

1.

WISLOE DEVELOPMENT

I refer to Stroud District Council (SDC) consultation process regarding the above and submit my comments regarding the Draft Plan.

Accepting that SDC has been required by Government to provide for a quantity of houses to be built and it cannot be every day that two major landowners team together to offer around 150 acres of flat level land as a potential building site. That being the case, I can understand the willingness of SDC to run with that potential and include it in their Draft Local Plan.

However, that the offer is made does not make it right or indeed acceptable and I submit my objections to the proposal herewith.

FLOODING, ACTUAL AND POTENTIAL.

I moved to Slimbridge in May 1967. At that time the land now offered by Ernest Cook Trust (ECT) and Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) as potential building land was all permanent pasture, almost all was tenanted and all was used to service milking herds. Being permanent pasture it became packed and hard (panned) when dry, mainly in summer, and as such, whenever heavy rain (e.g. thunderstorms) occurred the land flooded easily resulting in considerable run-off into drainage channels which ran (and still do) through Slimbridge village. I have seen rainwater from overflowing drainage channels running through Slimbridge to a depth of several inches and on one memorable morning in early July the A.38 Road at Cambridge flooded to a depth of more than 12 inches, the George Inn flooded with water flowing in through the front door and out of the back whilst Ryalls Lane surface was totally destroyed by the flow of water. Whilst the Cambridge incident was, until now, a one off, flooding in and around Slimbridge has continued until the present day. As patterns in agriculture changed, the land concerned became mainly arable, the panned ground was greatly reduced due to cultivation, especially when deep cultivation (sub-soiling) took place. This allowed the surface water to permeate the subsoil and to drain away via the underlying gravel seam which runs under part of the area, under parts of Slimbridge and appears in the lower reaches of the Parish around Catscastle and Double Bridges, which still flood. The land, although wet at times of rain, does not currently flood. However, replacement of the currently friable land with hard surfaces in the form of house and commercial roofs, some 1500 of them, along with hard-standings and roads to service the houses will remove the friable area and replace it with large quantities of surface water with no-where to go except into the already minimal drainage channels present currently. Whilst the latest draft plan shows two areas of soakaway features, that to the North of the area has no-where to go to except to flow onto the Old Dursley Road at Cambridge or to flood neighbouring land which is not included in the draft. There is currently no soakaway connection to this area and it lies outside the bounds of the gravel seam. The soakaway area at the more southerly part of the plan is situated at and above the site of a current pond which drains into a small ditch which runs under the A.38 Road and then through Slimbridge village, partly piped and the same drainage channel which was present in 1967 and subsequent years, which caused flooding through Slimbridge village and which has received no enlargement since then. Whilst the land concerned may not flood easily, it is my belief that this number of buildings will result in serious flooding in Slimbridge and Cambridge to a much greater degree than ever before. The developers will undoubtedly argue that this will not be the case and will point to the soakaway features as planned but these will be totally inadequate to cater for the quantity of surface water that a development of this size will generate. Numbers of longer-time residents remember the regular flooding and the problems that it caused and do not want to see any return of such flooding. I note that there is no requirement on the developers to provide any drainage from the site, their only

responsibility being for drainage on site. Whilst the development may not flood, it will certainly seriously affect those areas of the Parish which are lower lying with potentially devastating effect.

2.

LAND CLASSIFICATION

Much of the land concerned was (and I believe at the time of writing still is) graded as agricultural Grade 2 land. I am aware of a recent re-assessment being carried out and believe that this has downgraded the land grading by two points. As Grade 2 land the possibility of building on it would be restricted to agricultural buildings but Graded at 3b opens the opportunity for development with little restriction other than planning requirements. Whatever grade the land is or becomes it is clear by observation that the land generally is highly productive and produces high quality crops in abundant quantity with tenants claiming high yields of whatever crop is grown upon it. They are the ones who should know.

Any experienced company dealing with soil sampling and testing which is acting to a brief by its employers would be expected to locate suitable sites, especially in an area of 150 acres, where whichever feature they have been briefed to supply would be most likely to be found. Time of year would also affect the samples; any sample would normally be higher in value in (say) March or April when fertiliser has been recently applied than in September after crops have been harvested. I would not expect a re-evaluation to reduce a value by two points. Strange that I made reference to land gradings in my previous response!

POLLUTION

This basically triangular plot of land proposed for development is bounded on its hypotenuse by the M.5 Motorway which runs approximately southwest to north east alongside it. The prevailing wind is south to south west and both noise and chemical pollution from the motorway will present themselves onto the site as a matter of course. Whilst the motorway to the North of the old Coaley Road is only slightly elevated above the land, South of that point the motorway climbs to both clear the railway line and to cater for the fact that it follows the contours of the local ground. It continues to climb from that point until it passes under the road to Stinchcombe and at the elevation the motorway reaches no matter what barriers, bunds or planting is placed around the site it will not be able to prevent all of the noise pollution and at least most of the chemical pollution from invading the whole site. Add to this the already busy A.38 Road which is adjacent to much of the proposed site, the main Midlands to Bristol Railway line (diesel operated with no plans to electrify) and the site will be trapped between three major polluting factors. With the proposed 1500 houses a further added 3000 vehicles (at two vehicles per house, the accepted value) the whole site will add its own pollution to that of the motorway and the A.38 to considerable affect both to the site itself and the surrounding area. Add to this the already planned and granted developments in and around Cam and this low-lying site will potentially become very heavily polluted with consequent potential health implications. I do not think that the four electric vehicle charging points in Cam (by observation rarely in use) will have any effect on reducing pollution in the area, especially as few (in comparison) electric cars are currently in use. To the South of the proposed site the M.5 motorway is elevated far above the level of the site and practical experience shows that no matter what steps are taken to eliminate pollution from elevated busy roads none is effective. This proposed site will be no exception.

SERVICES

The proposed 1500 houses will bring around 3000 adults and 3600 children to the area at the current accepted rate of two adults per household and 2.4 children in each.

Slimbridge itself has few services with two public houses, a basic post office and a heavily oversubscribed primary school. Shops in Cam and Dursley are mainly local, the two recognised 'supermarkets' being small in

nature and at busy times unable to cater adequately for the present population. The planned development completely ignores the need for residents to shop or that currently there are very limited local facilities. Whilst the local hospital has a minor injuries unit, that same hospital has recently had its services cut dramatically and is now a 6 bedded hospital devoted to stroke patients rather than the local hospital (designed to replace Berkeley Hospital) that it was planned to be.

Whilst the current proposal includes a planned primary school, I doubt that this will cater for 3600 children let alone those already waiting for places in the current Slimbridge school. In an area which formerly had three secondary schools, just one remains which is apparently full anyway. No consideration has apparently been given by the developers to secondary schooling nor to any provision for further education, both of which will undoubtedly follow. Whilst there are doctors surgeries at both Cam and Dursley, it is my understanding that both practices are full even before the already permitted development at Cam is occupied. Similarly, local dentists are, at least, busy. Again, the proposal ignores any need for such services locally, which can only result in around 6600 residents, both old and young, necessarily having to travel to find any of these essential services.

ACCESSIBILITY

Bounded as it is by the M.5 Motorway, A.38 Road and the North/South main Railway line, access to and from the site is already limited by narrow access roads. Whilst one of the proposed site plans details roads within the site it simply attaches the site roads to the narrow existing roads for access to or egress from the proposed site. There is no motorway access junction nearby so any travel would eventually be made via the A.38 Road. This is already a busy road and has narrowing constraints at Cambridge to the North, and Leathern Bottle, Berkeley Road and Berkeley Heath, Newport, Stone and the infamous Junction 14 to the South. The A.38 was de-trunked a number of years ago which reduced maintenance and development to it. Along with the already approved developments at Cam the potential for over 5000 vehicles using the A.38 to gain access to work opportunities will lead to much greater traffic congestion at the already present pinch points – one only has to drive on the A.38 Road at busy times to recognise that there is already severe congestion on that and adjacent roads. And it is undoubtedly the case that most residents of this proposed development would use motor vehicles in preference to a very limited bus service (one per hour to Gloucester and Stroud (but not to both on the same bus)) and a similarly hourly train service from Cam and Dursley Railway Station to Gloucester or Bristol. Whilst the proposed development is large it is not sufficiently so to persuade either bus operators or rail franchises to increase services sufficiently to become convenient. The current trend for all walks of life to use their cars or other vehicles for even short journeys, citing the convenience against any other form of transport would undoubtedly prevail on this proposed site given the spread and nature of it leading to the need of residents to use their cars with the consequences that traffic will increase unacceptably.

I note on the most recent draft plan that access to the proposed site from the A.38 Road has changed, being solely now via a point halfway along the straight between Cambridge and Slimbridge Roundabout. Access to the proposed site land to the North is via an arrow leading onto the site – from apparently no-where. It might be from land not included in this plan or more probably via a long avenue showing already planted trees from the Old Dursley Road. The Old Dursley Road is already rather restricted in nature and leads either to the pinch point of the A.38 at Cambridge, already at times extremely difficult to get onto the A.38 from, or via even narrower roads, including Wisloe Road, to its junction with the A.4135 Road. This junction is very close to Slimbridge Roundabout and currently causes considerable holdup when accessing the A.4135 due to traffic from and to Cam. Wisloe Road is also the only entrance/exit for Wisloe Industrial Estate and it is not

unusual to find large, including maximum length articulated, lorries reversing from that estate onto Wisloe Road immediately adjacent to its junction with the A.4135 Road.

A particular feature of the latest draft shows access from the A.4135 Road onto the proposed South end of the site. This is a short distance from the bridge on the A.4135 which carries the A.4135 Over the M.5 Motorway. The location of the proposed access is some 30 to 35 feet, 10 to 12 m, above the level of the A.4135 Road. The latest draft plan shows the A.4135 passing under the M.5 motorway rather than the fact that the road passes over it. This renders the South of the site inaccessible – totally as no other access is now shown. Even if the previous access from the A.38 were to be revived, that was shown as coming off a dual carriageway which made that proposal (may be the reason why it is missing from the current plan) unusable. It does make me suspicious that the architects of the plan have never viewed the area and have taken their brief from the landowners who have also appear to have little idea of the layout of their own land.

EMPLOYMENT

Whilst some parts of the proposed site are marked for commercial development, the area set aside for this is small and it is clear that commercial developments will provide few additional jobs locally. Currently, the small commercial areas have full employment and there is little of any consequence planned locally elsewhere. It is clear that the workforce generated by a development of this size, potentially 3000 placements required, would need to travel to find and obtain employment. The local services (as above) are minimal and most of not all workers would be forced to drive out of the area onto already busy roads with less than easy access to the major networks.

TOURISM AND VISITORS TO THE AREA

Apart from visitors to the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust at Slimbridge and the Castle at Berkeley the local area does not attract tourists in number. However the wider area is a popular tourist lure and many come for the views across the Severn Vale which are available from various viewpoints such as Cam Long Down, Frocester Hill and Frocester Picnic Site and Selsley and Rodborough Commons. These viewpoints currently offer pleasant views across open expanses of agricultural land in the Severn Vale, the area around Slimbridge being one of these. With a Parish of about 500 houses in total over quite a wide area (the Parish includes Cambridge, Gossington, Shepherds Patch and Wisloe), Slimbridge can, currently, only be described as rural. Views from all the points I mention are currently pleasant and encourage visitors to return again. The whole area benefits from the tourists. It is unfortunate, if this development is agreed' that this view will be destroyed completely as no matter what planting or visual obstructions are placed on or around the site, 1500 houses plus further industrial buildings will not be hidden from anyone at any of the viewpoints. This will undoubtedly have a negative effect on the Stroud area and, instead of visitors stopping and staying, I believe that many more will simply drive through to more pleasing vistas.

LOCAL

Slimbridge Parish is a rural parish of around 500 residences. The proposed development would destroy the rural nature of the parish and increase residences and population threefold. Because of the closeness to the developments at Cam, it would become a ribbon attachment to those and would, effectively, become a continuation of Dursley Town and Cam Village. Once built, there is little to prevent further ribbon development and I believe that Slimbridge and all of its history would disappear into a conurbation with (probably if/when Town status was approved) Cam as the named locality.

ALTERNATIVES

I have already voiced my opinions on alternative and better sites. These include a number of brownfield sites which, although possibly more difficult for builders, offer larger and more suitable sites than this proposed development and at the same time would improve those brownfield sites from the current eyesores that many are into large estates with services and facilities built into the development, possible because of its size. There is little doubt that the Government requirement for a predominantly rural District Council like Stroud to build large amounts of houses is a requirement too far unless an opportunity is presented to amalgamate different Council requirements. It is clear to me that the place to build large blocks of houses is near to areas where services and facilities are already in place, where there are good transport links, both road and rail and with good access to centres of employment. The area in Gloucestershire which is readily apparent as offering this is the area between Gloucester and Cheltenham. Good road and rail links are available at both Gloucester and Cheltenham and local bus services are frequent both in those areas and between them. Rail links already exist to the wider Country and doctors surgeries and dentists are present in numbers. Both have hospitals catering for A & E and well as routine matters. This does of course need co-operation from different District Councils and The Government to achieve and it may be that district councils should be approaching Government for easement to its requirements rather than pressing on alone. With a new government now in place this would be an ideal opportunity to make such an approach and, who knows, maybe the government requirement will change anyway?

SUMMARY

Whilst the proposed development may satisfy a large part of SDC required housing supply, it does not make it either the correct development or the right place. Ease of building might be seen as an easy fix but the wrong site in the wrong place cannot justify this. The site is wrong in so many ways, there is no infrastructure to support it whatsoever and apart from the suggested primary school no cognisance or recognition of the needs of the large increase in population that this proposal would bring. Probably the largest consideration should be reserved for the previously recognised and prolific flooding in and around Slimbridge village, flooding that this proposed development would undoubtedly re-introduce and with such a large run-off area, would increase massively to the detriment of the existing residents

I voice my strongest objections to the proposed development for the reasons given.

