

Pre-Submission SH Local Plan Reg 19

From

Tony Murphy

To

Planning Consultation

Cc

Recipients

Planning.Consultation@surreyheath.gov.uk

Dear Sirs - I have been invited to comment on the "soundness" of the Plan.

My general views on the Local Plan, when in Draft Form, were expressed in my submission dated 5th May 2022 which I have attached for interest as I understand, from a FoI response, that written submissions were translated into the on-line questionnaire format - without evidence of whether there was distortion in that process. I also understand that the responses to the Consultation were a very low proportion of the Borough population, which tends to question the validity of the Consultation.

I do not find the present process helpful as a means of expressing my views so I choose to comment in this form.

I would be in favour of a Planning System which could be described as fit for purpose, that would follow a proper evaluation of the up to date national need for housing development, to include serious consideration of the need for "levelling-up".

A Plan which would propose Infrastructure in advance of proposals for housing development, flowing from national to regional to local needs for both hard and soft infrastructure.

I would support the NPPF view that development should be Plan led, that Local Plans would be succinct and maintained up to date, by review at least once every five years. But actual local experience is that development is driven by the major developers - in support of their commercial needs which may not coincide with the national interest. With "Development Control" and "Planning" acting as facilitators of development or for processing planning applications, tolerating delays to suit changing market conditions. The current extant Local Plan is the 2000 version so a 25 year period to adoption of the new edition - assuming no further delays. At either 450 or 1000 pages, depending on the depth you wish to review, it is certainly not succinct and contains no commitment to a schedule for review.

It does not provide any sense of urgency on Environment matters, including the vital need to conserve ecosystems under threat and to avoid housing development in close proximity to the major sources of air and noise pollution.

And in the fine detail of current events there is contradiction - applications refused are included in the plan.

I do not believe that the Local Plan is "sound" and hope that these personal views will be considered.

With Best Wishes

Tony Murphy - Windlesham Resident & Elector of the Parish

Other contact details can be provided if necessary

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Draft Surrey Heath Local Plan – 2019 to 2038

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But there is also a potential question about the validity of the process which calls for comment on Policies which are intended to be part of reaction to the “Climate Emergency” but are ill defined and without a timescale for implementation.

In complete contrast we are asked to consider a Plan for housing developments in both short and long term without knowledge of whether they will be subjected to these policies. In further contrast we are asked to comment on the “Interim Sustainable Appraisal” which is also without reference to the proposed policies which must be considered as essential under the NPPF definition of “Sustainable” – “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

The on-line Consultation Questionnaire is almost entirely related to proposed policies. As framed in the Questionnaire, many can be agreed to in principle, especially those which relate to “Environmental” matters, but they are without definition and without timings for implementation. Therefore not part of a plan and hugely disappointing that, in view of “Climate Emergency Declarations” they are being considered in this rather leisurely fashion and without relevance to, or impact on, the majority of the developments which are front loaded – ie before the likely implementation of so called “Emergency” policies.

If approached seriously, Policies under Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation, including such as measureable Biodiversity Gain and Carbon Capture with protection of trees must be implemented as “Emergency” measures – prior to all developments which have not yet commenced. (This view appears to be supported in paras 2.34 & 2.45 that developments within the borough must contribute to Climate Change Mitigation/Adaptation and that they should demonstrate how they are maximizing reduction of carbon emissions etc.)

The logic of this position must extend to all site appraisals – especially in relation to the key word “Sustainable” as defined above. Clearly the implementation of Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation policies is essential under this definition. Therefore all appraisals conducted without demonstrating features under these proposed policies are essentially flawed pending review against those policies.

In paras 1.59/60 there is reference to health & well being and the requirement for a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) on new developments. In this connection it is noted that 90% of households in SH have a car (1.106) – higher than the rest of Surrey, and in the more rural areas, the unsustainability in relation to local facilities and very limited public transport will create cause for greater use of cars as essential.

SH has higher than average UK emissions with the M3 motorway being the main source. Monitoring/reporting and AQ Policies are hopelessly out of date in relation to WHO recommendations – most recently in 2021. In 1.56 it is noted that further AQ work is required prior to the next stage of the LP in a further version of the Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA). The 2021 WHO recommendations are based on harm to humans and dramatically reduce the levels allowed – a seriously out of date policy does not allow for this risk to human health, especially the already vulnerable, when put in close proximity to the main source of harmful emissions by new developments.

The “Plan” aspect is (under New Homes para 2.5) to deliver the predetermined (LHN calculation) number of homes – 6,213 over the period of the plans. In following paras a breakdown is demonstrated which in table 4 shows the Spatial Strategy of majority in the more urban West of the Borough and a minority (ca 12%) in the more rural East.

The Spatial Strategy is said to support delivery of Sustainable Development in SH it “focuses new development to the existing settlements in the western half of the Boro...the most sustainable and accessible areas...a significant element being to support high quality and high density development within Camberley Centre”. It says that the eastern more rural half, the villages, is “subject to significant areas of Environmental Constraints and the Green Belt”. Smaller scale development is proposed. At para 2.17 there is a clear statement that NO release of Green Belt is required.

Windlesham shows as 12 completed and with 173 “Commitments”. This is, on any measure, an extremely unfair proportion dedicated to this small village.

The still extant 2000 Local Plan and the Windlesham Neighbourhood Plan, “made” in 2019 and part of the local Development Plan, led us to believe that we could expect to see a modest scale of development in our village, in tune with generations of Inspectors opinions on the lack of “Sustainability”. Those modest numbers defined “sustainability” and indicate the lack of “sustainability” now being experienced. Any suggestions or proposals for further development beyond the “committed” numbers must not be considered on the grounds of “unsustainability” in addition to other limitations.

But, as the calculated numbers tell us that further numbers are not required in this village, why is it that we see further sites on Woodlands Lane being referred to as “realistic candidates for development” apparently without insight into the still unresolved infrastructure issues, both Hard and Soft, related to the Heathpark Wood development and not recognizing that this is a main access and the HGV route around the village. And what motivates the Housing Supply Topic Paper (at para 2.21) about our NP that because no specific sites were mentioned it is being “generally supportive of housing development within the Neighbourhood area” – implying without limit which is simply untrue. These and other references will lead to suspicion.

The current “Committed” sites with 170 or so units follow the significant Heathpark Drive, Snows Ride and Windmill Field and other smaller scale developments, in the latter part of the 20th Century which have over time been assimilated within the village and form part of our community. What we now see is that actual approved/committed for further development, are vastly exceeding expected levels and greater proportionally than any other area of the Borough.

The most significant element is the 116 committed in Heathpark Wood. It had been given "Reserve Site" status in the 2000 Plan but conditioned to be called upon subject to a new Local Plan review – therefore regarded as "saved" pending. The original PA was refused by the PAC, properly so by the Inspectors decision at the subsequent Public Inquiry, but eventually allowed, essentially, because the SHBC Planning were unable to demonstrate, to the Inquiry, that they had the claimed/required Housing Land Supply.

It is of special interest that by Executive decision under devolved powers and contrary to the PAC decision, council did not put the "environmental" case to the Inquiry (entirely contrary to Policies now part of this Draft Local Plan – a development therefore now committed which is out of tune with current sentiments on biodiversity, carbon capture, preservation of trees, with unknown risks of air pollution and other matters including the devastating impact on wildlife).

Developments have taken place and continue to take place not only in our community but beyond in Surrey and in neighbouring Berkshire without action which really considers the impact on Infrastructure and without positive response to the growing need. Our village Infrastructure is essentially unchanged since the Middle Ages and has not adapted to the private motor vehicle, it is clear that each planning application has been considered in isolation without considering the cumulative impact. For example, Highways England were not original consultees in relation to Heathpark Wood with its direct impact on the near adjoining M3 motorway and the cumulative impact on Jct 3 of the M3. In the surrounding region having some impact on our local Infrastructure it is estimated that 10,000 homes are to be built in the near short term.

In relation to Heathpark Wood, infrastructure issues, essential to the development, which were agreed by the parties at the Public Inquiry in 2017 remain unresolved to date.

The cooperation between agencies, envisaged in the C.I.L agreements procedures, is clearly not working to our advantage and it is no surprise that it is to be "reviewed". This may at last be recognition of "evidence of a disconnect between Infrastructure & Planning" as referred to in the RTPI report 14/5/19 "A Smarter Approach to Infrastructure Planning". By Infrastructure we include Hard Infrastructure such as Highways, streets, bridges, mass transit, rail, water supply, waste management etc but also Soft Infrastructure – the institutions that maintain the economic, health, social, environmental & cultural standards with educational progress, official statistics, parks and recreational facilities, law enforcement and emergency services.

What we learn from the Heathpark Wood experience is that priority being given to the "housing numbers" – over all other matters – is complete madness. It must be conditional on other crucial matters as determined by other protective policies and sustainability. And, is there proper assurance that the "housing numbers" are not "shifting sands" or "smoke and mirrors" or conditioned by commercial interests which give a bad name to Capitalism ?

Ostensibly this is about a Plan to build the pre-determined number of 6213 houses in the stated time frame. But, at the human local level, it must actually be about building or maintaining communities. In this context, it is disgraceful that the Borough continues to perpetuate (by default) the wrongful division of this village/community, in Borough warding terms. This resulted from the Boundaries Commission decision in 2017 which became effective from the 2019 elections. The otherwise robust BC process which proceeds by a series of Consultations was undermined by "jerrymandering" of boundaries which was perpetrated /accomplished by those elected to represent us, but promoting other interests using

- a) the expedient of excluding the residents of this village from the Consultations, against the expressed wishes of the Boundary Commission and were therefore unaware of the proposals until after the event.
- b) in submissions to the BC not recognizing the individual character of this and the other village communities within the grouping of the confusingly named "Windlesham Parish Council" which derives from history and does not reflect the current dominance of (near town in scale) Lightwater.
- c) making no reference to the division of our village community in their representations – a division which is contrary to BC policy.
- d) Over emphasis on electoral equality without considering the impact on people/community and without taking the opportunity for review of the Boundaries. There is a powerful human desire for belonging to place which must not be ignored.

If the Borough is genuinely supportive of individual, strong, vibrant, characterful, independent communities it should act in favour of the integrity of this village by calling on the BC to review this situation without delay, whilst recognizing the importance of electoral equality (in the light of the latest census), it must also recognise the nature of communities and take the opportunity to review the borders in the light of 21st Century "natural" borders which are meaningful to residents, as opposed to those warding for advantage.

The impact of this division is not only to essentially disenfranchise, in terms of Borough representation, those in "North" Windlesham but contributes to a loss of geographical integrity tending to define us into separate settlements and blurring the boundaries which identify the essential separations between the villages – including green belt separations. It also contributes to the birds eye view of our village in the Local Plan Draft which fails to recognize the heart, lungs, soul and spirit of our community at the centre, the Hub, our Field of Remembrance, our Club & Theatre, our Church and the people who form a very special community.

I strongly support the position which may be/ is made clear in the Vision statement (para 1.118)...seeking to deliver vibrant communities with a distinct identity in keeping with the character of their surroundings which enhance the local landscape and biodiversity.....must take place in the right place to make a positive contribution to peoples lives including health and wellbeing.....including alongside social and leisure opportunities whilst protecting and enhancing the natural and historic environment.

This is a fine supportable statement except for the word “seeking” which appears to be an unnecessary “political” qualification seemingly at odds with the positive NPPF Framework – a material consideration – which at para 2.7 defines the purpose of the planning system as to contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development and refers to the 17 Global Goals for Sustainable Development established by the UN General Assembly in Sep 2015.

At para 2.8 the NPPF defines its 3 overarching objectives which include at b) Social – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities.....well designed, beautiful & safe places that reflect current and future needs & support communities health, social and cultural well being and at c) Environmental – to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment.....improving biodiversity, minimising waste and pollution.....mitigating and adapting to climate change including moving to a low carbon economy. And at para 9 |to reflect the character, needs & opportunities of each area.

Accepting the inevitability of the housing Commitments already allocated to us by Planning Approvals, we must be allowed the time to adjust to the unsustainable that they represent, to create through the responsible agencies the infrastructure – both hard and soft – to meet the needs of our community. There must be a very clear unambiguous (no ifs, no buts) Local Plan statement which provides NO further development within Windlesham during the lifetime of the Plan – expressly NO tinkering with our Green Belt in view of public support at 96% in recent polling – “hands off” is the message.

The “Sustainability Appraisal” must be taken back to base to be readdressed holistically, recognising the cumulative impact of all regional development, the limitations of available Infrastructure, the implementation of protective policies for the environment including species (and humans), the Green Belt to be “preserved and enhanced”, proper care for Heritage assets and our Conservation areas.

The key words Community, Sustainability and (Soft) Infrastructure come together in terms of a community which can care for all residents especially the vulnerable and elderly but also the “just about managing”. The many good people caring for others in their own homes for as long as practical should be well supported especially in these difficult times when the UN Sustainable Development Goals are increasingly appropriate for all nations – the goals to end poverty and hunger, to provide wellbeing for all, gender equality and to provide access to affordable, reliable, sustainable & modern energy for all – for example – have increasing relevance to us today

I hope you will consider these comments, recognise the seriousness of intent behind them, that they come from a full reading of the documents and having attended presentations in both Lightwater and in Windlesham. I hope that future drafts will have taken account of my comments and that they will make clear unambiguous statements without the qualifying comments which give succour to Lawyers acting for commercial interests in the future – actions which may be other than proper “material considerations” in the best interest of our community.

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But there is also an essential question about the validity of the process which calls for comment on Policies which are intended to be part of reaction to the “Climate Emergency” but are ill defined and without a timescale for implementation.

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