

WINCHESTER TOWN FORUM

12 February 2008

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK CORE STRATEGY CONSULTATION – TOWN FORUM RESPONSE

REPORT OF CORPORATE DIRECTOR (OPERATIONS)

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RECENT REFERENCES:

None

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Town Forum has the opportunity to make a formal response to the consultation exercise on the Core Strategy Issues and Options Paper for the Local Development Framework. The Issues and Options paper raises fundamental questions about the way in which Winchester town will evolve over the next twenty years. The report highlights the key questions in the paper and gives some feedback on the response from members of the public at the consultation events held in Winchester.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Corporate Director (Operations), in consultation with the Chairman of the Town Forum, be authorised to respond formally to the Issues and Options consultation in accordance with the majority views expressed at the meeting.

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DETAIL:

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The City Council has now started the process of preparing a replacement for the adopted Local Plan which sets out planning policies and land allocations up until 2011. The new 'plan' is called a Local Development Framework (LDF) and will run until 2026. It includes a number of different documents which are read together to form the Council's spatial planning policies. Central to the LDF process is the idea of 'place-making'. In deciding what development to allow, where to allow it, and what development control policies to operate, the Council is helping to decide what kind of place Winchester is and what it is to be like in the future. It is therefore important to understand and articulate the kind of place it is that the Council wishes Winchester to become when it draws up the document, which will be used to make key decisions about development.
- 1.2 A key document in the LDF is the 'core strategy' which sets out the strategic objectives and direction which more detailed policies and land allocations then follow. The core strategy is vital in setting a direction for the future and it is this strategy which is currently the subject of consultation. The 'Issues and Options' consultation paper published by the City Council in December highlights the various issues – local, regional and national – that Winchester has to face and suggests options for dealing with them. After public consultation the Council will agree a 'preferred options' paper in the summer which will then form the basis of the core strategy itself.
- 1.3 As part of the consultation process, seven public events have been held across the District, two of which focussed on Winchester town. Many individuals and organisations, including parish councils, will be responding to the consultation. Whilst Winchester town will no doubt produce a large number of these, it is appropriate that the Town Forum, as the grouping of City Council ward members, also makes a formal response.
- 1.4 As with any local organisation it may be difficult for the Town Forum to achieve complete consensus but it is suggested that a response could be framed in consultation with the Chairman which provides a sensible summary of views after the debate at the meeting.

2 Issues and Options and a Vision for Winchester

- 2.1 The Issues and Options paper offers two broad scenarios for Winchester town over the next twenty years, both driven by the requirement to accommodate a substantial quantity of new housing development in conformity with the South East Plan, the

regional planning document which itself embodies national planning and housebuilding targets.

- 2.2 The first scenario is based on providing for housing development in accordance with existing Local Plan boundaries. This includes development of 2000 dwellings at Barton Farm and at other existing reserve sites. The additional housing development required to meet the local requirement would be accommodated in smaller settlements around the north of the District. This scenario provides for new housing numbers with the necessary infrastructure but does not seek to act as a catalyst for change in the economic or business infrastructure of the town. The advantages of this option might be said to be that it provides for minimum change (albeit much more than some people would like) in the nature of the town and therefore runs lesser risk of upsetting the fine balance on which the success of the town lies.
- 2.3 What may be considered less desirable about this option is that it provides for significant new housing numbers without addressing any planned approach to major issues such as commuting or the economic vitality of the town.
- 2.4 The second scenario envisages providing for a greater percentage of the housing requirement being located in Winchester coupled with a carefully managed but deliberate effort to provide more opportunities for business and employment development in the town. The paper does not suggest a radical or ill-advised attempt to create a different kind of place, but rather an expansion of opportunities for the high value employment which are based on the town's current strengths, not least its links with two universities.
- 2.5 This 'step-change' scenario might necessitate making use of additional large sites around Winchester, including land at Teg Down, off the Romsey Road and at Bushfield Camp for some housing or business development.
- 2.6 Reaction to the options at the public meetings held in January at the Guildhall and Littleton Memorial Hall was obviously mixed. There is long-standing opposition to the principle of further large scale development being imposed by central Government. However, most people attending accepted that the City Council has to produce a LDF in conformity with the South East Plan and understood that development of a major area may therefore be necessary if regrettable. The more lively area of debate was therefore on whether the so called 'step change' option would be right for Winchester and this is the issue which the Town Forum might wish to concentrate its consideration on.
- 2.7 The Issues and Options paper provides evidence of the gradual but definite decline of the town's retail and economic base. With its dependence on a relatively few public sector employers and a great deal of outward commuting the town does not have a strong local base of private sector employment. Decisions such as that by Hampshire Constabulary to leave the town because there is no opportunity for them to develop a modern headquarters building might be seen as reason for concern about the future.
- 2.8 The Town Forum has already endorsed the 'Vision for Winchester' paper which sets out the kind of place it would wish Winchester to be. Whilst not explicitly endorsing significant development, the Vision for Winchester does stress the importance of the economic health of the town, providing new and affordable homes and the importance of not assuming that its historic importance is a safeguard against future

decline. Members of the Town Forum may wish to consider the objectives of the vision document in considering their response to the Issues and Options paper.

- 2.9 One contributor to the public consultation spoke of the importance of 'development with a purpose' which used housing growth (assuming that it is inevitable) as a platform for economic and social improvements rather than simply adding further dormitory suburbs. There is a similar statement in the Vision for Winchester. The Town Forum may want to consider whether this concept is one which they feel useful in responding to the paper.

3 Retaining Character

- 3.1 Whilst the most important single aspect of the Issues and Options paper for Winchester is the choice about growth, the issues of character and the special quality of the town, especially its setting, were also prominent in the public consultation.

- 3.2 Winchester's historic core – the Cathedral, college environs, the water meadows across to the High Street, North Walls and Hyde – are not directly affected by development further out of the town centre. It is this core which is most distinctly Winchester. Other areas, such as Weeke, Harestock and Highcliffe are a pleasant and familiar part of the town to residents but not actually of a form or type which is unique to Winchester. These areas were themselves added to the town as deliberate extensions to accommodate a growing population and perhaps demonstrate that further development is not necessarily detrimental, provided it is handled well.

- 3.3 But there are significant concerns that the setting of the town, which is so important to its feel and character, could be changed if development is not well handled. Considerable importance has often been placed on retaining the 'hard' edges that the town has which establish a quick transition from built environment to the natural environment without the sprawl of commercial development which affects even towns such as Salisbury. Members of the public at the consultation events were keen to see this avoided even if the location of the urban edge had to be extended to provide a larger area in which housing development could take place.

- 3.4 There was a preference for low density 'traditional' housing, but also a recognition that the nature of housing is changing as the requirements for new development to be low, and eventually zero, net carbon contribution means that the design and layout of new build will be very different in the future.

- 3.5 The character of the town is not entirely shaped by its form, but also by the mix of people, skills and cultural and social interests that they have. Again, participants in the consultation events frequently stressed the importance of ensuring that new development provided for a similar mix of ages, incomes and family sizes so as to reflect, rather than distort, the current situation.

4 Infrastructure

- 4.1 The issue which is obviously of concern to residents (and indeed potential residents) in considering the type and scale of development is the impact on infrastructure, including health services, education, water, sewerage and transport.

- 4.2 Without going into detail, the Issues and Options paper assumes that infrastructure to support new development in a strategic option can be adequately provided, with

funding coming from developers through Section 106 contributions. Discussions with those responsible for the provision of infrastructure suggest that this is the case since Winchester is well provided with services, in particular a large general hospital the scale of which somewhat exceeds the norm for its local catchment population. New primary education can be provided relatively easily and the capacity of secondary schooling increased where necessary.

- 4.3 Transport issues are perhaps the most difficult to address but in this respect the prospect of substantial development in Winchester town has to be seen in the context of the alternatives. Development outside of the town will still result in commuting into Winchester and would seem likely to put greater pressure on road intersections and parking (both public and private) than would development within the town which provides more opportunity to enhance cycling and walking. Reducing the total volume of commuting which is very high in Winchester by providing both more affordable housing and greater local employment opportunities (in other words, making the town more self sufficient by 'developing with a purpose') could be a worthwhile goal.

5 Consideration by the Town Forum

- 5.1 The points made above are offered to assist the Town Forum in its discussion but Members who attended the various events will of course have their own views and assessment of the Issues and Options which they will wish to debate.
- 5.2 The Town Forum has the opportunity to provide a formal response to the consultation which must be made in writing by 15 February 2008. Members will need to determine, either through consensus or a majority view, what the principles of that response should be. It is suggested that the detailed wording is prepared by the Corporate Director (Operations), in consultation with the Chairman. Individual Members are, of course, able to make their own response to the consultation.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

6 CORPORATE STRATEGY (RELEVANCE TO):

- 6.1 This reports to the key objectives of Economic Prosperity and High Quality Environment,

7 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 7.1 There are no direct resource implications arising from the report.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

"Core Strategy Issues and Options" Winchester City Council consultation document December 2007

APPENDICES:

None