

Notes of Q&A session at New Alresford Town Council Consultation Event on Local Plan Part 2

7 January 2014

The questions were answered by Mr Steve Opacic, Head of Strategic Planning Winchester City Council

Serial No.	Question	Answer
1.	What obstacles would need to be overcome to form a new junction off the A31 to access the proposed development site?	In transport terms, a new junction is not seen as particularly problematic. Clearly it would need to be carefully designed but all the land needed is within the site promoter's or Highway Authority's control. Therefore, funding is the key issue and the development would be expected to fund provision of the new access.
2.	Previous phases of development in Alresford have left a legacy of access difficulties, particularly in the north-south orientation. A greater dispersal of development than that now proposed might help to solve this whereas the current proposal promises to exacerbate the situation because access to and from the housing area has not been fully addressed. Access to the Bishops Sutton road from the housing area would be essential.	The developers of the proposed site are undertaking transport surveys and technical work which will address the detailed access issues. Access via a link to the Bishops Sutton road is an option but would incur the cost of purchasing the land over which the link would need to pass and this would impact the total package of benefits that the developer could pass on to the town.
3.	Are details of biological surveys of the proposed site available?	There are no nature conservation designations on the proposed site. The developers have done an initial ecological assessment and the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre/HCC ecologist would be consulted. Given the agricultural activity on the site, its ecological interest is likely to be low, other than perhaps around the edges.
4.	Is the area allocated to commercial use on the proposed site big enough to accommodate businesses that would provide the 200 new jobs that the needs groups set as a target?	The area currently proposed is assessed to be adequate and is, if anything, greater than that which the needs groups calculated would be necessary.

5.	<p>(Councillor Jackie Porter)</p> <p>a. Has the aspect of the new development as seen from the residential areas west of Sun Lane been considered?</p> <p>b. The suggestion that access to and from the housing area should be on foot would create a situation for the new residents of the site that is not dissimilar to the situation currently faced by residents of some areas of the town eg Oak Hill.</p> <p>c. The proposed new junction with the A31 should provide access to and from both the east and west bound carriageways.</p>	<p>a. Yes, it is recognised that the central part of the site needs to be left as open space as it is unsuitable for built development from a landscaping sensitivity perspective.</p> <p>b. Noted</p> <p>c. The prospective developer's transport consultants are looking into transport movements and this will influence the design of the junction.</p>
6.	Should we not challenge the requirement to build 500 houses over the next 30 years?	This has developed over many years through Local Plan Part 1 and is now part of the statutory Local Plan. The figure of 500 was recommended by the national planning inspector and had to be accepted. Failure to plan for this target would mean that any site promoter could argue that their site should be brought forward to meet it.
7.	<p>In response to the previous question, the 500 new houses are needed to maintain the town's demographic composition and therefore its viability as a thriving community.</p> <p>Putting housing on previously green field sites can improve biodiversity but there is a critical density above which biodiversity suffers rather than thrives. Should the proposal not allow for lower density housing by reducing the area allocated to open space?</p>	This is certainly possible but may well reduce the financial benefit that the developer could pass on to the town in the form of access points and so on. It may also be necessary to find other sites for the 'lost' housing.
8.	Why is part of the site considered to be of higher value than other parts in terms of landscape sensitivity?	A landscape sensitivity study concluded that this is the case. The full study can be viewed on the web site and people can comment on it if they wish.
9.	Could any of the commercial activity currently sited in Old Alresford (eg the salad packing business) be moved to the proposed new commercial area? This would ease the well known traffic problems that are currently associated with the activity.	It is a possibility that had been considered. However, it was concluded that the authorities could not force existing lawful businesses to relocate, although they may find new site attractive and volunteer to move. It should be recognised that new businesses might move into the vacated site in Old Alresford.
10.	It is an established fact that land formerly devoted to agriculture is devalued from a biodiversity perspective so the proposal to use it for housing and commercial development could increase biodiversity.	Noted.

11.	<p>a. At what rate would the houses be built (is it realistic to expect that the programme would extend over the 20 years that are allowed for its completion)?</p> <p>b. Link road from the housing area to the Bishops Sutton road would be essential to ease traffic problems caused by vehicles accessing the housing area.</p>	<p>a. The developers assess that a rate of 50 per year would be achievable, although this would depend on market conditions. Taking graduated start up and finalisation phases into account, the whole programme could take 10 to 12 years.</p> <p>b. Perhaps, or it might shift the traffic problems elsewhere. People's views on detailed access ideas would be welcomed through the consultation process and the site promoters will be asked to examine them.</p>
12.	<p>The developers would make £100,000 margin per house so for 320 houses they would make £32 million. That could pay for a lot of access roads and more. Could not the density be reduced to trade off over-provision of access roads for more garden space leading to greater biodiversity?</p>	<p>The questioner's estimate of the margins does not sound correct from my experience from past projects. However, whatever the detailed figures are, there will be a point at which the development ceases to be viable. The Council will seek to get the most community benefit it can without exceeding that point.</p> <p>While there is some flexibility on the density/open space trade off, it should be recognised that the proposed 32 houses per hectare is not particularly dense compared to other developments. However, public views would be welcome, bearing in mind the need to make up any 'lost' numbers.</p>
13.	<p>a. Is the current proposal dependant on a new junction on the A31 being possible?</p> <p>b. Could not the housing area be divided up so as to allow a greater buffer between it and already established housing?</p>	<p>a. Yes</p> <p>b. There is no planning rule that says that new housing must have a large buffer between it and already established housing, in fact it is normally good to integrate new housing with existing. The split of the site into 3 broad areas reflects the sensitivity of the central area and conclusions on the best locations for the other uses, although there may be limited scope for flexibility in the boundaries between different uses.</p>
14.	<p>Why must provision for travellers be made in the proposal?</p>	<p>There is a requirement from central government for all district councils to demonstrate an adequate housing supply for the 5 years ahead. This includes traveller requirements and at the moment the Council is unable to meet this requirement, resulting in a presumption in favour of traveller applications on any site.</p>
15.	<p>If the current proposal is agreed, would development of the other sites in the SHLAA be impossible.</p>	<p>Yes the Plan would carry considerable weight once it is adopted and other sites would be resisted.</p>

16.	What is to stop owners of sites in the SHLAA from developing their sites while the current proposal is being considered?	LPP1 says that development outside settlement boundaries is not to be supported until housing needs have been assessed and sites allocated through LPP2. The Council is strongly resisting any site promoters that try to 'jump' this process, including sites that are currently preferred.
17.	Why does land allocated to travellers need to be inside the settlement boundary?	It needs to be close to the same facilities and services enjoyed by permanent housing, although the site proposed would not directly adjoin any existing or proposed housing.