



PORTFOLIO HOLDER DECISION NOTICE

INDIVIDUAL DECISION BY THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

TOPIC – CONSULTATIONS BY FAREHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – PUBLICATION VERSIONS OF LOCAL PLAN PART 2: DEVELOPMENT SITES AND POLICIES, AND LOCAL PLAN PART 3: THE WELBORNE PLAN

PROCEDURAL INFORMATION

The Access to Information Procedure Rules – Part 4, Section 22 of the Council's Constitution provides for a decision to be made by an individual member of Cabinet.

In accordance with the Procedure Rules, the Chief Operating Officer, the Chief Executive and the Chief Finance Officer are consulted together with Chairman and Vice Chairman of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee and any other relevant overview and scrutiny committee. In addition, all Members are notified.

If five or more Members from those informed so request, the Leader may require the matter to be referred to Cabinet for determination.

Contact Officers:

Case Officer: Steve Opacic, Tel: 01962 848101,
Email: sopacic@winchester.gov.uk;

Democratic Services Officer: Nancy Graham, Tel: 01962 848 235,
Email: ngraham@winchester.gov.uk

SUMMARY

This draft decision notice sets out the recommended response to Fareham Borough Council's (FBC) consultations on the 'publication' versions of its Local Plan Part 2: Development Sites and Policies, and Local Plan Part 3: The Welborne Plan. Both of the consultations close on 11 April 2014.

The Local Plan Part 2: Development Sites and Policies sets out detailed site allocations and development management policies reflecting the strategy of the Fareham Borough Core Strategy. It is recommended that the City Council comments in general support of the Fareham Local Plan Part 2.

The Welborne Plan sets the policy and delivery framework for the development of the new community (previously known as the North of Fareham Strategic Development Area) over the period to 2036. Respondents to this stage of the Plan need to indicate whether they consider the Plan to be 'sound' and set out any

changes they think should be made to make it sound. They are also requested to indicate whether they would wish to appear at the public examination of the Plan.

The key issues which it is recommended that officers submit representations on are summarised as:

- Welborne and its access arrangements should be 'southwards-facing'. Policies WEL2, WEL23 and WEL25 are not sound unless modified to achieve this and to refer to the various transport improvements that are likely to be required.
- The commitment to retain settlement buffers is welcomed, but policy WEL5 is unsound as the requirement for a 50m buffer to the north of Welborne does not reflect landscape evidence on visual sensitivity and should be larger.
- The proposed location of the secondary school playing fields within the Knowle triangle is not sound (policies WEL3 and WEL16) or deliverable as it relates to land outside the Plan area and will not accord with the Winchester District Local Plan Part 1 policy (SH4) on retention of the area's open and undeveloped rural character.
- Policy WEL30 is unsound as it makes inadequate provision for SANGS. All of the Knowle triangle should be proposed for such a use, to be funded by the development, to help offset the shortfall and to secure the requirements of the Winchester District Local Plan Part 1 (policy SH4).
- The lack of specific requirements for off-site pedestrian and cycle links, particularly between Welborne and the former Meon Valley railway line makes policies WEL28 and WEL32 unsound.
- The proposed phasing arrangements (policy WEL41) are unsound as they are not adequately justified in terms of the location of the early phases and are not robust enough to ensure key infrastructure is delivered when required.

DECISION

That officers submit formal responses to the consultations by Fareham Borough Council based on the comments set out in the sections below and summarised above.

REASON FOR THE DECISION AND OTHER ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

Local Plan Part 2: Development Sites and Policies

The Local Plan Part 2 is one of three documents within the Fareham Local Plan, which also includes the Local Plan Part 1: Core Strategy (adopted in August, 2011), and Local Plan Part 3: The Welborne Plan, which is being prepared alongside Part 2. The Plan sets out the Council's approach to managing and delivering development identified in the Core Strategy for the Borough to 2026, except for the area covered by The Welborne Plan. It will replace all remaining saved policies in the Fareham Borough Local Plan.

The Local Plan Part 2 reviews and carries forward as necessary the policies from the existing Fareham Borough Local Plan Review (2000). Setting aside the Welborne development (see below), the Plan does not involve significant changes or new development allocations in the area adjoining or affecting Winchester District. It maintains the application of countryside policies for most of the land on the boundary between the authorities. A Strategic Gap is defined which coincides with the Meon Strategic Gap defined in the (saved) Winchester District Local Plan policy CE1. At Whiteley, which is partly within Fareham Borough, the land allocations adjoining Winchester District carry forward previous allocations and are consistent with the City Council's policies.

Accordingly, it is recommended that the City Council informs Fareham Borough Council of its general support for the policies of the Fareham Borough Local Plan Part 2.

Local Plan Part 3: The Welborne Plan

The Welborne Plan sets Fareham Borough Council's policy and development strategy for the development previously known as the North of Fareham Strategic Development Area, to 2036. The principle of a Strategic Development Area North of Fareham has been established through the adopted Fareham Borough Council Core Strategy Policy CS13 and Policy SH4 in the adopted Winchester District Plan Part 1: Joint Core Strategy.

This consultation on the draft Welborne Plan follows consultations on an 'Options Plan' held in July 2012 (see Portfolio Holder Decision Notice [PHD424](#)) and the Draft Plan in June 2013 (see Portfolio Holder Decision Notice [PHD501](#)). Winchester's responses to previous versions of the Welborne Plan have been concerned particularly with the future of the land separating Welborne from Knowle and Wickham, and the transport or other impacts of the proposal.

Fareham Borough Council developed the Options Plan into proposed policies and drew this together into the draft Welborne Plan, published in Spring 2013. In summary, the policies in the draft Welborne Plan provided for:-

- approximately 6,500 dwellings;
- up to 78,650 sq.m of employment floorspace mainly in the southern area;

- settlement buffers 50m wide within the development, to prevent coalescence with Knowle and Wickham;
- transport works including an upgrade of M27 Junction 10 to facilitate all moves;
- pedestrian and cycle connections to Wickham and Knowle;
- community facilities including a District Centre, a Village centre and a Local Centre, 3 primary schools and 1 secondary school; and
- on-site Green Infrastructure including open space and sports pitches.

The current Publication version of the Plan makes some significant changes to the earlier draft, some of which are of particular interest to the City Council. The key features of the Publication Plan are:

- approximately 6,000 dwellings;
- 20 hectares of employment land (97,250 sq.m) mainly in the southern area;
- settlement buffers 50m wide within the development, to prevent coalescence with Knowle and Wickham;
- transport works including an upgrade of M27 Junction 10 to facilitate all moves;
- pedestrian and cycle connections to Wickham and Knowle;
- community facilities including a District Centre, a Local Centre, a Community Hub, 3 primary schools and 1 secondary school; and
- on-site Green Infrastructure including open space and sports pitches.

It can be seen that the number of dwellings proposed has decreased to about 6,000, with an increase in the amount of employment. One of the key changes for the City Council is the proposed location of the secondary school on the western edge of the development, rather than on the eastern side of the A32. The overall disposition of uses has reduced the employment uses to the east of the A32, while making some provision for housing in this area.

The current stage of the Local Plan invites representations as to the 'soundness' of the Plan. It is recommended that delegated authority be given to officers to complete the relevant comment forms, which ask respondents to give a view on the soundness and legal compliance of the Plan and whether they would wish to be heard at the public examination. The main issues arising from the Publication version of the Welborne Plan, taking account of the City Council's planning policies and the matters that it has raised in previous consultations, are considered to be as follows.

High Level Development Principles (Chapter 2, Policy WEL2)

This policy sets out the high level principles that the Welborne development will be expected to achieve, including matters such as sustainability, employment opportunities, green infrastructure, buffers with adjoining settlements, transport measures, infrastructure, and affordable housing. The principles are generally sound and to be welcomed but there is one matter that it is recommended the City

Council should seek to add as a high level principle, namely that the development, and particularly its access arrangements, are 'southwards-facing'.

The issue of traffic from Welborne travelling northwards on the A32 through Wickham and subsequently through other villages on the A32, A334 or B2177 has long been a matter of concern for the City Council. While some impact is inevitable, it is considered important to try to minimise this by establishing the principle that Welborne looks to the south for its key transport links, via the A32 and M27. This should be dealt with in the transport policies (policy WEL23 in particular) and it is recommended that the City Council seeks the inclusion of suitable wording to this effect in policies WEL2 and WEL23.

Settlement Separation and Location of the Secondary School (Policies WEL3, WEL5 and WEL16)

The City Council's Local Plan Part 1 defines settlement gaps between Welborne and Knowle and Wickham and the City Council has sought to emphasise the importance of retaining these in open uses. While the Winchester Local Plan provides for the possibility of some natural green infrastructure in these gaps, it requires the open and undeveloped rural character of the land to be retained. The Welborne Plan acknowledges this and Policy WEL5 is very positive in terms of maintaining settlement buffers between Welborne and Knowle and Wickham.

Policy WEL5 protects Blakes Copse, on the A32, as part of the settlement buffer and requires an additional 50 metre buffer within the development. The explanatory text refers to the sensitivity of the ridge at the northern edge of Welborne, particularly above the 50 metre contour line. However, the proposed 50m buffer falls well short of the 50m contour line and the City Council's own landscape assessment suggested greater sensitivity above the 45m contour. Accordingly, the City Council should seek amendments to policy WEL5, to require a substantially larger woodland buffer in order to avoid development in the most visually sensitive areas, which would also help to secure a substantial woodland block to link Dash Wood and Blakes Copse.

The current version of the Plan proposes to locate the secondary school at the western edge of Welborne, with the majority of its playing fields within the 'Knowle triangle', which forms part of the area designated in the Winchester Plan and a settlement gap. The school buildings would be within the Welborne development, but there is the substantial risk that having a large proportion of the playing fields within the gap would lead to its urbanisation through features such as fencing, car parking or lighting, such that it would not be consistent with the City Council's policy for the gap (Local Plan Part 1 policy SH4 and accompanying text).

The 'Knowle triangle' is separated from the area proposed for the secondary school buildings by a substantial tree belt, which is important in screening the proposed development. This important belt would be put under pressure by the proposal to develop the school buildings on one side and its playing fields on the other. It is therefore recommended that the City Council questions the soundness of policies WEL3 and WEL16, which refer to the location of the secondary school and its playing fields, and their consistency with WEL5 which seeks to retain settlement

separation. It should be suggested instead that the whole school is accommodated within the built-up part of Welborne. Although this would reduce the area available for housing to a limited extent, this could easily be compensated by a modest increase in the density of proposed housing, which is significantly lower than currently being planned and developed at West of Waterlooville or Barton Farm.

The remainder of the Knowle triangle is proposed by the Welborne Plan as 'suitable alternative natural greenspace' (SANGS) as part of a series of measures to compensate for the impact of the development on areas of nature conservation interest. The SANGS provision in the Welborne Plan is less than the area which the Plan suggests is needed, so the use of all of the Knowle triangle for SANGS would help to reduce the shortfall in this provision and would be entirely consistent with the designation of the area as a settlement gap in both Winchester's and Fareham's plans.

This would be consistent with the Notice of Motion unanimously passed by the Council on 2 April 2014 in the following terms:

"This Council reiterates the policy in the Winchester District Local Plan Part 1 that the triangle of land between Knowle and the proposed Fareham SDA (now known as 'Welborne') should retain an open and undeveloped rural character forming an important green buffer gap between the two settlements. The Council believes that this will be best achieved and secured for the long term by the inclusion of the land as part of the SANGS (Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space) for Welborne. The Council considers that the appropriate use of the land within the SANGS definition would be for conservation, grazing or informal recreation none of which should involve the construction of any buildings, significant engineering works or urban features such as formal sports pitches, urban fencing, car parking or artificial lighting".

Policy WEL30 of the Plan deals specifically with mitigating the impact of Welborne on protected sites and refers to Fareham Borough Council working with the City Council to determine the appropriate uses of natural greenspace within the City Council's area and the management required, including financial contributions from the development. The preceding text refers to the need for the authorities to work together to ensure this does not become a financial burden on the City Council, which is to be welcomed. However, this is in the context of references to potential for school playing fields on the Knowle triangle, which would not be classed as SANGS and would be likely to conflict with Winchester's policy on settlement gaps. Accordingly, the City Council should question the soundness of the proposed location for the school playing fields, while supporting and seeking to strengthen the references to the provision of SANGS in a way that does not involve the City Council in financial burdens.

Transport Issues (policies WEL23, WEL25, WEL28)

As noted above, it is recommended the City Council should seek the inclusion of references to a 'southwards-facing' development in policies WEL2 and WEL23. In

addition, policy WEL25 refers to a series of off-site transport improvements that the development will be to deliver, including to the A32/A334 junction at Wickham and 'other roads within Fareham Town Centre, Wickham and Funtley'. This policy should also refer to the principal access being from the south and, for completeness, should include Knowle within the list of 'other roads' which may require improvements.

The explanatory text refers to the A32/A334 junction in Wickham and suggests that it is likely that signals will be required. It is considered that this reference to signals should be deleted at this stage as it is too detailed and that more specific references to other junctions on the A32 and A334 should be included, particularly the A32/Southwick Road junction and the A334/Titchfield Lane junction. These are also likely to require improvements and it may be possible to coordinate these with any transport improvements that may be needed as a result of development allocations in Winchester's Local Plan Part 2.

Policy WEL28 deals with walking and cycling and requires that the development includes links to the surrounding communities and countryside. The green infrastructure section of the Plan refers to the value of linking Welborne with the former Meon valley railway line, but neither policy WEL28 or the policy on green infrastructure connections (WEL32) contains a requirement for the delivery of this key improvement. Without this and other important off-site pedestrian/cycle links there is a danger that Welborne will not have good countryside links and it will be either poorly connected or lead to unauthorised routes being created. Accordingly, the various links listed at paragraph 8.38 of the Plan should be included as requirements within policies WEL28 or WEL32.

Phasing and Delivery (Chapter 10, policy WEL41)

The Plan divides the development into 5 main phases, covering roughly 4-year periods from 2015 to 2036. The first phase (2015-2019) is proposed to start close to the A32, including residential development north of the Knowle Road and possibly the Local Centre in that area. It is anticipated that this would deliver about 500 homes both north and south of the Knowle Road. The second phase would see development continue to the north and south of Knowle Road, with both the District and Local Centres being at least partially completed in this phase (2019-2022). Employment development would start in this phase and the first primary school and upgrading of M27 junction 10 to all-moves would be required by the end of this stage. The second primary school would be required within phase 3 (2022-2026) and the third primary school and secondary school would be within phase 4 (2026-2030).

There is little explanation in the Plan of the phasing programme, particularly the location of the various phases, other than that development needs to begin near the A32. While this is logical, it is not clear why the development is proposed to start close to the Knowle Road, to the north of the site, when the main access routes will be from the south and key facilities such as employment and the District Centre are also to the south of the development. Given that the improvements to M27 junction 10 may not be complete until the end of phase 2 (or later, see below), by which time

1,500 dwellings could have been built, the focus on developing in the northern part of Welborne does not seem logical and is likely to unnecessarily increase traffic pressure on Wickham and other settlements to the north.

The situation may be exacerbated by the references in the Plan to flexibility in the phasing and a 'deferral of contributions' policy (policy WEL41). While the Plan must have a reasonable level of flexibility, it is considered that policy WEL41 provides too many opportunities for key infrastructure provision to be delayed or even avoided. The developer is required to produce and submit the main phasing plan and this would then be kept under review. This already provides considerable flexibility for the developer to propose a viable phasing of development. However, the policy also allows the phasing to be changed if existing infrastructure is available, for infrastructure to be spread across phases and for the activation of the 'deferral of contributions policy' where viability issues are demonstrated.

The effect of these flexibilities could be to allow key items of infrastructure such as M27 junction 10 improvements, provision of schools or the delivery of the District and Local Centres to be delayed, with implications for the residents of the development and surrounding communities. The trajectories for development in Tables 1.1 and 1.2 do not include the requirements and phasing of key infrastructure requirements. Accordingly, it is recommended that the City Council objects to proposals to focus the early phases on the northern areas of the development and the degree of flexibility over the provision of key infrastructure items.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

No implications directly although officer time will be needed to present the comments and appear at the examination in public. Given the importance of the issues, this can be accommodated within existing staff resources. The recommended comments seek to ensure that the Council will not be liable for any costs associated with areas retained as natural greenspace within the District.

CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN ON THE DECISION

The Ward members for Wickham have been consulted.

FURTHER ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED FOLLOWING PUBLICATION OF THE DRAFT PORTFOLIO HOLDER DECISION NOTICE

One Councillor suggested that the wording of in relation to the proposed location of school playing fields be strengthened to state that the proposed location *will not* accord with the local plan. This change was agreed.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS BY THE DECISION MAKER OR A MEMBER OR OFFICER CONSULTED

None.

DISPENSATION GRANTED BY THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

n/a

Approved by: (signature)

Date of Decision: 10.04.14

Councillor Weston – Portfolio Holder for Built Environment