

To: _WEB_Local Plan
Subject: Comments on local plan

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Dear Sirs,

I imagine that like most people I don't have the time or memory capacity to read and absorb all the information provided that is available to support the draft local plan. I do however have some very fundamental observations that I believe are pertinent and throw into question the basis of what I have seen put forward, specifically in relation to the transport strategy and the provision of two huge "garden villages".

I appreciate that Stroud District Council is obliged to meet the government's direction on accommodating an additional quantity of housing, and that providing land for it is a challenge.

However, the first thing that I notice is that the evidence provided to underpin the policies is now 6 and more years old. How do we know that the evidence is still valid?

The second thing I notice is that the housing quota appears to be a given, along with the assumption that the AONB cannot be included at all.

I think it wouldn't be inappropriate to challenge these assumptions, especially as the fine words about sustainability and minimising travel are incompatible with them.

So, given that the evidence used is dated and we have no idea what assumptions have been made regarding the draft plan, please could we (the public whom you are consulting) have a qualified review of the validity of Evidence used to inform policies and a Register of Assumptions?

I refer now to the transport strategy, the Employment Assessment Review (2014) and the Local Plan where it refers to the Garden Villages at Wisloe and Sharpness. Firstly, the process of selecting potential sites for residential development has missed a golden opportunity in the way it has been done. The vision of these two "Gardens of Eden" with their footpaths and cycle ways and so on is laudable, but woefully naive.

Wisloe will be a 1500 property housing estate that backs onto the M5. Sharpness will be a two phase housing estate of initially 3500 houses, growing to 5000 and a school in the second phase. The first phase is pretty much just housing estate and a railway station that connects to the abysmal, overloaded and unreliable train service at Cam. So we're talking about building 5000 new homes between Wisloe and Sharpness Phase 1. Nowhere have I seen an assessment of the impact this will have on traffic congestion and local amenities health and education services. These 5000 houses will equate to around 10000 people plus say 3-5000 children, and say 7-10000 cars. I'm making some assumptions here because I haven't found anything better in the documentation for the plan.

Both of these settlements are on the A38 corridor. According to your plan, all of the villages and towns that connect to the A38 are described as "dormitory" settlements - i.e. the workforce that lives in them takes to the road every morning to travel some distance to work and comes back in the evening. Virtually all of the A38 junctions between Thornbury and Whitminster are gridlocked twice a day already with the commuter traffic. Cam station is accessed down a small lane that is now impassable in peak times, partly due

to the "traffic calming" measures that coincide with the construction of housing estates, and people park on the road as the car park is full by 0700to. It is already overloaded.

So why on Earth are we even thinking about building two more enormous dormitories and adding thousands more cars on the A38 corridor when the words are all about sustainability and minimising travel?

The reason this won't work is that we have forgotten how communities come into existence. These garden villages with one or two roads in and out will never be communities if they are to just be dormitories for employment 20+ miles away. Communities grow around something that attracts people to them - it used to be water, food and protection, and people would live and work together in communities with shared amenities and looked out for each other with bonds of loyalty and common purpose. Nowadays those things have all but gone and people just live side by side without any sense of community or indeed loyalty to the locality or their neighbours. In reality the true community has all but gone from the UK, but if you were to design a new community you would start with something that makes moving into it attractive. I.e employment.

I can give you chapter and verse on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs - something that is simple to understand and should be taught in schools. I won't, but suffice to say that all humans have a set of needs in a hierarchy that starts with the essentials of food and water. Once you have that you can look at keeping yourself safe. After that there is the need for belonging and once that is satisfied there is a need for esteem and recognition and once you have that it's all about doing what matters to you and gives you significance. We all have these needs and now they are largely met by where we live and where we work. A life in which all these needs are not met is an unsatisfactory life. We should not be planning to make people live unsatisfactory lives.

The reason I mentioned it is that these needs should form the basis of a development plan. These garden villages aren't going to meet the hierarchy of needs unless a substantial number of people who live in them actually work together - which they won't under the draft proposals. They will actually have the opposite effect by causing stress and frustration at trying to get the journey to work done twice a day or trying to get anywhere else for that matter.

A community in the true sense has all it needs in its midst. People used to live in communities and didn't travel - they didn't need to and had limited means anyway but they had all they needed in the community.

So my points are these:

Instead of building garden village dormitories that will be gridlocked morning and night and empty in the day, design a community that can grow organically by providing industrial and commercial spaces that attract people for employment. The links to the motorway and rail network are there, attract the right kind of industry and then build the houses for its workforce along with the amenities and infrastructure it needs as the needs arise. By avoiding the need to travel to work you create a community in which a lot of people live and work together and have most of what they need on the doorstep without having to get on the A38. They might even use the footpaths and cycle lanes.

That might mean that you don't meet the target number of houses, which just tells us that the target is wrong and should be challenged.

Building dormitories to add to the existing ones does not make sense. You create a dormitory to house a workforce but a workforce for what? Again the evidence provided does not show that there is any demand for an additional 10000 workers who cannot be housed nearer to their places of work.

The 2014 Employment Assessment Review talks about a growth zone in Sharpness - why isn't it in the plan? If you want to attract 10000 people to live in the area, you have to create

10000 jobs if they aren't going to make a mockery of the plan's sustainability aspirations.

The NPPF talks about "sustainable economic development", "the effective use of land", "supply meeting assessed needs and building a strong and competitive economy", "making the right land available at the right time in the right locations" and "attracting inward investment" - these garden villages are not in any way compatible with any of that.

I'm not against development, and could support development that conforms to the ideals of the NPPF. However, starting with the answer of "build X homes" and trying to backfit everything else to justify it is utter nonsense. By all means build some new communities but do it the way they actually work and allow them to develop organically. Preset targets are dangerous and unhelpful, and will ultimately lead to achieving the opposite of what they set out to.

Warm regards,

