

Community Action Team Meeting (CAT) 25 October 2017: Portchester Community School

Who was there?

Present: Cllr Woodward, Cllr Evans, Cllr Walker, Cllr Fazarkarley, Cllr Barton, Cllr Price, and Cllr Cunningham.

Residents: approximately 140

What was talked about?

Introductory presentation by Cllr Woodward focusing on the Borough's growing need for housing, the sites that were assessed for housing and the importance of infrastructure. This was followed by Richard Jolley, Director of Planning and Regulation who discussed the selection of the draft preferred sites for housing proposed in the Draft Local Plan.

Questions from the Floor

Q What difference would not having a local plan make to Portchester? Many people in this room don't feel we would be any worse off.

A For a non-technical answer you look to our boundary with Eastleigh. They receive planning applications, they have refused them, and they have gone to appeal and lost. Without a Local Plan a Local Authority has no control over what gets built. Biggest site west of Downend Road for around 700 houses would go through as well. There are 10,500 of green-field sites; any of those sites, in any order, could be developed.

Q Sustainability Report (produced by Urban Edge) has given a clear indication about priority for housing – but there are significant floors most obvious being Portchester population as 7,000. How much else is inaccurate? What is the credibility of the company who has produced this report?

A They were our advisors for the last 5 years, so they have provided us with advice that was found sound by an Independent Government Inspector. In terms of detailed comments, we welcome those. This is at the very first stage of Local Plan preparation and with comments from the consultation improvements to technical evidence can be made.

Q Regarding the 'call for sites' and the ones that have been chosen. Significant chunk of land on south-west which on Richard's working paper has gone?

A First slide highlights 10,500 green-field houses that came forward. Some of those sites were discounted and seen as not appropriate. The remainder go through another exercise, some sites will go through and other sites will fall away. It is because of the appraisal of those sites that they are not going forward.

Q Key strategic priorities document point for calls for infrastructure to be in place prior to development. We are very worried about the impact on the doctors' surgery. What work have you already done with the CCG?

A Today is the start of the consultation so this will include CCG – they are now being consulted about this. Health service is funded through general taxation and GP practices are private businesses. Statutory duty is on Fareham and Gosport CCG to provide services to meet residents' needs.

Q Welborne delay due to land procurement issues. If FBC had delivered promised homes no green-field sites would have to be built on. Why did Executive briefing paper given on 9 October prior to the Executive meeting highlight lack of leadership or ambition of FBC? Why didn't you threaten compulsory purchase earlier?

A The Welborne site will deliver 6,000 homes, however it will not deliver them in the timescale originally predicted during the examination of the Welborne Plan. It is not that we decided not to use our Compulsory Order Purchase powers; it is when the Council threatened to use these powers, the dominos started falling in terms of resolving landownership issues on this site. This resulted in the judge ordering a significant area of land on the site to be sold. This happened as a result of the Council's threat. The Council cannot force people to build a house and when, that is the way the planning system works.

Q How could members have made a fully formed judgement on 9 October when the documents were only made available now?

A Any member could have asked for the background documents prior to making a decision.

Q Natural England has already said it is a very important site for Brent Geese and Waders. I am not sure what else they need to say to you for you to take it out the plan.

A That is why in the draft local plan we have highlighted it as key issue that needs to be addressed.

Q Cllr Woodward do you represent Sarisbury Ward? How many sites are there to be developed in those areas?

A In the Draft Local Plan, there are none. There are 5 wards out of 15 wards that have no sites in the Draft Local Plan, however this was not the case in previous Local Plans where the Sarisbury area took thousands of new houses

Q Why was land at Moraunt Drive downgraded?

A There is a range of different technical studies that assess the sites. We welcome views on any of those different documents.

Q I rang the Council's Planning Department, a member of your staff told me that the Draft Local Plan gives certainty to the sites and that all the sites are needed. Indeed, you said the same on your radio interview this morning. Comments like that undermine the consultation.

A That certainly is not the case. I said there were many alternative sites. The Draft Local Plan has to be written in positive terms as if it is the actual local plan i.e. planning permission will be given provided...It is a plan that may change radically, it may not. It is being consulted upon.

Q Why does Portchester not have the same rights as Titchfield and Stubbington to preserve our strategic gap?

A Portchester has already been majorly developed over the years. The gap between Portchester and Fareham is the Cams estate and Wicor is a vast green area.

Q Why was Romsey Avenue classified as a strategic gap until this has come around?

A Romsey Avenue is countryside not a strategic gap. We only have two strategic gaps in the Borough.

Q Houses of 2 storeys and 2.5 storeys maximum. Can you clarify this in terms of future development of loft extensions etc.

A This is design guidance. In terms of scope for further development, it is only in exceptional cases that we can prevent further conversions and loft conversions. All householders have the right to permitted development. It is a very valid point as it could inform the detailed design guidance on specific sites.

Q National Planning Policy Framework states environmental circumstances should not be worsened for future generations. Do you accept that the right balance in Portchester West has been struck?

A Guidance is all about weighing up different considerations that we have to take into account. There are no easy choices in this. The Council has come up with a particular

development strategy, and if that follows through and we go into an examination in front of an independent Government Inspector. We will find out whether we have weighed up all those considerations or not, and if not the Plan will not be found sound and be adopted.

Reference was made to the Government's current consultation (Right Homes in the Right Places) and the fact that the Council will be responding to this.

Q Can building start before the plan has been agreed?

A There are two ways land can get allocated 1) through the Local Plan or 2) if someone comes in with a planning application then the Council's Planning Committee have a set time to respond. So if the Planning Committee permitted it, then yes it could. The new Local Plan will gain weight over the existing plan as it advances.

Q I am concerned that in your assessment of sites priority was given to developers who would give you a quick build?

A Planning is about land use, not land ownership - it is irrelevant who owns the site. It is whether the land has been put forward, is suitable and deliverable. Smaller sites can be expected to come forward more quickly, which is why we have a blend between small and large.

Q Why you have considered a site where the trees have been felled during nesting season and wildlife has been compromised?

A If there is no preservation order on the trees then it is a matter for the authorities, the Council can only become involved if preserved trees are felled.

Q How is it that the Officers came forward with proposals for developing good quality agricultural land, where there are Brent Geese regarding Romsey Avenue and access/traffic issues? Can you guarantee members will not give early planning permission to prevent this taking place?

A To date, access and traffic concerns have not been raised in dialogue with the Highway Authority, in terms of the principle of development with suitable mitigation works at this stage. However we welcome comments and continue to work with the Highway Authority (Hampshire County Council) about any concerns. Regarding agricultural land, increasingly the Government has given reduced weight to this, if there is a need to accommodate development then try and use poorer quality land. Brent Geese issue already covered, however re-iterate that working with Natural England necessary surveys will need to be carried out. Regarding planning consent guarantee, we cannot predetermine what the Planning Committee can and cannot do. We are not allowed to do that. If a developer puts in an application and it goes not get determined, they can appeal, which would be before the plan examination. It would be illegal to give that guarantee.

Q Can you confirm the new Plan will not be overturned in the appeal? How robust is your new plan?

A If the new Local Plan is put in place with objectively assessed housing need, I can't guarantee we will never lose a planning appeal but I can say it is more likely that we won't lose.

Q If someone puts in a planning application for west of Downend Road now and you refuse it now and they appeal it what point does Local Plan kick in?

A 2019.

Q The harsh truth is it is not you who are making the rules. I have sympathy for you. The Government make the rules. All you can do is defend their position. Perhaps someone from the Planning Inspectorate should be here to answer the questions.

Q More houses mean more cars. What happens when laws are enforced about the amount of vehicles and increasing pollution? Who has the final say on this?

A Planning authority is responsible but we have to consult other statutory bodies.

Q Regarding Land South of Romsey Avenue in the National Planning Policy Framework – economic and other benefits – seek to use areas of poorer quality agricultural land. Do you accept that the development on this land is unjustified?

A Many considerations have to be weighed up, agricultural land is not ignored it is taken into account but it does not necessarily override its potential value as housing.

Q In 2012 the PUSH South Hampshire Spatial Strategy stated that concentrating greenfield development into the new community development north of Fareham (Welborne) is the most sustainable format. Why isn't Welborne being reviewed as part of this Plan (Draft Local Plan) and why is it being treated differently?

A PUSH 2016 figure are what we are considering now in the PUSH Spatial Position Statement for this Plan. The Welborne Plan has already been to inquiry (examination) and runs to 2036. The only thing we are reviewing in relation to Welborne is the build-out rate (i.e. the year-by-year number of homes likely to be built).

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