



# STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Council Offices • Ebley Mill • Ebley Wharf • Stroud • GL5 4UB  
Telephone 01453 766321 • Facsimile 01453 750932  
www.stroud.gov.uk

Agenda  
Item

**5**

## Public Questions to Council.

### Questions from Neil Leighton on behalf of the Berkeley and Sharpness Residents' Action Group (BaSRAG)

1. On p179 of the Local Plan Review – Pre-submission Draft Plan document, the council says:

*'The development (PS36) will deliver a new railway station on the Sharpness branch line and provide contributions to support a regular passenger service to Cam & Dursley and Gloucester...'*

Is the council therefore *guaranteeing* a new railway station and rail services will be delivered as part of the first phase of the 'Sharpness New Settlement'?

If a new station and rail services are guaranteed, then please will the council direct us to the evidence which shows this part of the plan is viable and also deliverable in the first phase of the development.

If this evidence has not yet been published, please can the council assure us that it will be available to the public at the start of the next consultation round.

### Reply

The delivery of a new railway station and the introduction of passenger services is an exciting part of the sustainable transport strategy for Sharpness new settlement. It is a requirement of the site set out in the Draft Local Plan and the deliverability of the proposals will be subject to scrutiny at the Local Plan examination.

Work on these proposals is ongoing and the promoters have put together a favourable outline business case which forms part of the District Council's bid to Government's Restoring your Railway Fund, supported by our local MP Siobhan Baillie. The purpose of the bid is to receive funding and support to develop this outline business case into a fully compliant ("Green Book") Strategic Business Case, exploring detailed costs and governance structures. This would be used to secure wider funding for the project.

Whilst the proposals are not finalised and therefore cannot be guaranteed at this stage, the evidence collected to date demonstrates that the project is technically feasible, that Sharpness services could be fed into the timetable on the mainline around the Cross-Country Express and stopping services and that forecast demand would compare favourably with other branchline services in operation. This information will be made available with the Local Plan at the Pre-Submission consultation stage at the end of May 2021.

The promoters of the railway include the Vale of Berkeley Railway Trust, a registered charity which not only has the ability to call on monetary support and benefits in kind through its network of supporters, but has the technical ability to operate a pilot service, at a slow speed, at an early stage in the development of the site. The potential tourism market of the rail proposals means that demand is likely to be broader than a purely resident based service and will spread usage beyond the normal times.

The promoter of Sharpness new settlement is proposing a first hourly service to Gloucester commencing in 2029 with a second train provided by 2035 and will prepare viability assessments for scrutiny by the Local Plan Inspector to show how the service will be supported in the early years.

2. If the delivery of a new railway station and rail service are not guaranteed at this point, will the council amend the plan and consultation documents to show that, at this stage, they are a possibility rather than a certainty?

### **Reply**

Nothing within the Draft Local Plan can be guaranteed at this stage. The test that has to be passed is whether proposals are aspirational but deliverable and that there is a reasonable prospect of development coming forward within the Plan time periods. The proper approach is to set out the Plan's proposals and to seek to demonstrate their deliverability, to the appropriate level, at examination.

The evidence to date demonstrates that these proposals are aspirational and should be deliverable, but further detailed work needs to be completed. This evidence will be scrutinised at the public examination which will take place from the end of 2021 and through 2022.

3. The council and developers promise PS36 will be a sustainable development. This is a relatively remote site with an inadequate public transport infrastructure. A new rail link is therefore vital to a plan which will bring thousands of new people – and cars – to the area. If the rail link can't be delivered, how viable is the overall plan for the Sharpness New Settlement?

### **Reply**

The Sharpness new settlement site actually performs relatively well against other sites in terms of proximity to local services and facilities. Berkeley is a Tier 2 historic town with many of the services required in relatively close proximity to the proposed new settlement site. The new settlement would provide many of the other essential services and facilities to minimise the need to travel beyond the immediate area for day to day needs. However, a development of this size would certainly require a step change in sustainable transport infrastructure to minimise trips by the private car.

The Local Plan policy requires the provision of bus and coach services and active travel measures as part of the overall sustainable transport package. If the Local Plan Inspector were to consider the railway proposals a possibility and not a certainty, they would seek assurances that other sustainable forms of transport would be delivered at Sharpness from an early stage. The site promoters have set out proposals for the provision of bus and demand responsive coach services in their transport work which will be available at the Pre-submission public consultation stage and their deliverability will be scrutinised at examination.



**Questions from Sue Leleu on behalf of Wisloe Action Group (WAG)**

1. Independent professional assessment has shown PS37 (Wisloe) to be less sustainable, require more infrastructure expenditure and contravenes more planning guidelines and Stroud policies than two other large developments proposed at Whitminster (PGP1) and Moreton Valence Hardwicke (PGP2), which were recently consulted upon. PS37 (Wisloe) also has virtually no support from local residents (99% against). Does the council support the motion that an independent comparative assessment be urgently undertaken of proposed sites PS37, PGP1 and PGP2 to determine a definitive recommendation based on factual site specific evidence?

**Reply**

Under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, sustainability appraisal (SA) is mandatory for local plans as is the requirement to conduct an environmental assessment in accordance with the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive. The Stroud Local Plan Review has integrated SA into the process since the start in 2017. The SA has been produced independently by planning consultants and subject to public scrutiny since 2017. The Local Plan is underpinned by this SA and this will be the legally required SA evidence that the Local Plan Inspector considers at examination. Other parties may commission their own studies and make comments on the Council's SA at Pre-Submission stage. The Local Plan Inspector will consider all of this evidence at the examination.

All policies and sites have been assessed against SA objectives through the review process. Using the SA framework, PS37 (Wisloe) performs well and better than many of the other strategic sites set out in the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan and better than the two strategic alternatives at Whitminster and Moreton Valence considered at the Additional Housing Options stage in 2020. The site particularly benefits from its location relative to sustainable transport opportunities, including proximity to Cam & Dursley railway station, existing and proposed active travel walking and cycling routes and access to services and facilities at neighbouring settlements. The policy for the site will also require improvements to all of these, including completing the link between the Uley-Dursley-Cam Greenway and the Sustrans route 41 at Slimbridge. As the biggest source of carbon emissions is from transport, Wisloe provides a significant opportunity to help meet the District's CN 2030 commitments by reducing the need to travel by private car.

Proposals for significant growth, particularly new settlements, are rarely popular with existing nearby communities. Should alternatives such as at Whitminster or Moreton Valence be included within the Draft Local Plan they would also undoubtedly be unpopular with local residents. However, the Council's role is to meet national Government's growth requirements and to assess the most sustainable locations to accommodate that growth. The SA demonstrates that Wisloe is a more sustainable location than alternatives proposed through the Local Plan process.