

Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan 2011 to 2029 Public Examination Hearings

Issue 3: (Q 4.1- 4.7) Spatial Strategy & Housing Need Wednesday 7 October 2015

Submission by CPRE Hampshire

1. CPRE Hampshire is concerned that the new Local Plan for Basingstoke is effective and viable, and works for all parties in a consistent manner. The spatial strategy needs to address all aspects of the human and natural environment. It is not simply a framework to deliver housing. The public mostly think it is just a housing plan, and it must be clearer about its role and purpose. It is evident that the Plan must be prepared in a positive manner. However, references to sustainable development may be too general, in that they set objectives but not a direction.

2. The Plan also lacks a wider regional or sub regional context and strategy. Instead of this, it has a shared vision and objectives. These highlight the economic opportunities and enterprise aspects, as well as its varied and attractive countryside. The need to maintain and enhance the quality of life, as well as regenerating towns and villages is acknowledged. The town of Basingstoke should continue to be a major and vibrant centre within North Hampshire, and it should fulfil an influential role in the region.

3. There is a need to ensure a more sustainable pattern of development, a more bio-diverse environment, as well as a reducing level of natural resource consumption. The scale of development proposed is significant. The level of development proposed must be assessed, as will the timely delivery of infrastructure on which any development is crucially dependent. External pressures will continue to grow over the plan period, and may accelerate, both from revived natural growth and unexpected influxes.

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4. The level of housing remains the most intractable aspect of strategic planning. The evidence of housing need and demand suggest an increase beyond earlier regional indicators. More attention should be paid to the provision and delivery of affordable housing, and to the design and location of significant developments, with a greater emphasis on quality and practical sustainability.

5. Public aspirations of home ownership, via national initiatives, need to be reflected throughout the Plan. The problems of rural areas need urgent attention, and they must be kept within a framework of sustainable development. Housing should be located so as to encourage community development, not estate anonymity. Housing design and layouts are also critical to achieving densities appropriate to their location.

6. The aim of encouraging or directing new development to previously developed sites first, makes sense. It addresses a fundamental aim of CPRE to protect and enhance the ordinary countryside, while meeting legitimate development needs. Regeneration is particularly important in a like such as Basingstoke, with its heritage of rapid growth and expansion. Greater urban concentration can be achieved through good planning and design and layouts. This should not lead to a cramped and unacceptable urban environment. It is important that urban areas incorporate viable green infrastructure and open spaces. Liveability in urban areas is important, as well as the ability to connect to, and appreciate the rural hinterland of attractive countryside.

7. It is encouraging to see that the spatial strategy and local plan supports the process of neighbourhood planning. CPRE has over a number of years promoted and facilitated this aspect of local plan making. When addressed in a practical way, it can help to bring out issues and aspirations lying within local communities. It must be a positive and inclusive process at all times, which attempts to resolve conflicts and encourage a collaborative approach to future development. Aspects of localism and local determination can be addressed and encompassed within neighbourhood planning to help shape the future, as well as ensuring the longer term viability of local areas.

Delivery of the strategy

8. It is important that the delivery of the Plan seeks to address housing sites allocations, as well as other specific policies and objectives, including employment and business areas, leisure and tourism, and be underpinned by effective and lasting infrastructure. CPRE is concerned about the various components of housing land supply. It believes that a higher element coming from small scale as well as larger windfall sites will help to relieve pressure on the countryside.

9. Consideration is also needed as to the implications that higher housing numbers may have for environmental capacity in the region. Environmental capacity is more than a metaphor and can provide a helpful method of assessing where limitations may have been reached. Due to development and expansion over the last fifty years, the capability to absorb more without damage to the fabric of the environment, and frequently stressed water supplies may be severely limited.

10. Assessments of numbers of larger windfall sites by the council have been inadequate. Previous Urban Capacity Studies (July 2004) ahead of the SHLAA process, and an analysis of historic housing completions have various suggested estimates of yield. These estimates have not produced adequate numbers. CPRE submitted evidence from national surveys to show that there was unlikely to be a shortage of previously developed sites coming forward. Evidence showed that in 2008, there was close to 80 hectares of previously used land available, with a rising trend.

11. Table 2 provides a small site windfall allocation of 600 over the plan period. Small site and larger site windfalls may well exceed this figure, and should be acknowledged as a higher component. In the October 2013 consultations, CPRE suggested an inclusive figure of 1746 to cover both small and larger site allocations.

Conclusions

12. CPRE Hampshire accepts that the emerging local plan necessarily has to be multi-faceted and partnership-based. It appreciates and fully supports the conservation and enhancement of the Borough's high quality natural and built environments. Outside protected and designated areas, there remains a danger that the allocation of large scale or significant greenfield sites will make unacceptable incursions into the countryside. These should be avoided through protection or appropriate mitigation, where possible, to allow for other practical elements of the plan to be fulfilled.

13. Improved allowances for windfall sites coming forward during the Plan period should be incorporated into the Plan. It is the nature of unforeseen sites that they cannot be planned for, but continue coming forward for a variety of reasons. This would ensure a robust and effective strategy to be monitored and supported once adopted.