

Achieving Sustainable Development

So that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development (NPPF 2012 paragraph 11).

For plan-making this means that: a) plans should positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of their area, and be sufficiently flexible to adapt to rapid change; b) strategic policies should, as a minimum, provide for objectively assessed needs for housing and other uses, as well as any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas⁵, unless: i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for restricting the overall scale, type or distribution of development in the plan area⁶; or ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.

Objection

In his judgement of appeal APP/Q3305/W/17/3187245 the planning inspector says “At 1 April 2017 56 dwellings had been completed in Beckington since 2006, and 52 either had planning permission or were under construction. Local residents referred to a further seven dwellings that had planning permission at Rudge, which is within the parish of Beckington, but CP1 refers to villages rather than parishes. I consider that the assessment should be considered on the basis of the 108 dwellings completed, being constructed and with planning permission as they are at the village of Beckington. Having said that 108 dwellings represents a 30.6% increase in housing at Beckington since 2006 and it was agreed that, if permitted, the appeal proposal would increase this to 38.5%.”

- Based on a nationally recognised figure of a 15% increase in housing stock is considered sustainable development, any further development would go far beyond what is reasonable and clearly represents unsustainable development to Beckington.
- There are more sustainable locations across Mendip in accordance with LPP1 spatial strategy set out in policies CP1 and CP2.
- The LPP1 spatial strategy clearly directs new housing to the larger settlements in the District i.e. the five principal market towns. These are planned to provide fully 80% of the District-wide housing requirement across the plan period.
- The proposal for the additional 505 houses to be situated in the North East of the District has been developer led and there is no policy justification as to why these houses should be positioned in just the North East corner.

Plan Making

NPPF 2019 Paragraph 16 subsection c) of the National Planning Policy Framework states that a plan should be shaped by early, proportionate and effective engagement between planmakers and communities, local organisations, businesses, infrastructure providers and operators and statutory consultees;

Objection

- No consultation has taken place with the community prior to the modifications being made
- Para 16 subsection a) of the NPPF also says plans should be prepared with the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development – as referenced above 38.5%

does not meet the national guidelines and thus the local plan is now unsound if the modifications are agreed with the inspector.

Planning & Flood Risk

NPPF Para 156 says “Strategic policies should be informed by a strategic flood risk assessment, and should manage flood risk from all sources.”

Objection

- No consideration has been given to the continued flood risk to the neighbouring properties, or the run off of foul water.
- Beckington is currently awaiting a report from Somerset County Council regarding flood risk – no decisions can be taken about modifications to the local plan until this evidence has been seen and reviewed by the planning inspector.
- NPPF Para 165 states that local authorities must take information from the lead local flood authority – this is yet to happen as the report is not finished.

Highways

NPPF Para 109 states that development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.

Objection

- Highways advice should be considered as Somerset County Councillor Linda Oliver stated at the public meeting that she has seen a report from Highways England saying that the roundabout on the A36 next to Beckington Services is already at full capacity – consideration of increased traffic in the area of the proposed site must be considered.

Previous History

Objection

- Robert Yuille in his previous report into LPP1 states that, and as evidenced by his report that the LPP1 Inspector gave great consideration to this strategy and, in finding it sound, concluded that ‘I am satisfied that the Council has taken a reasonable approach to the distribution of development in villages’
- A memo from Jacobs Engineering and seen by the PC states “This memo has demonstrated that the A36 Beckington Roundabout already suffers from peak period congestion, with long queues and associated delays to traffic on the A36 and A361 arms in particular. The roundabout experiences heavy demand between the A36 (S) and A361 arms, whilst simultaneously catering for strategic north-south traffic and local access to Beckington village and roadside services. A base model has been constructed using historic traffic survey data and compared against available information in terms of junction conditions. With the addition of future background traffic growth, operation of the junction is forecast to deteriorate, with extensions to existing queues and delays. Forecast traffic flow demands associated with the Mendip Local Plan will further compound junction capacity issues and could undermine the economic aspirations of the Local Plan.”

- In his refusal of the appeal APP/Q3305/W/17/3187245, Robert Jackson (HM Planning Inspector says:-
 - 72. The proposal would be contrary to the overall strategy of the LPP1 and would have a harmful effect on designated heritage assets.
 - 73. Set against this is the significant weight I have given to the benefits of the additional housing, both market and affordable, and the particular significant beneficial weight to the affordable housing. There are also the limited benefits of the New Homes Bonus and enhancements to biodiversity. These are public benefits for the purposes of DP3 of the LPP1. Giving great weight to the conservation of heritage assets and special attention to the setting of listed buildings this would balance the less than substantial harm to the significance of the designated heritage assets. There would thus be compliance with DP3 of the LPP1. I also take into account the lack of environmental harm beyond heritage harm.
 - 74. However, I have found that the LPP1 is up-to-date and therefore should be given full weight. The determination of the appeal should follow the development plan unless other considerations indicate otherwise. As paragraph 12 of the Framework makes clear development that conflicts with an up-to-date local plan should be refused unless other considerations indicate otherwise.

It's therefore surprising that Mendip District Council now take a view that it is appropriate to recommend firstly this site to be included in their modification and secondly any site based upon the sustainable development test.

Examining plans

Local plans and spatial development strategies are examined to assess whether they have been prepared in accordance with legal and procedural requirements, and whether they are sound. Plans are 'sound' if they are:

- a) Positively prepared – providing a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet the area's objectively assessed needs; and is informed by agreements with other authorities, so that unmet need from neighbouring areas is accommodated where it is practical to do so and is consistent with achieving sustainable development;
- b) Justified – an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence;
- c) Effective – deliverable over the plan period, and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters that have been dealt with rather than deferred, as evidenced by the statement of common ground; and
- d) Consistent with national policy – enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in this Framework.

Objection

- Beckington's needs have not been objectively assessed – the modification has taken the path of least resistance and fails to accept that a 35% increase in housing stock represents unsustainable growth. (Para 35 subsection a)

- To be consistent with national policy the anticipated growth rate of a village should be in the region of 15%. Para 35 subsection d)
- In his letter to Sarah Richards (Chief Executive of the Planning Inspectorate) on 18th June 2019, the RT Hon James Brokenshire says *“They are (local people) also right to expect that examination will be efficient, timely and easy to engage with.”* and *“the importance of being pragmatic in getting plans in place that, in line with paragraph 35 of the NPPF, represent a sound plan for the authority”*.