

SUBMISSION TO THE STROUD PLAN REVIEW MADE JANUARY 2020

GENERAL

1. The original plan identified a growth corridor close to the M5 North of Ju13. This review fails to reference progress and opportunities in this area and in particular fails to capitalise on the good infrastructure, transport and employment that either does, or will exist there.
2. The Gloucestershire industrial growth strategy focuses on a Hub between Gloucester and Cheltenham with spokes of the wheel going out a short way to a pleasant living environment. The natural commute from the south of Stroud District is towards Bristol as acknowledged by the promoter of the Sharpness site. Were this plan to be approved Stroud's contribution to the county's industrial strategy would therefore be that of a broken spoke.

PROCEDURAL

1. The then CEO of Stroud District Council hosted a series of meetings ahead of commencement of the review in order to promote the Sharpness site. In attendance were senior planning officers, the promoter of the site, the landowner, the developer and local organisations. These meetings were clearly designed to get key people on board with this particular site. These meetings evidence the fact that this site, for whatever reason, was earmarked as the core of the plan review ahead of other proper planning considerations. I understand that a similar approach led to the failure of the South West Combined Authority joint spacial plan at inspection recently.
2. It is interesting to note with regard to Sharpness that in the local plan Issues and Options paper of October 2017 Access to services and facilities elsewhere is rated VERY POOR, however in the emerging strategy paper of November 2018 it is rated GOOD. Yet nothing had changed in that time except perhaps a desire to justify a questionable strategy.
3. In consulting on the issuers and options paper of October 2017 the good residents of Stroud District were asked for their preference between 1. **Concentrated Development Around Existing Large Settlements**, 2. **Wider Distribution**, 3. **Dispersal** or 4. **Focus On A Single Growth Point**. Their preference was for a mixture of Dispersal and Concentration Around Existing Large Settlements. Their least favoured option was 4. **Focus On A Single Growth Point**. Sharpness and Wisloe together form that single growth point, the least favoured option.

EMPLOYMENT

1. There is little existing employment in the area of the growth point, what there is tends to be in farming or tourism and although previous and current local plans have specifically designated employment land at Sharpness, it has really only been taken up by a storage and distribution company providing few additional jobs. It would appear that in general employers are not interested in this location.
2. The vast majority of people living in the area commute south towards Bristol, a point acknowledged by the Sharpness site promoter.

TRANSPORT / CONNECTIVITY

1. TRAIN: Currently there is no train service, however it is understood that the lead developer for Sharpness has made contact with Network Rail via a consultant and they have advised that it would be possible to obtain a licence to bring the old track back into use and to construct a new station. This track however only connects to the main northbound line and so it would not aid commuting to Bristol. Evidently it may be possible to connect the line southbound but this would require considerable investment and is unlikely ever to be economically viable. Network Rail further advise, that due to line congestion approaching Bristol, even if a south bound connection were made it would not be possible to programme any additional services.
2. BUS: Seemingly in support of the fact that the direction of commuting and general travel in the South of the district, the only bus service currently coming through Sharpness and Berkeley is the Dursley to Bristol Bus. In public presentations, the lead developer for Sharpness recognises that if a train service is established it will only go north and so they are proposing that a large fleet of buses will be required to ferry commuters into Bristol and bring them home in the evening (Assuming they all want to come home at the same time!)
3. LOCAL ROADS: It is understood that the landowner whose land would be required to improve connectivity between Sharpness and the A38 has written to this consultation making it clear that such land will not be made available as to do so would result in the destruction of one of the most productive farms in Gloucestershire and seriously impact the vista from Grade 1* listed Berkeley Castle.
4. WIDER ROAD SYSTEM: M5.Ju14 is acknowledged to be at capacity and so considerable investment would be required here but the real pinch point comes at the Almondsbury Interchange where incoming traffic from the now "toll free" Severn Bridges comes into conflict with traffic coming down the M5 from Ju14. There is significant expected growth in Bristol commuter traffic from South Wales and the undeniable likelihood that following the recent failure of the SW JSP at inspection, South Gloucestershire unitary authority will now seek to bring forward its own plan, so this is a rapidly growing issue and one might realistically expect South Gloucestershire to be concerned that a Stroud plan which forces commuter traffic through South Gloucestershire to potentially create a serious bottleneck at Almondsbury might impact on the subsequent feasibility of their own plan.

THE LOCAL VIEW

1. Local people understand that there is a requirement to build more homes and are happy to play their part. The word "Proportional" is often used to describe that part and if pressed I believe that would translate to a number in the order of a total between 500 to 600 at Sharpness/Berkeley and the same at Wisloe.
2. As things stand local people are outraged. Pressure groups have been formed to oppose the scale of these proposals, meetings are standing room only. I am aware also that contact has been made with specialist learned council.

CONCLUSION

The people of the whole district told you in consultation that they wanted a different approach and they have been ignored. Yes, you agreed following representation from Councillors at the PRP, to enable exceptional building in small settlements but you wrapped the concession up so tightly in conditions that it is hardly worth the paper it is written on. It appears that regardless of what people think, you are hell bent on pushing through your original plan.

I believe that many aspects of this plan on many levels are extremely questionable and I have laid some out in the body in this letter. If you persist with the review as planned to inspection, the review will no doubt be tested by learned council as well as the inspector and as a councillor I am deeply concerned that the inspector will find against the plan.

Clearly there are significant costs involved in bringing a review to inspection, this is money the council cannot afford to lose and so I implore you to call a halt at this point while there may be time to bring an alternative review forward, perhaps one that builds more on existing infrastructure, in the form our council tax payers would like to see.

Gordon Craig

Stroud District Councillor
Berkeley Vale Ward

PS Should you decide to ignore my request then I would like to formally request that this document be brought to the attention of the inspector at inspection.

