

Note of Recommendations made at the hearing session on 21 July 2016

This note is a record of the recommendations made at the 21 July hearing session following consideration of additional evidence presented since my Interim Report. It is written for the benefit of those who were not present at the hearings to inform them of progress and next steps. It does not contain full reasoning, which is left over to my final report. All recommendations are subject to any further evidence which might come forward before submission of my final report.

The JCS team has confirmed that these recommendations, together with my earlier reports and previously agreed modifications, are sufficient for them to draft the main modifications to the JCS, which they are now working on. Main modifications will be sent to me for checking by Monday 19 September 2016. There is no longer a need to hold hearing sessions in September.

Thereafter, the drafted main modifications will go to the Council Members of the three districts for approval, followed by at least six weeks of public consultation. I will then consider representations on the proposed main modifications, which I hope to do in January 2017 and, if requested, I will hold hearing sessions on the main modifications thereafter.

Recommendations

5% Uplift

The 5% uplift should remain, providing a housing requirement of 35,175 dwellings. This would make a significant contribution to the supply of affordable housing, would boost the supply of housing generally, and would give choice and flexibility. In my judgement, there are sufficient sites to meet this requirement, at least for the next 10 years, when Gloucester might run short without the assistance of Stroud. (In EXAM 236 Stroud has indicated it would consider Gloucester's needs as part of a review and has suggested aligning its own review with a JCS review.)

Leckhampton – traffic

I am satisfied that the proposed allocation at Leckhampton involves different considerations to the Bovis/Miller outline application and, therefore, the two can be distinguished. Although the appeal decision found that there would be severe cumulative traffic impacts resulting from the appealed development, the same would not necessarily be true of all schemes. An alternative scheme could prove to be acceptable. Whilst there appear to be land constraints to traffic mitigation strategies, a future scheme might, nonetheless, produce a mitigation package, which would reduce the impacts to a satisfactory level.

Highways England and Gloucestershire County Council Highways Authority have no objections to the allocation. They are confident there is an acceptable

solution to the A46 capacity issue and other road issues. I place significant weight on the advice of Highways England and Gloucestershire County Council.

Moreover, I have accepted the JCS modelling work for other strategic sites and it would be inconsistent of me not to accept it for Leckhampton. However, should evidence come forward from the 2013-based modelling, that evidence will further inform my final judgement on traffic impacts.

In summary, on the evidence presently before me, I accept the JCS authorities' position on traffic and confirm that I do not propose main modifications on traffic grounds.

Leckhampton – Landscape, Visual Impact, AONB, Local Green Space

Cheltenham side

For the reasons previously given in my earlier reports I confirm that it is my recommendation that no development be allocated on the red, highly sensitive areas shown on the Landscape and Visual Sensitivity plan.

The development proposed would harm visual amenity and in particular striking views of the Cotswold escarpment from within the proposed allocation and from the A46. Development should be designed to preserve as far as possible the view of Leckhampton Hill from the corner of the A46 and Kidnappers Lane.

I have concerns over the impact of the proposed development on the AONB. I have visited Leckhampton Hill on three occasions and it is apparent to me that proposed building on the areas of medium sensitivity, shown yellow on the Landscape and Visual Sensitivity plan, would bring a large mass of development closer to Leckhampton Hill, adversely impacting on views from the Hill.

I have considered the objection letters from the Cotswold Conservation Board and Natural England on the Bovis/Miller application relating to the proposed scale of overall development. Natural England makes the point that this land forms part of the setting of the AONB and contributes positively to its special qualities. I agree. The scale of development would impact significantly on views from the escarpment including important public viewpoints such as the Devil's Chimney and Cotswolds Way National Trail.

In accordance with NPPF paragraph 115, great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and AONBs, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. The scale of development proposed on the Cheltenham side of the allocation would not meet with paragraph 115. The proposed scale is too great for this sensitive location.

The quantity of proposed development should be scaled back. I therefore recommend that built development be contained within the green, less sensitive areas of the Landscape and Visual Sensitivity plan towards the north. Built

development should, however, avoid the green corridor of Hatherly Brook referenced "HB" in EXAM 121C. The areas I find acceptable for development correspond generally with the fields referenced NE, NW1, NW2, NW3 and NN in EXAM 121C.

I have considered the discussions on the need for a primary school in the area and the ability of a larger scale development to deliver such a school. However, this need would be less pressing with reduced housing and, in any event, it does not override the harm I have identified.

Local Green Space

The indicative area of Local Green Space should take in the walking loops. Therefore, I recommend that the indicative area reflect Fig 1 of EXAM 121C (also shown as Fig 1 in EXAM 121A) but excluding land to the West of the Farm Lane. The area can be refined and designated in either the emerging Cheltenham Local Plan or the emerging Neighbourhood Plan.

Tewkesbury side

I have taken account of the new planning permission for infrastructure relating to the site West of Farm Lane (EXAM 240 & 240A). However, this has not altered my opinion. In my judgement the development would be prominent in views out of the AONB and would cause significant harm to its scenic beauty. Therefore, I recommend that the land West of Farm Lane should not be allocated.

West Cheltenham Safeguarded Land

Part of this area has already been recommended as a strategic allocation and I do not propose re-visiting those discussions. It is the remainder of the area proposed for safeguarding that I have re-considered. This proposed safeguarded land makes a significant contribution to the Green Belt according to the AMEC report. Consequently, there is a very high bar to overcome in demonstrating exceptional circumstances.

However, in my judgement this bar has been reached for reasons which include the following: there would be a major benefit in Severn Trent Water removing the Hayden Sewage Works from the area, resulting in significantly improved living and working conditions; it would result in a co-ordinated development in two phases, preventing further piecemeal development in the area; it would provide a strong Green Belt boundary; there would be significant contributions to infrastructure, including schools.

Consequently, I find that exceptional circumstances exist for the release of this land from the Green Belt and, therefore, its safeguarding is sound. Furthermore, the JCS team might wish to consider exploring the possibilities of

phase one being expanded and additional housing being provided in this area during the Plan period.

Review

An early review mechanism should be built into the JCS. This could be based on the JCS team's suggestion in EXAM 247. However, I recommend that, instead of a 25% buffer, there be a 10% buffer to avoid corrective action being taken too readily. The less than 75% trigger in three consecutive years for strategic allocations seems to me to be a sound basis for review.

However, every effort should be made to align a review with other Gloucestershire authorities. This is particularly important if sites are to be brought forward South of Gloucester in Stroud, given Stroud's position (Exam 236) and their suggestion of an aligned Stroud/JCS review. The JCS team propose setting out a commitment to align reviews with other Gloucestershire authorities in accordance with their devolution note (EXAM 255). This appears to me to be a sound way forward.

Additional Strategic Sites

From the feed back on my Interim Report it appears that there may be scope for strategic allocations at Twigworth, Winnycroft, West Cheltenham and Fiddington. I note that the JCS team will carry out further work on these sites aimed at allocating them within the JCS. The JCS team will investigate further the extent of the land that might be allocated at Twigworth.

Cross Boarder Negotiations

The JCS team will work with Wychavon District Council to prepare a Memorandum of Agreement to be submitted along with the proposed main modifications. This is with a view to setting aside land at Mitton to contribute to Tewkesbury's housing supply.

The possibility of reserving additional capacity at Mitton will also be explored with Wychavon District along with an appropriate trigger mechanism for release of that land.

Stepped Trajectories

Stepped trajectories may soundly be used in the JCS implementation strategy subject to robust justification.

Elizabeth C Ord

Inspector

25 July 2016