



STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Agenda Item

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Members of the Public's Questions to the Chair of Environment Committee

Questions sent in by Peter Gilbert and Tim Knight on behalf of Berkeley and Sharpness Residents Action Group (BaSRAG)

1. *A thorough and robust evidence base is needed to support this latest version of the Local Plan. We understand, however, that some of the key assessments will not be completed until just before the final plan is published in July 2020. How can it be considered a fair, open and sound process when important evidence isn't produced until the revision of the Local Plan is in its final stages?*

Reply

Producing a Local Plan is a long and complex process, where evidence on a wide variety of subjects is compiled, published, updated and informs the various stages of Local Plan preparation. We are working with our neighbouring authorities to compile a comprehensive evidence base for Gloucestershire, despite the fact that not all authorities are in the same stage of plan preparation as we are. Consequently, the evidence is becoming available on a staged basis and we are publishing it when we receive it and to coincide with the informal stages of consultation (known as Regulation 18 consultation).

Each consultation document includes an update on our background studies and what we intend to complete in the future. Some evidence can only be produced once the Council has confirmed its Draft Plan, for example carrying out a whole Plan viability assessment and completing an Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

A great deal of evidence has now been compiled and there remains sufficient time for the remaining evidence to be compiled, before the Plan is published for formal consultation responses (Regulation 19 stage), expected to be September 2020.

2. *According to The International Garden Cities Institute, one of the key principles of the Garden City movement is that there should be:*

A strong local jobs offer in the Garden City itself or within easy commuting distance.'

However, employment projections for the Sharpness and Berkeley area in the latest version of the local plan and in developer promotional material appear to be based on a series of vague assumptions. In the absence of an employment and economic study (which, we understand, won't be published until next year), how can the council say, with any confidence, that there will be local employment opportunities for the 3,000 to 5,000 households in the proposed 'Garden Settlement' – especially as it has stated in previous reports that there is limited market demand for employment development in the area?

Reply

A strong local job offer should be part of any Garden Village proposal and the role of the local planning process is to provide the appropriate condition and opportunity for business and industry to provide employment in these types of developments by the allocation of land. The Draft Plan allocates land for 10 additional hectares of employment land at Sharpness to meet the needs of the community and to contribute to the wider needs of the District. The Council will continue to investigate the potential for economic growth in this location over the following months before the Local Plan is finalised for submission. This will look at the exact mix of offices, light industrial and warehousing needed in this location.

Work on developing an economic and employment strategy for Gloucestershire is ongoing. The Local Enterprise Partnership GFirstLEP is in the process of producing a Local Industrial Strategy. Working with other Gloucestershire councils, the District Council has commissioned an Economic Needs Assessment to explore options for a future economic growth strategy for Gloucestershire and what this will mean in terms of employment policies and sites. However, based upon past take up rates, there is a need to provide at least 50 ha of additional employment land (offices, light industrial and warehousing) (2020 to 2040) in the District. The proposed strategic sites within the Berkeley cluster currently plan for 22 ha adjoining existing successful business parks such as the Severn Distribution Park. The Berkeley Green UTC Science and Technology Park is within this area, which, in partnership with GfirstLEP, is planning to become a major centre for high quality education, research and business innovation (including green technologies).

There are opportunities for the Garden Village to develop a relationship with these employment opportunities. However, it is important that the Council and promoters of the Garden Settlements demonstrate at the Local Plan examination that sufficient employment is co-located with housing to provide the best opportunity for greater self containment and shorter journeys to work by transport other than the private car.

3. The “emerging growth strategy” summarised in section 4.2 of the Emerging Strategy Paper correctly described itself as a ‘hybrid’. The Council in effect created a ‘fifth’ strategy option. The other four Options were all subject to a comparative Sustainability Appraisal (SA). The SA did not provide enough evidence to conclude whether the hybrid option is more (or less) sustainable than the other options or is sustainable ‘in its own right’. The hybrid incorporates elements of other options but will have different sustainability outcomes itself. Why has this option been taken forward in the absence of a comparative SA?

Reply

The hybrid strategy option was taken forward as a result of a comparative SA: the question is therefore incorrect in its assumptions.

Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is a tool used to appraise planning policy documents in order to promote sustainable development. Social, environmental and economic aspects are all taken into consideration. Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is a compulsory requirement under the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act and the 2001/42/EEC European Directive. SA is an iterative process and produced at each stage of the plan making process.

The SA Report, produced by consultants in November 2018 to accompany the Emerging Strategy document, set out in Chapter 3 Table 1 (page 41) the four growth options and how they had been tested:

- Option 1: Concentrated development - 5,550 dwellings and 30ha B class employment.
- Option 2: Wider distribution - 5,520 dwellings and 30ha B class employment.
- Option 3: Dispersal - 5,695 dwellings and 40ha B class employment.
- Option 4: Growth Point - 6,010 dwellings and 40ha B class employment.

The SA summarised the sustainability effects identified for the four future growth strategy options. The Report then stated in paragraph 4.33 “it may be worth considering a hybrid option which most resembles Option 1: Concentrated development, but perhaps including growth at one or two growth points and/or one or two of the smaller towns and villages as well.”

As a result of this recommendation, the Council generated a hybrid option which became the development strategy in the Emerging Strategy document. Consequently, the SA Report then went on to appraise the hybrid option - Table 6.4 at page 95 gives a summary of the SA effects for the emerging hybrid strategy in the same format as for the four options so as to be directly comparable.

Further, at Paragraph 6.162, the SA states:

“As part of this work a recommendation was made to the Council that the growth strategy option which would result in a more concentrated pattern of development had been appraised as performing slightly better overall than the other options considered in terms of potential positive effects as well as having slightly fewer negative effects. Furthermore it was recommended that a hybrid option which resembles the concentrated development option but also includes growth at the one or two growth points and/or one or two of the smaller towns and larger villages as well might be taken forward.”

The Council’s amended strategy in the Draft Plan will now be further tested as part of the SA Report accompanying the Draft Plan and will be available to view during public consultation.