

Objection to the Stroud District Council Draft Plan Review 20 November

County Councillor [REDACTED] 30 November 2019
[REDACTED]

Summary

Pages 111-112 of the 20 November 2019 Stroud District Council Draft Plan provide for retaining the option of use of land at Whaddon for 2500 houses and mixed use development. The intention appears to be to allow for the land to be included in Gloucester's housing allocation. However the site is clearly not feasible for Highways reasons, and it should not be included since planning permission could not be granted for those reasons. Its inclusion in the plan would therefore be misleading and would adversely affect planning decisions in Gloucester and Stroud.

The proposal

Taylor Wimpey propose a mixed use development of 2000 houses (per August 2018 promotion material) in addition to a business park, a primary school, a health centre and local retail. The draft local plan refers to 2500 houses and refers to a secondary school as well as primary schools. The plan notes correctly that adjacent land within Gloucester City Council boundaries (over 200 houses at "Tuffley Farm") and within my Tuffley County Division has been consented (and is under construction at the present time).

Tuffley: Stroud Road and St Barnabas Roundabout

At the time the Tuffley Farm development was given outline planning permission, prior to my election to represent the area, Gloucester City Councillors were given assurances that the local highways infrastructure could be upgraded to meet the additional peak time traffic. In particular, there was significant focus on the St Barnabas (StB) Roundabout which acts as a bottleneck causing queues on Stroud Road that at peak time stretch as far as Whaddon itself. These queues were expected to lengthen further to the Tuffley Farm development without mitigation, and it is indeed likely that this will be the case.

However, it has subsequently emerged that there is no viable solution to improving traffic flow across the StB roundabout. There is insufficient land available to expand the roundabout to accommodate the existing traffic without the compulsory purchase of several homes and encroaching on the memorial garden of StB church. Widening of lanes to the approach would require compulsory purchase of all or part of very many more properties. The process of land acquisition, which would be resisted, would result in considerable and uncertain expense. In the opinion of Gloucestershire County Council's relevant highways officer, this could not be achieved within the likely funds available from s106 money. Neither is there any assurance that the land could be purchased at all, given likely strong local resistance. The risks and costs involved imply that, in practise, an upgrade of the StB roundabout to accommodate the necessary traffic flow cannot be considered without central Government support.

Transport from Whaddon into Gloucester and sustainability

Gloucester, especially the docks, is a growing retail and leisure centre. It is very unlikely a development of 2000-2500 houses could even start to match the scale of Gloucester for retail and leisure. Its schools are popular, particularly the four grammar schools. There is a significant amount of high quality employment in the City. Gloucester would therefore be the location of choice for most activities. The proposed development would in no way be as self contained as suggested by the developers.

Cycling is unpopular locally except with school children because of the high amounts of traffic in Stroud Road and because of the gradient of the road. Bus services are poor, with the No 63 having a highest day-time frequency of half hourly, which is unsuitable for the time-limited (which currently includes most of the population). The local bus company Stagecoach has recently reduced its service to Tuffley, reflecting the community preference for cars over public transport, which appears to be a growing trend. We can therefore conclude that the vast majority of journeys to and from the proposed development would be made by car. This trend towards cars and away from public transport is particularly acute in my County Division, especially in connection with journeys to and from the local schools and results in a large number of complaints. I do not believe that adding a secondary school at that location would mitigate these issues; indeed in the unlikely event a secondary school were built in that location, it would tend to make matters worse since the evidence would suggest that there may be little correlation between pupils attending and their locality. As a County Councillor member of the Children and Family committee, I can assert that this location would not be the location of choice for a new South Gloucester secondary school.

The developers proposal is that some of the traffic could be accommodated using a new road built along Naas Lane. However, this would merely redirect traffic to the western edge of the south of Gloucester which is also very busy. A good deal of this traffic would use the southern by-pass A38 which again meets the StB roundabout. This therefore effectively solves nothing.

In conclusion, the proposed development would cause a very large growth in unsustainable car journeys, most of which would be made on the A4173 Stroud Road, the A38 and the StB roundabout, which cannot take more peak-time traffic. Arguments that car growth would be limited do not stand up to detailed examination.

Conclusion

The arguments put forward in the draft plan, and by the would-be developer, suggest that the Whaddon site would be ideal. But on closer inspection, these arguments turn out to be fallacious, based on the false premise that cycling and public transport are viable options for most residents and users of the development, or that mitigations exist to solve the peak time traffic issue. There will be practical alternative to private cars for most, and mitigations are not economically viable. The conclusion that the Whaddon site is viable, let alone the best option, must be rejected. The option must not be contained in the final plan.