



Winchester District
Local Plan Part 2
Development Management
& Site Allocations

Further Statement for
Examination in Public:-
Land at Texas Drive
Oliver's Battery

On behalf of
Weatherstone Properties Group
(Ref No:- 50153)

June 2016

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This paper follows extensive previous Local Plan representations promoting the subject site, including expert landscape and sustainability consultancy inputs. More recently, a planning assessment report by Magenta Planning Limited and Pegasus Planning Group was submitted in December 2015, including a housing land supply position report by the latter. It also follows previous detailed engagement with the Council's Planning and Housing Officers, including a number of pre-application meetings that were held during 2013.
- 1.2 It is prepared on behalf of Weatherstone Properties Limited, who are the freehold owners of the land. As requested, it focuses directly upon the Inspector's questions under Matter 14, as applied to Policy WIN 1 (Winchester Town) and how the plan needs to be changed to comply with the tests of soundness.

2.0 The Subject Site

- 2.1 The subject site, being promoted as a proposed allocation, is located on land at Texas Drive in Oliver's Battery, Winchester, approximately 3 miles south of Winchester City Centre; a location plan is appended. The site extends to approximately 18 hectares and enjoys direct access from the adjoining road network.
- 2.2 A public footpath runs along the northern boundary of the site, adjacent to existing residential properties, and a bridle way runs along the eastern boundary of the site. The Yew Hill Butterfly Reserve is located within the southern tip of the site. Winchester railway station is located approximately 3.5 kilometres to the north-east, with Eastleigh station also in close proximity to the south.

3.0 The Inspector's Questions (Policies WIN 1-4; Matter 14)

- 3.1 Of the two questions posed by the Inspector, the first is the most relevant to the issue of considering the land at Olivers Battery, with reference to Policy WIN 1 – Winchester Town.

ie. i) Are the policies and proposals for growth and change in this area appropriate and justified, including in relation to the NPPF/PPG and in terms of environmental, economic and social impacts?
- 3.2 Other participants at the EIP are challenging the Local Planning Authority on the issue of its five year land supply position, and in particular, its over reliance on the quantum of housing to be delivered by the Barton's Farm and North Whiteley developments. It is known, for example, that the former has suffered from protracted land ownership disputes. As referenced in the introduction, Magenta Planning Ltd have previously commissioned Pegasus Planning Group to undertake a study on this matter. Their work concluded that the Council have failed to provide an up to date assessment of the five year housing land supply as part of their emerging evidence base and that, as a consequence, they are required to identify increased allocations of land that is available and deliverable within the short term, to meet current housing needs. They also contend that the Authority has a poor track record in terms of housing delivery and as such they need to increase their required buffer figure to 20% (rather than 5%).

3.3 In the event that this is proven to be the case, additional allocations will be needed within the Local Plan in order to make it 'sound' and the subject site is a prime candidate for consideration, since it will deliver sustainable development against all three of its dimensions (social; economic and environmental). These attributes are summarised below:-

- The site is well located in terms of its proximity to public transport links (both with the rail network and good local bus routes).
- Pre-application discussions with the County Highway Authority have indicated that any development proposals could include an improvement to Stagecoach service No2 as a sustainable transport benefit facilitated by bringing the site forward. Improvements to other local junctions could also be included.
- Given the site's accessibility and linkage to the local area, it has the potential to serve as a catalyst to economic growth in Oliver's Battery and Winchester.
- There are good and wide ranging educational and healthcare facilities available within the local area. A local commercial area is also located on Oliver's Battery Road South, some 600 metres to the north. There are a number of sports and leisure facilities within an 8 kilometre radius of the site.
- This combination of sustainable transport options and local amenities highlights the subject site's connectivity and positive attributes towards achieving a sustainable development on the land.
- Environmentally, the site has distinct individual character advantages over other competing sites, as previously acknowledged by Officers in dialogue with them, in that it has the ability to incorporate generous areas of open space (circa 50% of the overall site area) and retention/enhancement of the Yew Hill Butterfly Reserve, together with other bio-diversity benefits, thereby protecting its natural setting.
- It is also intended for the masterplan to incorporate the highest standards of sustainable design and construction, including the most appropriate renewable energy technologies.

3.4 Disappointingly, despite the extensive representations and initial design work on a potential masterplan, there has been no commentary or assessment in return from Officers. In the context of the above merits and the objectively assessed housing needs of the District, it is considered that the Council, by not recognising the opportunities provided by the subject site, are failing in their duty to deliver a plan that is consistent with national policy, with its presumption in favour of sustainable development and its emphasis upon significantly boosting the housing supply.

3.5 It is also noted that the Council are part of 'Partnership for Urban South Hampshire' (PUSH); this is a partnership of a number of South Hampshire Authorities and the Isle of Wight working together to support the sustainable economic growth of the sub-region and to facilitate the strategic planning functions necessary to support such growth. Whilst PUSH has no statutory powers it works collaboratively with the Solent Local Enterprise Partnership (Solent LEP) to deliver its distinct but complementary roles and objectives. It also works in partnership with

Job Centre Plus; the Environment Agency; the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA) and local private sector businesses.

- 3.6 The strategy for PUSH envisages 55,000 new homes to be built by 2026, and seeks an outcome of delivering major housing and mixed use development schemes, including urban extensions and recognising the need for sustainable communities. In the context of this overarching strategy for the sub-region, it is surprising that a more wide ranging and positive approach, seeking new opportunities for sustainable development to meet the needs for the Winchester area, has not been embarked upon.
- 3.7 Rather, by not responding on the merits of the subject site, the Council has adopted a defensive and negative position, relying heavily on other established sites that already have planning permission, but with no guarantee of the delivery rates which the Council are assuming. This runs contrary to the positive plan-making principles outlined in the NPPF.
- 3.8 Despite the growing pressures, the Council has also demonstrated a reluctance to review the merits of the local gap designation (Winchester/Compton Street Settlement Gap) within which the subject site falls. Previous representations (including expert landscape assessments) have demonstrated that the subject site could be released from this designation without any harm to its role in preventing the coalescence of settlements (the nearest settlement being the scattered linear village of Compton Down located some 1 kilometre to the south).
- 3.9 The proposed masterplan principles work with the grain of the existing natural landform and vegetation, incorporating the recommendations by ACD Landscape Architects. This will ensure that there would be no visual impact from the north of Compton Down and that the development will be designed around the important existing landscape features, including hedgerows, trees and tumuli. The proposed development would be visually self-contained, forming a logical and natural extension of the existing settlement, with no harmful impact to visual or landscape character.
- 3.10 Notwithstanding the merits of local gap policy generally, about which there has been much recent debate, in this particular case the potential development site could be released from the designation without physically or visually diminishing its strategic purpose. PUSH cover this issue in their strategic policy framework for gaps (December 2008). In setting out the criteria for the designation of gaps, it states, inter-alia that:- *'in defining the extent of a gap, no more land than is necessary to prevent the coalescence of settlements should be included having regard to maintaining their physical and visual separation.'* It also frames its policies in a flexible way which does not necessarily preclude development from taking place within them. In our opinion, given the individual characteristics of the subject site and the proposed sensitive siting of dwellings within their landscape setting, the benefits of providing new homes, as a sustainable urban extension, would far outweigh any harm caused to gap policy. A potential allocation could therefore in tandem seek to adjust the boundaries of the gap designation, rather than removing it, following the extent of the developable areas as identified in the master-planning work that has been undertaken.
- 3.11 It is instructive that such an adjustment to the local gap and settlement boundary to accommodate the development of the subject site would still sit comfortably with the aims and objectives of Policy WIN 1, as follows:-
 - i) there would be no impact upon the special character of Winchester Town or its setting

- ii) the proposals would provide for a range of housing, including affordable housing, to meet local needs
- iii) the development would help to re-inforce and be complementary to the Council's objectives for sustainable economic growth, as well as creating investment and construction jobs in its own right.
- iv) the development has the potential to include sustainable transport options such as improvements to the local bus services
- v) the development would contribute towards reducing carbon emissions by incorporating the most appropriate sources of renewable energy solutions
- vi) the incorporation of significant open space and bio-diversity benefits, would create an attractive green setting for the new development, which would not only meet open space provision for the prospective residents but would also help to address other existing local shortfalls.

4.0 **Conclusion and Recommendation**

- 4.1 For all of these reasons, together with the findings of previous extensive representations, we do not consider that the Council's current policy approach to the Winchester area is appropriate or justified against the context of the NPPF. Rather, we contend that it is a negative and defensive approach that is preventing sustainable options for development from being properly explored and delivered.
- 4.2 This could, at least in part, be rectified by the allocation of the land at Olivers Battery for housing, which is available now and deliverable in all respects; offers a sustainable location for development; has the potential to make a valuable contribution to the creation of sustainable mixed communities; and provides excellent prospects for housing to be delivered on the land within 5 years. This would go hand in hand with an amendment to extend the identified settlement boundary to include the subject site and to adjust the boundaries of the local gap accordingly.
- 4.3 A residential allocation at the subject site would provide a logical and sustainable extension of the existing settlement. The masterplan work to date has also demonstrated that a scheme could be developed that would have limited impact on the landscape, which to a large degree would be mitigated by the disposition and arrangement of generous public open space associated with the new housing.
- 4.4 Furthermore, it would help to ensure that a more robust and deliverable housing strategy is delivered and assist towards providing the Council with a rolling 5 year supply of sites as required by the Framework (contributing approximately 250 dwellings with 40% affordable housing)
- 4.5 The Inspector is therefore respectfully requested to recommend a main modification to the plan to allocate the site for housing accordingly.