distinctive.

A Positive Approach

This is another term derived from the NPPF which we will no doubt hear very often during these hearings. It is a term that features in various places within the NPPF, but we need to be clear that 'planning positively' does not adequate to simply raising the Plan's housing requirement, as some participants would have you believe. In fact, interestingly, 'positive' is not a word that appears in the parts of the NPPF that deal specifically with housing.

However, that does not mean that this is not a positive Plan as far as housing or other development needs are concerned – far from it. There are no doubt several authorities that are planning positively for major new areas of housing,

but I don't think there can be many that are planning for 3 strategic development allocations, as well as cooperating with a neighbouring authority to deliver another, even larger, new community right on its boundary. The Plan is also positive in terms of the period it covers, rolling forward the Plan period a while 5 years to 2031, rather than the more timid approach of other Hampshire authorities of looking to 2028/2029.

But planning positively for development and infrastructure is about far more than housing numbers or the simple quantum of development. In the Council's view, supported by the NPPF, it is about using development to meet a variety of needs and aspirations. In Winchester town we call this 'development with a purpose', although the approach is similar for the whole District. This means, for example, that in Winchester development is used not only to meet housing numbers, but to help address commuting issues, meet affordable housing needs, provide necessary new infrastructure and promote low carbon development. Similarly, in West of Waterlooville and North Whiteley the development areas proposed will provide, or integrate with, strategic employment locations, support the PUSH economic growth strategy and help to overcome existing infrastructure shortcomings.

Planning positively for development and infrastructure is also about the full range of local needs. Therefore, the Plan seeks to use development to help meet the need for affordable housing in the District, to provide necessary infrastructure and to implement high standards of carbon reduction and water conservation. These are all very positive measures and Winchester is fortunate that the development market is strong enough for it to be able to expect high standards in new development without this undermining viability.

Positive planning is also about working in a positive way with the public and stakeholders. You will know, Sir, how extensive the examination Library is, but it is no coincidence that the thickest document in it is the Consultation Statement. The Council has always tried to engage in a positive way with all its stakeholders and communities and has developed innovative, indeed award-winning, means of doing this. Those represented at the hearings represent the groups or individuals who probably feel we have not succeeded in this area, but the divergent views that you will hear demonstrate amply that it is simply not possible to agree with everyone, even if you would like to. Ultimately the Council has to make a judgement on those issues where the consultation responses are irreconcilable.

But what is perhaps more striking than the number of bodies that you will hear from during this examination are the number that you won't be hearing from. These are the 'silent majority' that are satisfied with the Plan, or at least not so dissatisfied that they feel they need to address you. This includes the majority of the statutory consultees, including the 3 Government Agencies, 47 Parish Councils, 7 neighbouring Districts and 26 neighbouring Parishes, as well as the many other organisations and infrastructure providers falling under this 'statutory' heading. These statutory consultees usually have a broader and more impartial remit than many of the participants and even those 'statutories'

that are appearing are usually concerned about matters of detail rather than overall strategy.

Summary

In summary:

- the Plan has been developed over several years and the various stages of consultation and changes that have happened along the way have helped to knock off any rough corners and provide a check that the basic strategy remains valid;
- The Plan is based on a full and detailed evidence base covering matters such as housing need, employment, retailing, infrastructure, flood risk, viability and other matters;
- Alternatives have been developed, consulted on and subject to sustainability appraisal;
- Existing plans and strategies have been taken into account and the local Plan has been developed to promote and assist in their implementation;
- National and regional planning policy has been complied with and the Plan has been robust enough to withstand the changes that have happened, or are proposed, in these areas whilst still remaining in general conformity with the regional plan and meeting all the legal and soundness requirements.

In other words, the Council is convinced that the Plan is 'sound' and the Team looks forward to demonstrating this to you. I am confident that at the end of the examination you will agree.

The Council's Team

I am the Head of Strategic Planning and lead the Council's team, but the lead officer for the Local Plan is Jenny Nell. I would like to acknowledge and thank her for her invaluable contribution. We have been assisted by a wide range of key officers from the Council and our partners.

In closing, I would like to briefly introduce the Council's team here today. I will lead the presentation of the City Council's contribution, supported by members of the Planning Policy Team:

- Steve Opacic Dip TP, MRTPI – Head of Strategic Planning
- Jenny Nell BA (Hons) TP, MRTPI – Principal Planning Officer
- Joan Ashton BA (Hons) TP, MA Urb Des, MRTPI – Senior Planning Officer
- Liz Dee BA (Hons) T&CP, BPI, MRTPI – Planning Officer

- Zoe James BSc (Hons), MSc Ecol, MSc DP, LRTPI – Planning Officer

The Council will also be calling several other officers and consultants to assist in presenting its case:

- Tim Richings BSc (Hons), MPhil, MRTPI – Planning Policy Manager, South Downs National Park Authority
- Simon Maggs – Housing Strategy & Development Manager
- Andy Hickman MRTPI, MCIHT, MA – Head of Access and Infrastructure
- Mark Herbert BA (Hons) BPI, MA, MRTPI – Local Planning Ltd
- Nigel Green BA TP, Postgrad Dip Urb Des, MRTPI – Nigel Green Consulting
- Christopher Cobbold MA, MBA, MRICS – Director DTZ
- Ian Walker BA, Phd – Director Element Energy
- Simon Jenkins BSc (Hons), MSc, Dip Mgt, Dip TP, Dip Hsg, MRTPI, CIHCM – Director Adams Integra

Further Council officers will be introduced as they attend. Thank you for your attention.

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