

**SITE ALLOCATIONS DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT O&S WORKING GROUP
THURSDAY 4 AUGUST 2011 (First Meeting)
(7:00 pm to 8:20 pm)**

Present: Councillors Finnie (Lead Member), Mrs Angell, Brossard, Finch and McLean

Also Present: Councillor Harrison

In Attendance: Bev Hindle, Chief Officer: Planning and Transport
Max Baker, Head of Spatial Policy
Andrea Carr, Policy Officer (Overview and Scrutiny)

1. Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Lead Member

Councillor Finnie was appointed as Lead Member of the Working Group.

3. Site Allocations Development Plan Document – Initial Briefing Report

To commence its work, the Working Group considered an initial briefing report in respect of the Council's Site Allocations Development Plan Document (SADPD), a planning policy document that identified the Council's preferred locations for different forms of development that were required to achieve the vision and spatial objectives in the adopted Core Strategy. The SADPD supported the Council's policy of having a plan-led approach to development and infrastructure in favour of reacting to developers' proposals and one of its main functions was to allocate sites to meet the Borough's housing needs. The Working Group was invited to identify what further information it wished to consider at further meetings to enable it to submit comments for consideration by the Executive and Council in November 2011.

The Head of Spatial Policy drew Members' attention to the national planning context of the SADPD consisting of a number of changes to planning legislation through the Localism Bill which would abolish regional spatial strategies such as the South East Plan when enacted. The Working Group was advised that the Government had issued a statement to the effect that there would be a presumption in favour of sustainable development and that local planning authorities should prepare local plans on the basis that objectively assessed development needs should be met. There was currently a low construction rate and the Government sought an increase in housing development as a means to assist recovery from the recession.

The Core Strategy, which had been adopted prior to the regional strategies, had previously identified two strategic development sites: one at Binfield and the other at Warfield. The South East Plan had proposed a further 2,000 new houses over and above the number identified in the Core Strategy and although proposals would revert to the lower number of 10,780 with the abolition of regional strategies, a legal ruling had found that the South East Plan remained a material consideration in determining planning applications until its abolition. Bracknell Forest was not currently well placed

to resist granting planning permission in respect of applications for housing developments in locations other than its Preferred Site Options as we do not have a 5 year supply of housing as required by Government policy.

Progress achieved to date had featured evidence gathering which included discussions with land owners and developers to inform the preparation of a long list of possible sites. The Issues and Options stage of the SADPD also considered revisions to employment area and retail centres boundaries and found that there was currently a surplus of employment land denoted by several un-let office buildings in the Borough. Consultation had taken place relating to the development of eight 'Broad Areas' of possible extensions to existing settlements and 7,000 responses had been received. Following the Government's announcement of its intention to abolish regional strategies and give local planning authorities the responsibility to determine the correct number of houses in their locality, the Executive decided to revert to the lower housing target and to exclude four of the identified Broad Areas. Sustainability assessments of options against set criteria were utilised to shortlist the Broad Areas to four sites, namely, land at Broadmoor and TRL, Crowthorne, and land at Blue Mountain and Amen Corner North, Binfield. Although the Overview and Scrutiny Commission 'called-in' the Executive's decision to approve a Preferred Option of the SADPD for consultation, the decision was not referred back for reconsideration and consultation was pursued. Some objections to the scale of proposed development were received.

Reference was made to the Infrastructure Development Plan for DPDs which dealt with the physical, social and green infrastructure needed to support the planned growth and identified how infrastructure would be funded and when it would be provided in order to demonstrate that it was deliverable.

The Working Group was advised of the timetable for approving the remaining stages of the SADPD. A pre-submission draft would be considered by the Executive and then Council in November 2011 and the formal statutory consultation would take place for a period of six weeks starting in January 2012. The outcomes of the consultation exercise would be incorporated into a formal Submission to the Secretary of State in June 2012 for Examination in autumn 2012 and Adoption in March 2013. Although the Examination report would be binding on the Council, which would need to action any suggested changes to secure Adoption, greater flexibility could be afforded in the future as a result of the Localism Bill.

The following points arose from related questions and discussion:

- In the event that the Council did not approve the Executive's recommendation to adopt the SADPD, there was no alternative option and a new approach would need to be developed otherwise future housing developments would be planning application led. The Submission version of the SADPD would carry more weight than the present draft.
- The present was the opportune time for non-Executive Members to make a contribution to the SADPD process before the document was approved by the Executive and Council in November for progression to the next stages of Adoption.
- Reference was made to a residents' survey, the outcomes of which would be taken into account and responded to.

- The Core Strategy would be reviewed in 2012 and it was possible that this might result in a return to a single planning policy document and a housing demand assessment extending to at least 2031. All eliminated sites would be re-visited at some stage in the future when required by demand and it was anticipated that an increase in house building would occur in the next few years owing to recovery from recession and the presumption in favour of sustainable development, particularly if there was no plan in place. Wokingham Borough Council had reviewed its housing demand recently and found evidence that demand would be higher than that stated in the South East Plan.
- The reasons for discounting four of the Broad Areas varied. In the case of land at South West Sandhurst, development would be in a flood plain, exacerbate the existing linear layout of Sandhurst and be a distance from other settlements. Land at East Bracknell had been eliminated as the Crown Estate was not prepared to sell it for housing purposes at present. Land was not available at North Warfield where development would not be cohesive whilst Chavey Down was a distance from other services and its development would create an outer urban boundary which could be backfilled. The broad policy approach favoured adding new housing as an extension of existing sustainable settlements.
- In terms of procedure, the Executive was empowered to determine matters such as consultation arrangements and agreeing draft documents in order to progress DPDs. However, the Council made the final decision on whether to adopt DPDs on the recommendation of the Executive as the documents formed part of Bracknell Forest's overarching policy framework. The Preferred Site Options document had not yet been adopted by Council.
- Although the Localism Bill would not impact on the structure of the SADPD, it could affect the contents such as the weight an inspector would attach to it and transitional arrangements prior to the abolition of the South East Plan.
- The Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) would replace existing national planning policies in areas including flooding and natural habitats. Although the Framework sought to simplify policy, it was expected to create ambiguity. It reflected the Government's wish to meet demand and drive growth in favour of sustainable development. Robust policy reasons would be required to resist development. The NPPF aimed for local planning authorities to have plans for a five year housing supply in place with a 20% surplus, e.g. six year supply deliverable in 5 years. The appeal against refusal of planning permission in respect of the TRL site had been successfully defended by the Council as it could demonstrate at that time that it had plans for a five year housing supply involving other preferred sites. Bracknell Forest would not currently be able to defend such a position as an adopted plan was not in place.
- The nature of communities could dictate appropriate layouts, densities and house types for their areas. Further work on the illustrative concept plans was being undertaken and would be shared with the Working Group at its next meeting (**Action: Max Baker**).
- It was suggested that planning policy data and transport models should be shared with neighbouring authorities to facilitate reciprocal understanding of neighbouring development and infrastructure issues and to take account of the impact they may have on models. Officers confirmed this was taking place and would continue.

- Current transport models were based on existing commercial and residential development and the impact of a significant increase in development would be mapped and tested to ensure that junctions operated effectively and gridlock was avoided. Behavioural aspects such as utilising alternative methods of transport could be promoted to ease congestion. However, the greatest pressure on the Bracknell Forest's highway network was created by growth beyond Bracknell Forest and outside motorists travelling through the Borough.
- Network Rail was consulting on a possible rail link from the proposed rail hub at Heathrow Terminal 5 to Staines and the Local Enterprise Partnership supported extending improved rail links across the Thames Valley. Unfortunately, there was limited scope to improve the rail network serving Bracknell owing to the constraints of existing level crossings and bridges.
- Reference was made to a White Paper concerning market economics which suggested that housing delivered economic growth and stated that residential development should be provided to meet demand leaving the housing market to find its own equilibrium.

4. **Future Meetings and Activities**

As the draft SADPD would be prepared by mid to late September, it was agreed that the Working Group would review the document at its next meeting, in late September / early October, to enable its comments to be submitted to the Executive for its consideration at its meeting to be held on 18 October. Members would be given advanced notice of the proposed contents of the document to allow them to indicate any areas of particular interest they wished to concentrate on (**Action: Max Baker**).

It was suggested that the Working Group also consider the SADPD consultation process at its next meeting with a view to establishing how consultation could be made more meaningful. Facilitating the public's access to consultation and understanding of proposals, and minimising the circulation of misinformation, were identified as possible priorities for future consultations. More meaningful consultation methods were also sought by the Local Development Framework Steering Group. Officers were available to provide information to Councillors where required although they had limited resources to correct misinformation circulating amongst the public.

Inviting Members of the Wards affected by the four Preferred Site Options, who were not existing Members of the Working Group, to its next meeting was suggested as a means of keeping them informed of progress.

5. **Any Other Business**

The Chief Officer: Planning and Transport explained that the purpose of the newly published Executive Forward Plan item concerning the SADPD was to seek approval to consult on additional sites should the need arise owing to changes throughout the process.

**SITE ALLOCATIONS DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT O&S WORKING GROUP
WEDNESDAY 5 OCTOBER 2011 (Second Meeting)
(7:30 pm to 8:55 pm)**

Present: Councillors Finnie (Lead Member) and Brossard

Also Present: Councillors Leake and Wade

In Attendance: Bev Hindle, Chief Officer: Planning and Transport
Max Baker, Head of Spatial Policy
Andrea Carr, Policy Officer (Overview and Scrutiny)

6. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs Angell, Finch, Harrison and McLean.

7. Notes

The notes of the last meeting of the Working Group were agreed. There were no matters arising.

8. Preliminary Site Allocations Draft Submission Document

The Working Group considered the above Draft Submission Document which was the final draft designed to deliver sustainable development in the Borough most successfully in line with the adopted Core Strategy. The Head of Spatial Policy introduced the Document, which was similar in structure to the Preferred Site Options Document, and drew Members' attention to revisions to the previous version which were shown by highlighting new text in bold type and scoring through deleted text.

Changes to the section concerning new urban extensions to the edge of existing settlements consisted of the rewording of Policy SA4 regarding land at Broadmoor, Crowthorne. The final number of proposed residential units would be approximately 270, subject to further consideration of the impact on the heritage assets of the site. Some minor changes had been made to the illustrative concept plan for the phasing of the development of land at Broadmoor.

Peacock Bungalow, Peacock Lane, Binfield, had been deleted from Policy SA1, which addressed previously developed land in defined settlements, as planning permission had now been granted in respect of this site.

Some changes had been made to Policy SA5 and Map 5 relating to land at the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL), Crowthorne, where 1,000 residential units were proposed. Features of the development would include a multi-functional community hub, care home, school, an open area, flood water storage and a 50m deep green buffer between the site and Nine Mile Ride.

Policy SA6 and Map 7, the illustrative concept plan for Amen Corner North, Binfield, had been superseded. The proposed development now arced further to the north

than previously with residential units lying below the western ridgeline and increasing in density towards the east of the site.

400 residential units, including affordable housing, were proposed for land at Blue Mountain, Binfield. A multi-functional community hub, educational facilities, open space and sports facilities would be included. Land forming part of Newbold College is a heritage asset with Registered Historic Park and Garden status and would be retained as a buffer between Bracknell and Binfield. Open space requirements were detailed in the related concept plan.

Limited change had occurred in relation to the site at Amen Corner South, Binfield. 725 residential units were proposed and a neighbourhood centre was sought. The amount of proposed retail space had reduced and pre-application discussions were underway.

The concept plans relating to Core Strategy sites did not contain as much detail as other sites as they constituted agreed Council policy.

A Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) was being developed in relation to land at Warfield as a master plan had not been included in the submission SPD and it was expected that it would be adopted in early 2012. Further consultation in respect of the site would take place in future months. Employment opportunities, a neighbourhood centre and schools etc would be included.

Other changes to the Draft Submission Document were the deletion of the phasing and development policy and the addition of a new Section 7 to cover Delivery, Phasing and Implementation.

The following points arose from related questions and discussion:

- There was a policy to retain the Borough's enterprise centre, on the existing site at Crowthorne if required. However it is recognised that an alternative site nearer Bracknell town centre might be preferable. In response to a Member's concern that the Old Wokingham Road and possibly the main route through the site could become congested owing to parked cars, the Working Group was advised that the facilities would be served with a looped access road and that the concept plan demonstrated commercial viability.
- Negotiations had not taken place with Wokingham Borough Council regarding land use at the Amen Corner site as all of the proposed housing allocation fell within Bracknell Forest. However, related transport issues were under discussion. It was requested that the Borough boundary be clearly depicted on related maps (**Action: Max Baker**).
- Much text had been deleted from the sections relating to Bracknell town centre and Crowthorne centre as it was not required in a submission version, the issues had already been resolved or the information was out of date.
- The document did not specifically address conservation areas as there was a separate statutory process for dealing with them. Some heritage areas forming part of proposed development sites were already afforded protection and the merits of protecting areas of special character by giving them conservation area status are covered by a separate legislative process.

- It was agreed that a note be added to the document to the effect that the provision of allotments would be considered as part of larger sites (**Action: Max Baker**).
- A Member sought the re-provision of a Guide hut which was expected to be demolished as part of the Broadmoor site redevelopment. However, this issue would be covered by the general multi-functional community hub policy. Officers undertook to establish whether the parcel of land on which the Guide hut was currently sited would be redeveloped as part of this scheme (**Action: Max Baker**). In-kind re-provision of lost Open Space of Public Value would be provided at Cricket Field Grove in addition to on-site at Broadmoor.
- A Member expressed the view that, although issues around other development sites at Binfield could probably be overcome, all relevant Ward Councillors, Binfield Parish Council and many local residents were opposed to the development of land at Blue Mountain as there had been a past commitment to retain the land as open space when Temple Park had been developed. Officers explained that there was a subsequent need to re-consider all possible development sites to meet future housing needs. The site had been put forward by the landowner and the Council had a duty and responsibility to consider it as part of the process of identifying the most suitable development sites. The land had initially been utilised as a buffer between Quelm Park and Binfield and efforts would be made to retain its gap function by siting any future housing to the south of the site and positioning non-residential elements to the north. Categorising the land as Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) afforded it greater protection than merely leaving it as general open space.
- Warfield and Binfield Ward Councillors were proposing to hold a meeting with officers prior to the Executive meeting on 15 November in order to explore the process for selecting preferred development sites. Although responses to the Draft Submission Document would primarily be fed back through the Overview and Scrutiny process, one Member advised that he intended to submit a list of his own points directly to the Executive.

9. **Summary of Key Issues Raised to Preferred Option Consultation and the Council's Response**

The Working Group considered the above item which summarised the main issues to the Preferred Option Consultation and the Council's response thereto.

As the development of land at TRL would have an impact on the residents of the Parish of Wokingham Without, which fell in the Wokingham Borough Council area, a Member stressed the importance of consulting adjoining Parish Councils and asked that the document be expanded to include a statement that all relevant parties had been consulted (**Action: Max Baker**). Any representations on soundness would be submitted to the Inspector as part of the process.

Officers were thanked for the hard work they had invested in progressing the site allocations process and for the useful site visit for Members held on 1 October.

10. **Future Meetings and Activities**

An article relating to the Draft Submission Document had been published in the Crowthorne Eye magazine and Members requested that updates be published in any available publications, including Town and Country, to notify as many residents as possible of the proposals and consultation (**Action: Max Baker**).

Members were invited to submit any further comments or questions concerning the Draft Submission Document to officers directly.

11. **Additional Information Following Meeting on 4 August 2011 on the Site Allocations Development Plan Document**

Further to a request made by the Working Group at its last meeting, a paper explaining the rationale for selecting urban extensions had been circulated and was discussed at the meeting.

Members noted the sustainability, accessibility, transport and other reasons behind the short listing of four preferred option sites from the eight broad areas. Proposed developments at Amen Corner and Blue Mountain had been scaled back from the original concepts. Although land north of Warfield had been included in the Core Strategy, it had subsequently been dismissed owing to ownership issues. Crown Estate land at East Bracknell, which would have been a favourable development site, was withdrawn from sale and also therefore dismissed. However, development of adjoining land at Bog Lane could progress as it was not part of the Crown Estate. Land at South West Sandhurst had been dismissed owing to constraints including linear development, a flood plain and a power corridor.

The following points arose from related questions and discussion:

- A Member felt that the Draft Submission Document did not sufficiently explain why land at Broadmoor was now considered to be a more favourable development site than in the past. Officers advised that the site was undergoing considerable change and now comprised a more favourable development package with numerous factors weighing in its favour including assisting in the delivery of a new secure hospital facility on the site. However, the heritage aspects of the site required sensitive treatment and the existing Listed Hospital Building could not be used for residential purposes. The provision of bespoke Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space would be required to mitigate the impact of development upon the Thames Basins Heath Special Protection Area, which required a 400m deep buffer.
- The policy to define buffers / strategic gaps had been included with the South East Plan which was now being withdrawn. Inspectors had felt that the policy was being used to avoid development. It was suggested that the strategic gap referred to in paragraph 3.8 between Crowthorne and Wokingham was incorrect as it referred to Wokingham Without and should possibly read between Crowthorne and Bracknell, officers undertook to re-word the paragraph (**Action: Max Baker**).
- Although paragraph 3.9 referred to a lack of information in respect of education facilities, education implications of the development of the site had subsequently been defined.
- The officers were requested to re-consider the wording of: paragraph 4.2 concerning its potential for redevelopment, including changing a reference from

North East Crowthorne/TRL to north east of Crowthorne; and paragraph 4.5 regarding the relation between Bracknell town centre regeneration and site allocation (**Action: Max Baker**).

12. **Any Other Business**

There was no other business.