

**WINCHESTER DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN COMMITTEE**

**9 December 2005**

Attendance:

Councillors:

Bidgood (Chairman)  
Councillor Sutton (Vice-Chairman in the Chair) (P)

Bennetts (P)  
Davies (P)  
Hammerton  
Hutton (P)  
Jeffer

Pearce (P)  
Pearson (P)  
Read (P)  
Saunders (P)

Deputy Members

Councillors Mitchell and Wright

Others in attendance who spoke:

Councillor Campbell (Leader of the Council)  
Councillor Beveridge (Portfolio Holder for Planning)  
Councillors Allgood and Coates

Officers in attendance:

Mr S Opacic (Head of Strategic Planning)  
Mrs M Kirby (Principal Planner)  
Mr H Bone (Assistant City Secretary and Solicitor (Legal))

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577. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillors Bidgood, Jeffer and Busher and Deputy Member Councillor Hammerton.

578. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting approximately 30 members of the public and a number of them made comments during consideration of the Reports, as set out below.

579. **MINUTES**

(Report WDLP57 refers)

Following debate the Committee agreed that minutes of the previous meeting had accurately recorded the debates on the implementation of PPG3 and of the principle and location of Local Reserve Sites.

However, following a statement by Councillor Coates, the Committee agreed to amend the minutes in respect of his comments on page 6. This was to replace the reference to "Corhampton" with "Hambledon" and to record his concern that there was an apparent mismatch between some omission sites that were within settlement boundaries and some that were not.

RESOLVED:

That, subject to the above amendments, the minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee, held on 15 November 2005, be approved and adopted.

580. **WINCHESTER DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN REVIEW INSPECTOR'S' REPORT:  
LOCAL RESERVE SITES**

(Report WDLP54 refers)

Councillor Davies declared a personal (but not personal and prejudicial) interest in respect of this item as a member of the Council of the City of Winchester Trust which had commented on the Report. Councillor Davies spoke and voted thereon.

At the last meeting, the majority of the Committee had objected to the Inspectors' recommended Local Reserve Sites and had deferred the issue to this meeting for further information. The Report set out the options available to the Council in relation to the Inspectors' recommendations and the likely implications of these courses of action.

Mr Opacic confirmed that if the principle of the Local Reserve Sites was rejected by the Council, it was his view that a further Local Plan Inquiry would be unavoidable. During this Inquiry, it was probable that housing requirements, numerous omission sites and alternative or additional Local Reserve Sites would be considered. This would have serious implications in terms of cost (an estimated and un-budgeted £500,000) and delays to the Local Plan adoption process. Because of changes in legislation, a delay in adopting the Plan before June 2006 would require a time consuming and costly Strategic Environmental Assessment of the entire plan. It was also possible that the Secretary of State could direct changes to the Plan.

He explained that the Inspectors had concluded that the housing completion rate in the District within the lifetime of the Plan might not be sufficient to meet the targets set by the Structure Plan. Instead of allocating omission sites for development, the Inspectors had recommended four Local Reserve Sites as the most sustainable from almost 200 sites which had been considered during the Inquiry. These sites would only be released for development by the City Council (using a triggering mechanism of its own design) in the event of any unanticipated shortfall in housing completions.

The Committee questioned how a further Inquiry could be triggered and Mr Bone explained that this was the Council's responsibility to assess any representation received on the Proposed Modifications and decide in the light of the issues raised whether a further Inquiry was needed. He underlined that the primary factor in whether a further Inquiry would be necessary was whether the Council's response had triggered any new issues that had not been considered by the previous Inquiry.

Some Members stated that the likely mass of objections from residents near to the Local Reserve Sites would also constitute new evidence, worthy of triggering a further Inquiry with at least the same weight as the probable objections from the development interests, should the Council reject the sites. However, Mr Bone

advised that it was likely that the arguments behind these objections would have already been heard during the Inquiry as part of the Council's evidence and, as such, might not warrant a further Inquiry. In response, some Members stated that many local residents would be unaware that these sites were vulnerable to development, until the anticipated publication of the Council's response to the Inquiry in January 2006. Therefore the majority of local residents had not submitted objections to the Inspectors.

The housing completion figures submitted to the Inquiry had dated from April 2003 and it was suggested that these could be updated to the latest figures from April 2005. However, Mr Opacic explained that with disappointing completion rates from urban capacity sites and with delays at the West of Waterlooville MDA, the good performance from allocation sites (most of which had now been developed) and windfall sites (which by definition were difficult to predict) would not guarantee that a future Inquiry would conclude that Local Reserve Sites were unnecessary.

Concerns were raised regarding the logic of releasing sites for development in Winchester or elsewhere to compensate for delays at the West of Waterlooville MDA. Mr Opacic stated to prevent this by sub-dividing the District would have no statutory basis and would introduce a major new area of work, that would be likely to be challenged and generate a further Inquiry.

In response to questions, Mr Opacic explained the importance of the Council adopting the revised Local Plan. Without an adopted Plan, the existing Plan (which was supposed to expire in 2001) would become increasingly open to challenge at Planning Appeals in the transition period before the Local Plan Review was adopted.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr Hayter spoke in support of the Council's adoption of the Local Reserve Sites. He added that these sites would reduce the risk of larger, strategic reserve sites (such as Winchester City North) being released for development.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr Lander-Brinkley (Denmead Parish Council) spoke against the adoption of Local Reserve Sites and, in particular, the identification of Little Frenchies Field, Denmead as such a site. Among the points he raised, he explained that the Parish Council had long supported the retention of Little Frenchies Field as Open Space and that, in a letter to the Planning Department in 2003, the Parish Council had argued that if there was to a change in the designation of this area, it should be for recreational and not development use. This would help to meet an identified shortfall in recreational space within the village. This view was echoed by Councillor Allgood, who added that the good housing completion numbers recently released by the County Council, made the identification of reserve sites such as Little Frenchies Field unnecessary and that the site should continue to be protected as an important area of Open Space.

In response, Mr Gardner spoke as a representative of the owner of Little Frenchies Field. He reported that, having attended the Inquiry which considered this area, he had no recollection of the Parish Council promoting the land for recreational use at the Inquiry. This was despite writing to the Parish Council in advance of the Inquiry to advise them of his client's interests in developing the land for residential use. He added that the objections considered by the Inspector centred on the landscape setting of the site, which had been dismissed as the site was partially enclosed by housing.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr Bond spoke as a representative of the development interest of one of the Local Reserve Sites. He supported their adoption by the Council and reported that similar policies had been successful as a safety valve against the pressures of PPG3 in areas covered by Basingstoke & Deane and at Hart District Councils. The Committee considered the practical implication of this on planning applications.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr Cole spoke as a representative of the City of Winchester Trust. In summary, he argued that making good a deficiency in strategic housing provision (such as the delay at the West of Waterlooville MDA) was the function of the Strategic Authorities and should not fall upon Local Reserve Sites. He also suggested that a further Inquiry could be avoided, if the principle of Local Reserve Sites was accepted, but that additional sites should be allowed for (but not identified) within the Plan. This could provide more flexibility and allow for more than the 400 dwellings which the Inspector recommended the sites could provide. In response, Mr Opacic stated that this approach was likely to make more sites vulnerable to development and he underlined that Inspectors envisaged that the release of Local Reserve Sites would be triggered by the City Council to meet District-wide housing requirements.

With the permission of the Chairman, Councillors Campbell and Beveridge spoke in support of the report's recommendation.

The Committee also heard a number of members of the public speak against the adoption of Local Reserve Sites.

Following a vote, the majority of the Committee rejected the adoption of Local Reserve Sites, as they were not persuaded by the arguments in support and considered that the principle had not been fully discussed, and that there had not been sufficient public participation on this during the Inquiry. They also considered that the latest housing completion figures made the identification of sites unnecessary. If adopted, the identification of these sites would build up unrealistic expectations of developers and cause unnecessary worry for local residents.

RESOLVED:

That it be recommended to Cabinet and Council that the principle of Local Reserve Sites and the four sites recommended by the Local Plan Inspectors, not be accepted.

581. **DRAFT POLICIES ON REPLACEMENT POLICY H.3 AND LOCAL RESERVE HOUSING SITES**

(Report WDLP55 refers)

Mr Wilson, as a representative of the Council's consultants, introduced the report and distributed to the Committee a schedule of the proposed modifications of the Plan in response to the Inspectors' recommendations on replacement Policy H.3 and Local Reserve Housing Sites, marked to show how the Inspector's recommended wording had been incorporated.

In light of the Committee's decision above (Report WDLP54 refers), it was agreed to only note the proposed modifications in regard to Local Reserve Housing Sites. However, notwithstanding this, Mr Wilson agreed to clarify within the explanatory text the references to housing shortfall and public consultation.

During discussion on replacement Policy H.3, Councillor Coates spoke of his concern that this would lead to inappropriate development in the countryside. In response, Mr Wilson stated that this would be prevented by a robust Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) that would be submitted to this Committee and Council in January 2006.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr Hayter raised various concerns against the recommendations. This included a concern that the proposed policy would lead to ribbons of development along “sustainable” bus-routes and concerns regarding the references to character and safety within the Report. He also stated that the criteria would be more robust as part of the Policy rather than within a SPD.

During debate, the Committee noted that Government definitions of sustainability included safe and convenient access by foot; that the Inspectors had not intended to limit infill development to brown field sites only; and that the Glossary should include a definition of Parish Plans and a revision to the existing definition of ‘infilling’.

Following comments made by Mrs Matthews (Itchen Valley Parish Council), the Committee noted the importance of achieving definitions of “sustainable” and “harm to the character of an area” which were universally understood between planning officers and residents.

The Committee also agreed to amend the last sentence of paragraph 6, page 4 of Appendix 2 to read: “However, many of the settlements in the countryside consist mainly of frontage development which will mean that ‘in-depth’ development is unlikely to reflect their character.”

RESOLVED:

1. That it be recommended to Cabinet and Council that the draft policies and explanatory text relating to the Inspector’s recommended replacement Policy H.3 as set out in Appendix 2 of the above Report, be endorsed and incorporated into the Council’s Proposed Modifications in response to the Inspector’s Report, subject to the above minor amendments.

2. That it be recommended to Cabinet and Council that, in light of the Committee’s above decision in reference to WDLP54, the draft policy on Local Reserve Sites be noted.

582. **POLICY H.5 AND “IN PERPETUITY”**  
(Report WDLP56 refers)

The Committee agreed to the recommendation for the reasons set out in the Report.

RESOLVED:

That the proposed wording change to MOD 6.39, as set out in paragraph 3.1 of the Report, be approved and incorporated in the schedule for Chapter 6: Housing (attached as Appendix 1 to report WDLP52).

The meeting commenced at 9.30am and concluded at 1.40pm.

Chairman