

**Winchester City Council
Winchester District Local Plan 2020-2040
Examination**

**Matter 3: The Plan's vision and strategic policies SP1,
SP2 and SP3**

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On Behalf of Macra Ltd
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Matter 3: The Plan's vision and strategic policies SP1, SP2 and SP3

Issue 1: Whether the Vision and strategic policies SP1, SP2 and SP3 are positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

General matters

1. *Having regard to NPPF 21, does the Plan make clear which policies should be regarded as 'strategic policies' and would they constitute a clear strategy for the pattern, scale and quality of development in the District?*
 - 1.1 There is a clear distinction made between those policies which are intended as strategic and non-strategic.
 - 1.2 With regard however to whether or not they constitute a clear strategy for development within the District which will deliver the required pattern, scale and quality of housing, it is our view that this is not the case.
 - 1.3 Within this frame, the Council is required to demonstrate where the development will be located and how the need will be met and not simply to leave it to chance how development needs shall be met. Only in this manner will the Local Plan provide an appropriate positive vision for the area and be considered to have been positively prepared in a manner that is both aspirational and deliverable.
 - 1.4 Whilst we consider that the Council has sought to plan broadly for the development needs of the District, we do not consider that the Council has had full and appropriate regard for the direction of National Policy in this respect. The Council has not sought to plan positively for development in a manner that guarantees that the level of development required will meet its objectively assessed local needs, in particular, for housing over the prescribed 20 year period.
 - 1.5 The Council proposes that 1,495 homes will be delivered within the plan period by way of 'windfall development'. Having regard for the objectively assessed housing need for Winchester District, which stands at 15,465 homes, approximately 12.3% of the housing need is left unallocated with an indication that this will come forwards on unallocated windfall sites within the plan period.
 - 1.6 Winchester Council's approach to windfall development is considered to be evidenced by the '*Assessment of Windfall Trends and Potential (February 2021)*' (*the AWTP*).
 - 1.7 Paragraph 72 of the NPPF is clear that where an allowance is to be made for windfall sites as part of an anticipated housing supply, there should be '*compelling evidence that they will provide a reliable source of supply*'. When considering the imposition of a windfall allowance this should therefore be

realistic having regard for historic windfall delivery rates and the Council's Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA).

- 1.8 With reference to the SHELAA, Winchester Council consider that there are significant opportunities for growth across the plan area; however the majority of these opportunities are located outside of settlement boundaries, which would require a formal policy change, either through a strategic allocation, or relaxing of settlement boundaries, in order to be deliverable.
- 1.9 With reference specifically to the Larger Rural Settlement of Wickham, all of the available and deliverable sites are located outside of the defined settlement boundary, within the countryside, and thus in locations where a formal allocation would be required to enable the land to come forwards in accordance with the Council's spatial strategy.
- 1.10 As a baseline analysis therefore, the Council's strategy places an unnecessary reliance on windfall sites to meet the provision of at least 15,465 homes across the plan period. The Local Plan does not plan proactively for the delivery of 15,465 homes at all, it plans for approximately 13,570 homes, with the remainder expected to come forwards in a manner that is not positively planned for and offers no guarantee at all of strategic needs for housing being met.
- 1.11 The imposition of a windfall allowance is not in of itself unreasonable, but where there is no reasonable requirement for such a windfall allowance to be included, due to the availability of suitable sites, the Council's approach in this respect is rightly questioned. The Council have not, alongside the imposition of windfall allowances for settlements such as Wickham, considered how or where these sites might come forwards. Indeed, there are simply not the opportunities for that number of dwellings to reasonably come forwards through urban intensification as a result of the tightly drawn settlement boundary and absence of meaningful sized parcels of undeveloped land. It is unrealistic to expect such a level of delivery through patterns of plot severance, which themselves may not respect local character in any event and will certainly not represent good quality design and place making.
- 1.12 This is not a positive vision for the Winchester Council Plan Area. It is a strategy founded in a reasonable degree of uncertainty where reliance upon windfall development accounts for a total of approximately an eighth (12.3%) of the suggested 15,465 homes.
- 1.13 This is in our view inappropriate and runs contrary to the intentions of the NPPF whereby the needs of the plan area should be provided for in order to deliver certainty of housing needs being met. It is important to recognise that the 'housing need' of the plan area as defined by the standard method is not a maximum, but rather a starting point and the Council should be planning to meet local housing needs as a minimum. To therefore rely on windfall development to address this need is not in our view appropriate given the

availability of other sites that are capable of being brought forwards to ensure these needs are fully met within the plan period.

- 1.14 The Council's approach does not provide a positive vision for the future of the Plan Area, contrary to Paragraph 15 of the NPPF, however this can be made sound through the allocation of additional sites to ensure that the objectively assessed housing need will be met in full.
- 1.15 The proposed spatial strategy for meeting housing needs is not appropriately aspirational in this regard. It does not properly consider opportunities to deliver meaningful levels of growth which will meet the objectively assessed need with the proposed reliance upon windfall development, and with respect to Wickham settlement, does not demonstrate proper consideration having been given to the detailed consultation and engagement undertaken by Wickham and Knowle Parish Council in relation to the opportunities for strategic development at Wickham settlement. The Council has in this regard dismissed the positive and effective engagement undertaken by the Parish Council with parishioners and other members of the public, who have made clear their preferred approach for the growth of Wickham, fundamentally comprising the support for the delivery of *Land at Mayles Farm, Wickham* in preference to the other strategic development opportunities.

2. *What is the justification for the Plan period of 2020 to 2040?*

- 2.1 Paragraph 22 of the NPPF confirms that strategic policies should '*look ahead over a minimum 15 year period from the adoption date to anticipate and respond to long term requirements and opportunities such as major improvements in infrastructure*'.
- 2.2 The overarching direction of National Policy with respect to the preparation of a Local Plan therefore requires, above all else, that development is sustainable and appropriately plans for the level of development required to meet local needs for all types of development across the plan period of at minimum 15 years. Local Authorities are not bounded by planning for only a 15-year plan period. They can consider a longer period if appropriate, and in the case of Winchester City Council, it is clear that a decision was taken to plan for a 20 year plan horizon to provide a greater degree of certainty as to how the strategic priorities of the district will be met from 2020-2040. However, it should be noted that the plan period was extended from its original 2038 end date, and we are now almost 5-years into the plan period before the WDLP has even been submitted for examination. There is a realistic likelihood that, by the time the WDLP has been through examination, that there will be a need to extend the plan period further in order to meet this minimum requirement of a 15-year plan period.
- 2.3 We consider at this stage that Winchester Council should extend the plan period to 2041 as a minimum in order to ensure that a minimum of 15 clear years will remain from the date of adoption.

- 2.4 Within this frame, the Council is required to demonstrate where the development will be located and how the need will be met and not simply to leave it to chance how development needs shall be met. Only in this manner will the Local Plan provide an appropriate positive vision for the area and be considered to have been positively prepared in a manner that is both aspirational and deliverable.
- 2.5 Whilst we consider that the Council has sought to plan broadly for the development needs of the District, we do not consider that the Council has had full and appropriate regard for the direction of National Policy in this respect. The Council has not sought to plan positively for development in a manner that guarantees that the level of development required will meet its objectively assessed local needs, in particular, for housing over the prescribed 20 year period.

Policy SP1

1. *The Plan sets out a vision and objectives to tackle climate and nature emergencies and create a greener District, living well, homes for all and a vibrant local economy. Those are given effect through Policy SP1. In so doing would that Plan be effective? Should the Plan objectives be incorporated within the Plan's strategic policies?*
- 1.1 We consider it would be more legible for the vision and objectives to form part of the policy, these would not need to be repeated, but rather the supporting text could be pulled into the policy itself. In comprising the overarching strategy supporting the development plan these objectives should form part of the strategic policy.
- 1.2 As we have set out, we question whether the proposed strategy does fulfil the aim of delivering homes for all, as a strategic objective, in the manner in which the spatial strategy and strategic allocations are proposed for the reasons proffered.

Policy SP2

1. *Given the transitional arrangements set out in NPPF December 2024 paragraphs 234-236) would a modification requiring a Plan review within a stated timescale be clear and effective? Given the above national policy would such a modification be necessary for soundness?*
- 1.1 Winchester City Council will be obliged to commence work on a new local plan expediently in order to address the shortfall in housing need based on the proposed housing delivery of 676 homes per annum, relative to the new standard method requirement of 1,099 homes per annum. As paragraph 236 of the NPPF confirms.

- 1.2 From past experience, the commitment to a precise timeframe to undertake a review has not been a matter that LPAs have been held accountable to. There is a degree of dependency here also on the Government bringing the relevant provisions relating to the new plan making system in to force as Paragraph 236 again confirms.
 - 1.3 There were opportunities for Winchester Council to seek to bring forwards a plan which planned for a greater level of growth, having regard for the range of strategic site opportunities available for allocation and indeed, the Council could have taken the decision to progress down the route of preparing a plan to meet its new needs in full to avoid duplication of process with the preparation and examination of a further new local plan.
 - 1.4 The imposition of a timeframe to undertake the review would only be effective if there were consequences to failing to meet the agreed date. Without such consequences, such a modification will lack teeth and both effectiveness and enforceability.
2. *To accord with national policy at NPPF paragraph 60, to boost significantly the supply of homes, should the numbers expressed in policy SP2 be stated as minimums?*
- 2.1 We consider it would be appropriate to rephrase the development strategy requirements as minimum figures rather than 'about' figures, to reflect the fact that the plan should be seeking to deliver at least the level of growth planned for to meet the Council's objectively assessed needs.
3. *Policy SP2 sets out housing targets for the three spatial areas in the District. In so doing, does it provide appropriate support for employment uses to meet local needs?*
- 3.1 Strategic Policy SP2 does not provide figures for the amount (ha or sqm) of employment space that it is considered is required in order to meet the employment needs of the District in full. It is considered that the policy is lacking in this regard and indeed the plan as a whole does not quantify the level of additional employment space required to meet the needs of the District or indeed qualify whether there are already sufficient opportunities to address the additional needs generated by the proposed housing allocations.
 - 3.2 We consider, with respect to employment provision, the plan is generally lacking in detail in this regard and there is no analysis drawn from the *Employment Land Study (July 2024)*, prepared by Lambert Smith Hampton, which sets out clearly a future employment land need for Winchester District for the period 2022-2040 of between 26.2ha and 69.9ha. This should be reflected within the plan and indeed it should be being planned for.
 - 3.3 The WDLP does not, in our view, appropriately plan for the level of employment growth required to meet the needs of the plan area.

Policy SP3

1. *Does the policy strike the right balance between protecting the countryside and promoting development to meet local needs? Should the policy explicitly recognise the sustainability of locations immediately adjacent to existing settlement boundaries or previously developed land;*
 - 1.1 With respect to the balance between meeting local needs and protecting the countryside, the WDLP weighs much more heavily on the site of protecting the countryside, through its enhancement of Local Gap designations rather than recognising the sustainability of development adjacent to existing settlements and considering opportunities for broader strategic place making.
 - 1.2 This is abundantly clear with respect to the approach being taken to Wickham settlement, whereby little consideration has been given to the relationship with Welborne Garden Village in terms of the opportunity to develop and deliver a strategic network of greenspace in the form of a country park style designation, accessible to the general public, through bringing forwards facilitating development to enable the land to be brought forwards.
 - 1.3 At present the approach set out within SP3 provides little flexibility such that would enable the windfall development allowances, given to settlements, such as Wickham, to be met, given the absence of opportunities within the existing urban area.
 - 1.4 We consider it would be appropriate for the development plan to recognise that development immediately adjoining settlement boundaries should be considered sustainable and in principle deliverable for housing, and indeed for sites such as WI24 - *Land at Mayles Farm, Wickham*, this could enable sustainable development, which is supported by the Parish Council to be brought forwards.
2. *Would policy SP3 accord with NPPF paragraph 89, which states that' ... The use of previously developed land, and sites that are physically well-related to existing settlements, should be encouraged where suitable opportunities exist.'?*
 - 2.1 The approach set out within Policy SP3 is restrictive in that it actively seeks to prevent development, which is otherwise sustainable, adjoining settlement boundaries, from being brought forwards. We concur with the Inspector's consideration of the wording of Paragraph 89 of the NPPF, and indeed that this flexibility would provide greater certainty in the objectively assessed needs for housing, and indeed other forms of development including employment and community uses, being capable of being met.
 - 2.2 There are opportunities for the development plans to encourage sustainable development, which will reduce the burden of the increased level of housing need which it will need to plan for in undertaking the preparation of a new local

plan to meet the new standard method (2024) based needs of the District in full.

3. *Should the countryside designation afforded by policy SP2 remain on sites allocated for development in the Plan?*

- 3.1 Sites which are proposed for development as strategic allocations within the development plan should be removed from the countryside and included within the defined development boundary of the relevant settlement.

4. *Does policy SP23 provide for the particular locational needs of essential infrastructure such as water and waste water infrastructure in accordance with PPG? Should it state that development should not increase flood risk and assessed any potential loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land ?*

- 4.1 No comment.

5. *To ensure the policy promotes biodiversity should it align with the Local Nature Recovery Strategy?*

- 5.1 No comment.