

## **Examination of the Stroud District Local Plan Review Wisloe Action Group (WAG) Written Statements**

This Hearing Statement has been prepared by Wisloe Action Group (WAG) who have submitted extensive representations in relation to the proposed Wisloe new settlement (hereafter referred to as 'PS37').

### **Matter 1 Compliance with statutory procedures and legal matters**

**Issue 1.1 – Has the Council met the statutory duty to cooperate as set out under Sections 20(5)c and 33A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004?**

**Q1. Has the Council submitted robust evidence to demonstrate that the duty to cooperate has been met? In particular:**

**b. Has the Council carried out effective engagement with neighbouring local authorities and other prescribed bodies on all relevant strategic matters and have all outcomes been adequately evidenced? Is there robust evidence to support the cooperation activities that have taken place?**

The evidence presented by the council has not been made available in the examination library (unless it is buried in other documents). The only recent update is EB103 which is 13 months ago. This was prior to the decision by the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) Mayor in May 2022 to stop all work on the West of England Combined Authority Spatial Development Strategy. WECA includes South Gloucestershire Council, the neighbouring authority to the south of the district (M5 Junction 14 / A38). South Gloucestershire Council (SCA) is proceeding with a separate local plan. It is known this has a significant impact on infrastructure in particular the transport agreement. This would have originally been discussed with WECA but it is not clear if any discussions have taken place since this time and with whom. The information has not been made available. The position is not clear with respect to The Joint Core Strategy (neighbouring authorities to the north of the district); the information has not been made available.

**Issue 1.2 – Has the Plan been prepared in accordance with other legal and procedural requirements?**

**Q3. Does the SA adequately consider the likely significant effects of reasonable alternatives where these exist, including in respect of the scale of housing and employment provision and the balance between them?**

**Q5. Have unreasonable alternatives been appropriately considered and have adequate reasons been given as to why these have not been selected?**

**Q7. Overall, does the SA adequately assess the environmental, social and economic effects of the Plan in accordance with legal and national policy requirements?**

Please find below a response which addresses Questions 3, 5 and 7 of Matter 1, Issue 1.2.

Whilst the SA identified a range of reasonable alternative sites to PS37 (1500 dwellings and mixed use), their individual significant effects have not been adequately weighed and balanced in determining the District's Spatial Strategy.

As detailed in the WAG and Slimbridge Parish Council (SPC) Regulation 19 submissions, numerous areas of non-compliance and mistakes with the SA were identified and are covered in detail within the SPC written statement submission.

This submission identifies a further area of non-compliance and shows alternative sites have not been reasonably considered. The SA identifies in Appendix 9, Table A9.2 the reasons for site inclusion or exclusion from the Local Plan.

A common statement is used in multiple places to explain the reason for some sites (e.g. p887 HOR001, p888 HorA, p952 WHI005) being excluded from the Draft Local Plan - ***'However, the scale of development proposed and location of this site would not accord with the emerging strategy of concentrating most development at the main tier 1 towns and at two new settlements, together with modest levels of growth at tier 2 settlements and lesser levels of development at tier 3a settlements'***. It is not the specific sites mentioned above which is the issue but the fact that potential alternative sites have been excluded from the Local Plan because, regarding new settlements, two (Wisloe and Sharpness) had already been pre-determined for inclusion within the Draft Local Plan.

Regarding reasonable alternatives to PS37, the reason for excluding WH014/PGP1 (p953) states – ***'Having considered the results of public consultation, assessment work and local evidence, the Council has decided not to take this growth point forward into the Pre-submission Draft Local Plan. The site performs less well than alternative sites in terms of meeting sustainability appraisal objectives and compatibility with the proposed development strategy'***.

SA analysis for WH014 shows it is not more sustainable than PS37 and therefore the main reason for exclusion is non-compatibility with the pre-determined proposed development strategy.

The statement against HAR016 (p884) is that development ***'would materially alter the rural character detrimentally. There is a likely high landscape impact from housing development (in a relatively remote location) adversely affecting the open rural character of the flat Severn Vale landscape and visible from the escarpment edge of the AONB. The city edge would be perceived to have moved southwards significantly as a finger into the flat open countryside. Any potential development would have to address high water table and flood risks. There are therefore physical constraints and potential impacts preventing sustainable development in this location'***. All these reasons for exclusion apply equally to the PS37 site.

Regarding the reasons for including PS37 within the Local Plan, the SA states at page 986 that ***'The site forms part of a wider land parcel located within the Severn Vale (A38/M5 corridor). The wider site is in accordance with the development strategy for concentrating growth at the District's main towns and at two new sustainable settlements at Sharpness and at Wisloe within the Severn Vale (A38/M5 corridor). The wider site offers the opportunity to improve access to Cam and Dursley rail station and to local facilities. The wider site is considered suitable and available for the scale and type of development as set out in the Draft Plan. Pre-submission Draft Local Plan Stage: Having considered all consultation responses, background evidence, assessment work and reasonable alternatives, the Council considers that the wider site is appropriate for allocation in the Local Plan. This new settlement, developed in accordance with Garden City principles, will contribute to the District's housing and employment needs at a location which maximises the potential for residents to use active travel and public transport to access jobs, services and facilities'***.

Again, the Moreton Valence and Whitminster proposals are also on the A38/M5 corridor. From the above it would appear the main/only criteria for including PS37 in preference to PGP1 and PGP2 is the presence of the Cam and Dursley railway station. As has been stated in the Regulation 19 evidenced submission, only approximately 1% of journeys are by rail and therefore it is misleading to state the presence of a rail station will materially affect future train usage.

The council appears to have pre-determined upon a planning strategy that included the provision of two new settlements (Wisloe and Sharpness), ignored the SA evidence which showed little difference between alternative sites and failed to provide any clear evidence to demonstrate support for this strategy. Reasonable and unreasonable alternative new settlement sites have not therefore been adequately/appropriately considered and overall, the SA cannot be said to comply with the legal requirements.

**Q8. Does the HRA meet the legal requirements for Appropriate Assessment in accordance with the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended)?**

No, it does not. Important documented evidence was submitted to the council relating to PS37 (Parish Council, WAG & residents) since January 2020. There is a statutory requirement for Local Authorities to check if a proposal might have a significant effect on a European Site. PS37 should have been identified and therefore seen as functionally linked land and water to the SPA, within the HRA. See response to Question 4. There is no evidence that demonstrates the council referred this to Natural England or shared the evidence with the consultants (who produced the HRA).

The PS37 proposer's reports (**EB96b**) conducted in August 2019 also highlight ecology concerns especially with respect to over wintering bird species and the proximity with the protected areas and the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust reserve.

The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust & Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust propose that an EIA is undertaken for PS37 Wisloe new settlement with a detailed assessment of cumulative impacts, recreation pressure on Internationally, Nationally and Locally designated sites.

In conclusion, the HRA assessment is incomplete as the risks to PS37 Wisloe new settlement have not been reviewed in relation to functionally linked land and water in relation to internationally protected species.

**Q9. Does the HRA adequately address whether the Plan would adversely affect the integrity of relevant European sites either alone or in combination with other plans or projects? Are the HRA conclusions robust?**

No. Please see the response to Question 8. It has not been adequately demonstrated that Policy PS37 Wisloe new settlement would not adversely affect the integrity of the European Sites either alone or in combination with other plans. Therefore, the HRA conclusions are not sound. Policy PS37 Wisloe new settlement should be assessed based on evidence presented to SDC. The documented evidence should be referred by SDC to Natural England and the consultants who undertook the HRA.

**Q10. Have all HRA recommendations been suitably reflected in the Plan?**

No. Please see the responses to Questions 8 and 9. 10

**Q11. Has the Plan been prepared in accordance with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement and statutory consultation requirements? Has all relevant and available evidence been made available for consultation, at the various stages of Plan preparation?**

No, the plan has not been prepared in accordance with the SCI. There are significant issues with the way in which the council has engaged with communities.

The council should maintain a timetable for producing the Local Plan and SPDs. This is publicised on the SDC website and kept up to date to ensure communities can keep track of plan making activity and know when they can get involved. The published timetable was not kept up to date (still out of date on the website). The LP consultations are hidden away in the planning pages, and not alongside all other council consultations.

The council did not provide any prior notification for any of the public consultations, communities (including Parish Councils) were notified on the date they commenced, in conjunction with the timetable being updated residents have been disadvantaged as there was limited opportunity to prepare.

SDC committed to publishing monitoring reports at least annually on their website on how policies within the LP are being delivered and progress with plan preparation as set out in the Local Development Scheme (LDS). Fully up-to-date data should be published in respect of both housing completions and commitments since the beginning of the Local Plan period. An example of this failure is **EB15** which has not been updated since 2020.

Neighbourhood Plans progress has not been reflected accurately within the Examination evidence; it refers to 2020 progress which is misleading.

With regards to who must be legally consulted on the development of the LP, the council failed to notify at least one statutory consultee (Wales & West Utilities) of the Regulation 18 consultation. This was of particular importance due to the high-pressure gas pipeline which bisects the PS37 site. The council and the proposers were not aware of its existence until WAG informed SDC in our response to the Regulation 18 consultation response.

There are examples of Slimbridge Parish residents, who responded to various consultations not being added to the consultation database and therefore not kept up to date.

There is no evidence that Slimbridge Parish Council, WAG or residents' consultation engagement has led to further investigation or LP policy amendments by the council.

The council did not consider or make efforts to modify traditional consultation methods to engage 'hard to reach' groups. Indeed, during the pandemic, the council did not attempt to offer any online conferences, workshops e.g. planning for real exercises or facilitation of online discussion or focus groups. This particularly impacted rural communities. In contrast the canal strategy consultation commissioned an explanatory film [www.stroud.gov.uk/canals-strategy-for-stroud-district](http://www.stroud.gov.uk/canals-strategy-for-stroud-district)

SDC did not have explicit time pressure to consult on the Local Plan (as they have a healthy land supply and delivering against the current LP) but there was a 'rush to issue the Regulation 19 consultation prior to the District Council elections which took place in May 2021. It is not clear why they took that decision when it was clear there were significant issues and has led to further delays and cost. <https://stroud.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=140&MId=1072>

<https://stroud.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=143&MId=1078>

At Regulation 18 and Regulation 19 the council had the option to provide longer consultation periods to allow for maximum community engagement but chose not to. In contrast to the Canal Strategy consultation [www.stroud.gov.uk/canals-strategy-for-stroud-district](http://www.stroud.gov.uk/canals-strategy-for-stroud-district) which was open for over 13 weeks with numerous articles released to the local press and social media channels <https://www.stroud.gov.uk/news-archive/theres-more-time-to-give-your-views-on-the-canals-strategy>. **'We will publicise consultations where necessary by methods such as leaflets, posters, displays and newspaper notices'**. There was no evidence public consultations were publicised by methods such as leaflets, posters, display, or newspaper articles.

There is no evidence that any reasonable steps were taken to ensure sections of the community that do not have access to the internet were involved and their views captured.

The council then issued the Regulation 19 consultation in May 2021 and published the raw results 3 months later. The Reg 20 summary report was issued by SDC in April 2022.

<https://www.stroud.gov.uk/media/1874680/slp-01a-reg-20-summary-part-1-site-allocations.pdf>.

The SDC Reg 20 report is flawed because it provides only a qualitative analysis of these data and does not give a quantitative view which provides a much better view of the depth of opposition to PS37

The overall statistics are as follows:

A total of 932 representations were made.

222 representations (23.8%) objected to PS37 (Wisloe Green).

30 representations (3.2%) supported PS37.

Of the 252 who either supported or objected to PS37, 88.1% objected to PS37 and 11.9% supported PS37.

Of those who objected to PS37, 65 (29.3%) offered no evidence.

Of those who supported PS37, 14 (46.7%) offered no evidence.

Gloucestershire County Council provided a Reg 19 representation but did not mention PS37.

In the list of email and letter representations several serial numbers are missing e.g. 812, 815, 825.

Although 16 consultees supported PS37 with evidence, concerns were expressed regarding aspects of the proposed development. These included:

- PS37 is an extension to an existing development
- Ribbon development
- Station capacity, access and parking
- Noise and air pollution
- Better access to transport links needed
- Flooding and sewage problems
- Effect on the WWT
- Too many houses
- Improvements needed to the M5 junctions

Therefore, the support for PS37 is not without conditions, many of which are the same reasons for other residents objecting to PS37.

Another consultation was issued on 27<sup>th</sup> September 2022 and closed 25<sup>th</sup> October 2022. The consultee responses from this Additional Consultation (SDC – Technical Evidence – Limited Consultation) was to give existing representors the opportunity to comment on additional technical evidence. The consultee responses were only published on 13/2/23, one day before the hearing written statement deadline. Important information is known to the council but not been made public. Opportunity should be made available during the Examination Hearing to review the findings from this latest consultation and not to exclude it from the written statement phase due to sharp practice by the Council.

## **Matter 2 Spatial Strategy and site selection methodology**

**Q22b. The text on page 23 of the Plan also states that some limited development on small and medium sites immediately adjoining SDL for tiers 1-3 will be allowed, to meet specific identified local development needs. Is it clear how local needs will be defined and what will be the criteria for this?**

Local housing needs have been derived from the emergent Slimbridge Parish Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) which is at the Regulation 14 Consultation Stage (23<sup>rd</sup> January to 5th March 2023). Part of the evidence base is a report on local housing needs which can be found on the Parish Council Website. The report was based on two surveys: The NDP Steering Group issued a questionnaire in March 2021 which included a housing needs survey, and a final report was issued on 19 July 2021. Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC) conducted an independent housing needs survey in September 2021 and a report was issued in November 2021. The NDP Steering Group produced a report comparing the two surveys which was issued on 17 February 2022. It concluded that the NDP Steering Group would not issue a call for housing sites. In addition, it was also noted that the Homeseeker plus data base could not identify local needs, was not fit for purpose and this was confirmed by SDC. Also the SDC Self Build Register was of little use in assessing the need for self-build plots.

**Q23b. Paragraph 2.3.12 of the Plan also sets out support for some development at tier 3b, 4a and 4b settlements of small sites up to 9 dwellings outside of defined settlement limits, provided that the policy is supported by the local community.**

**How will the Council determine that the policy is supported by the local community? Will this be at the point of adoption? If so, what is the purpose of this supporting text?**

See the response to Matter 2 Q22b. The NDP Questionnaire Residents' Views report issued on 21 May 2021 noted that 82% of residents supported developments of up to 4 houses, 32% supported developments of up to 20 houses and 7% supported developments of over 20 houses. Only 10% supported developments outside the settlement boundaries. The NDP supports Para 2.3.12 in the SDC Plan but only if a local need is identified and is supported by the residents of the Parish.

**Q28. Has the site selection process been suitably informed by relevant studies/assessments and site constraints, and has it included a robust assessment of development impacts?**

SDC documents **EB18 and EB9** clearly define the selection process which was followed to determine which sites should be included or excluded from the Local Plan. However, the assessments were ostensibly/exclusively tabletop exercises which failed to identify many of the limiting factors affecting numerous sites. A comprehensive analysis of the SA process and site scoring errors pertaining to PS37 was submitted in the WAG and SPC Regulation 19 submissions. As an example, in the context of PS37, the SA did not identify the high water table and recent flooding events, the site is also mostly Grade 2 BMV farmland, it would coalesce with surrounding villages, be subject to a minerals safeguarding requirement, it is of archaeological importance (presence of roman remains) and has a high pressure gas main running the full length of the site etc. The process had therefore been followed, but site constraints had not been adequately assessed. Furthermore, the SA has not been updated when local knowledge was provided to identify the shortcomings. The table at Appendix 2 of report EB9 is incorrect for PS37 and is probably therefore also incorrect for other large sites and cannot be relied upon to assist in site selection.

The impact of the proposed developments has also not been robustly assessed. To use PS37 as an example, the Slimbridge Parish Council (SPC) and WAG Regulation 19 submissions identified numerous issues adversely affecting the development of PS37, many of which could not be mitigated, purely by the fact of the topography of the site which is low lying, flat and significantly below the road and rail lines. As detailed in the SPC submission for this Examination, increases in road traffic from the Cam and Wisloe developments have been 'modelled' in a way that makes unrealistic and unsubstantiated changes to the modal shift assumptions. In addition, no solution has been identified to address the issues of insufficient secondary school places and access to local doctors' surgeries etc.

It is considered important to note that the PS37 proposal is also not supported by a lead developer, at present there is only a proposer's Masterplan document which has not been subject to independent review. A developer led plan would assess the site from a delivery perspective, rather than a marketing perspective for sales purposes, which would identify the internal and external factors associated with realising the site. The impact of the PS37 development proposal therefore has not been robustly assessed by SDC. The lack of a lead developer prepared to stand behind the Masterplan assumptions is considered to be a critical weakness of the proposal and demonstrates a distinct lack of credibility regarding its actual deliverability.

Some of the aforementioned shortcomings will equally apply to the other large site proposals, albeit they all have lead developer support. The conclusion is that the site selection process was not suitably informed of site constraints and impacts of the development have not been robustly assessed or taken on board in the content of the Draft Local Plan.

**Q29. Has the sequential test, and exception test where necessary, been correctly applied in the assessment of flood risk (including surface water flooding) for the selection of potential development sites? Is this adequately evidenced for all sites as part of the site selection process? Do any of the sites in the Plan fall within, wholly or partially, Flood Zones 2 or 3?**

The sequential test and exception test where necessary, have not been correctly applied in the assessment of flood risk (including surface water flooding) for the selection of potential development sites.

Page 42 of the Local Plan Review: Infrastructure Delivery Plan 2020–Draft 3–ARUP–16 October 2020 in reference to PS37 states:

***'The site is in close proximity to the river Cam and there have been a number of recent sewer flooding events since 2007 affecting highways and the curtilage of properties.***

***The site is included within the Environment Agency 2007 River Cam and Wickster's Brook detailed hydraulic model, but only a minor proportion of the site (1%) is considered to be impacted by fluvial flood risk. The site is at high risk of groundwater flooding, with a greater than 75% chance of groundwater emergence within a given 1km<sup>2</sup> grid square, during a 1 in 100-year event'.***

The Sequential Test must be satisfied. Only once the Sequential Test is satisfied should the Exception Test be applied. It is anticipated that proposed development will be sequentially located within Flood Zone 1.

The ordinary watercourse (Lightenbrook) on the northern site (note: this should read southern) will need to be surveyed and mapped as part of any application. Any proposals for drainage will have to



be split into the separate catchments. The western side of the site north (south) of the A4135 may be difficult to drain to the ordinary watercourse given the levels.

A site-specific flood risk assessment will be required because the site is within Flood Zone 2 and 3 and at risk from sources of flooding other than rivers and the sea.

Revised National Planning Policy Framework 2021 Para 161:

All plans should apply a sequential, risk-based approach to the location of development – taking into account all sources of flood risk and the current and future impacts of climate change – so as to avoid, where possible, flood risk to people and property.

There are two important points to be considered in the above extracts.

- The northern section of the development is largely within Flood Zone 1 but borders Flood Zones 2 and 3 associated with the river Cam. It is correct to say that no construction is planned in Zones 2 and 3 and therefore the fluvial flood risk is low, however, as stated, the risk from groundwater flooding is high.
- The proposers have chosen to focus on the risk to fluvial flooding while proposing flood ponds to capture surface water before the water inundates Cambridge and Slimbridge. It should have been abundantly clear that the combination of very high groundwater levels and bursts of surface water from storms makes flood ponds inherently unsuitable and ineffective. The ponds will already be full when storm water arrives. This applies to both north and south sections of the site. There is also no mention of the safety aspects of creating large areas of open water prone to flash flooding on a domestic development.

The council has failed to adhere to NPPF requirements and has not conducted a rigorous sequential, risk-based approach to the development. Had they done so, they would have identified the existential threat to both adjoining communities and excluded PS37 from the local plan.

## **Matter 5 New settlements at Sharpness and Wisloe**

### **Q 21. Does the proposed allocation meet the vision, spatial strategy and strategic objectives set out in the Plan? Does the policy ensure that these objectives will be met?**

The Plan has a clear objective to support the CN2030 target and to, in part, utilise PS37 to support that objective as an exemplar new allocation. However, the promoters' own masterplan shows very few houses will come forward in time to support the CN2030 objective. This housing build out rate is considered very optimistic as it underestimates the complexities associated with the massive infrastructure challenges associated with the PS37 site which require resolution before significant building can commence e.g. gas pipeline move. One of the main tenets of the Plan is therefore not supported by PS37.

### **Q 22. Does the evidence adequately demonstrate that the proposal will accord with the sustainable ethos of garden communities? Is the site of sufficient scale for the delivery of the garden city principles to be feasible? Has this been robustly demonstrated and is the development, as envisaged in the Plan, likely to be achieved during the plan period?**

The promoters are advertising PS37 as a new settlement constructed to conform with Garden Village principles. The A4135 bisects the PS37 site into two distinct areas (north and south), which the promoters now recognise in the masterplan at ref (955 - B.1) ***'two new walkable neighbourhoods within the northern and southern areas of the site'***. The masterplan states these two areas either side of the A4135 will ***'form two neighbourhoods within a cluster of 'five villages' which include the existing settlements of Slimbridge, Cambridge and Lower Cam. This approach allows existing villages to retain their own separate identities, by creating new distinctive neighbourhood centres'***. The important new facilities like school and sports ground etc are to be located in the northern neighbourhood/village whilst the southern section has been allocated very minor facilities, employment and mixed use land. It is clear from the promoter's submission that the northern portion will be the hub for the community with few facilities on the south side. A more appropriate description for proposal PS37 would be a single new settlement bisected by the A4135 with its hub based in the northern section.

SDC has decreed that, after being built, the whole of PS37 (not two neighbourhoods or villages) will be graded Tier 3a which recognises the entire site's limitations and accepts that most facilities for the new residents will be obtained outside of the new settlement, thus generating more journeys.

Without providing the right employment, community facilities and range of housing, new garden villages risk becoming dormitory commuter suburbs – the antithesis of the Garden City idea (**tcpa – understanding Garden Villages**). No, the proposal does not accord with the garden communities ethos.

### **Q23. Will the proposed new settlement be suitably connected to sustainable transport infrastructure networks to ensure that future residents are able to access an essential range of services, facilities and employment opportunities?**

Evidence collected for the Slimbridge NDP and reported in the Business and Employment report, shows that significant numbers of jobs exist within the Parish but less than 16% are occupied by residents. There is no evidence to show that PS37 would generate a greater percentage of local jobs.

### **Q24. In relation to infrastructure:**

#### **a. Will infrastructure to support the allocations be delivered at the right time and in the right place?**

There are some significant infrastructure investments required to support the plan, notably at the M5 junctions. There is a lack of agreement with the providers and, at best, uncertainty regarding funding mechanisms to support the right time right place requirement.

**b. Are the proposed rail link to the north and the express coach service to the south viable and deliverable? Have funding sources been identified? Will they be delivered on time to support the new settlement? Have discussions taken place with the relevant infrastructure providers and do they support the projects?**

There is no commitment or outline agreement for improving rail services at Cam and Dursley station or to provide an express coach service to the main employment centres. The plan is being led by the allocation of housing, especially two new settlements, which is not supported by the provision of transport infrastructure.

**c. Has the impact of the new settlement on the surrounding road network, including nearby motorway junctions, been adequately assessed? Can any impacts be mitigated and if so, how? Is the policy sufficiently positively worded in this regard, for example with reference to M5 junction 14?**

Please refer to M11 for a more complete response to this question. No, the road network impact has not been correctly assessed and the mitigation proposed has been shown to be insufficient.

**d. In relation to infrastructure:**

**Will the location of the high-pressure gas pipeline that runs through the site constrain the proposed development in anyway? What effect, if any, will the presence of the gas pipeline have on the viability of developing the site?**

The ECT/GCC Masterplan (<https://wisloe.co.uk/index.php?contentid=2>), recognises that the viability if the site is severely impacted by the high-pressure gas pipeline. At page 74 of the Masterplan Report – Additional Reports Stroud Local Plan – Regulation 19 Submission | JULY 2021, Fingleton White produced a feasibility study for Wales and West Utilities, which provides options for the relocation of the pipeline. This document contains errors, technical problems and raises questions regarding cost and timescales. It is also noted that investigation of many serious risks and uncertainties are deferred to the detailed design phase.

Many errors can be found in the document. For example, at Para 16.0, ***'The development land is owned by The Ernest Cook Trust'***, is incorrect as approximately half of the land is owned by Gloucestershire County Council.

Routes 1 (the preferred route) is in close proximity to the M5 and underneath the acoustic bund; however, Highways England have not been consulted.

Connection Point A is adjacent to the railway line but the Padhi zones shown only cover the development site and not the railway line. Network Rail has not been consulted.

The proposed routes have many sharp bends. This does not follow best practice and may mean that the pipeline would not be 'piggable'. (PIG – is a pipeline inspection gauge used to examine the pipeline internally).

At Para 15.0 of the budget cost estimate it states that, ***'The budget cost estimate presented below is a high-level cost based upon current costs for the construction of a similar diversion project'***. However, it does not identify which project the costs are based on and hence the budget cannot be verified.

In addition, the following items will add to the costs:

- Line items 4 and 6 are not costed.
- All the proposed routes cross land not owned by either ECT or GCC.
- The pipeline is not subject to a 'Lift and Shift agreement'

The report notes that the Budget is subject to +/- 40% but the report does not identify how the limits have been derived and what risks and uncertainties contribute to this figure. It also does not define what is meant by +/-40%; are these absolute limits which mean that the project costs would never fall outside these limits or is it a statistical probability e.g. there is a 90% probability that the costs will fall inside these limits?

It is noted that confidence limits are not given for the programme at Table 12, but it is acknowledged that the programme is based on the assumption that pipe is available and can be delivered within a 40-week lead time. Other risks and uncertainty should also have been factored in to derive confidence limits for the programme.

The relocation of the pipeline represents a serious risk to the viability and deliverability of PS37

**e. Has the effect of the proposed new settlement on the Sharpness Waste Water Treatment Works been adequately assessed? If capacity improvements are necessary can they be delivered within existing environmental constraints and how will they be funded?**

This question should also be addressed to the proposers regarding the Coaley Sewage Treatment plant serving PS37 Wisloe which is already incapable of handling current demand and discharges regularly into the river Cam.

**Q26. Are the indicative site areas, appropriate uses, net developable areas, minimum densities and indicative site capabilities justified and effective?**

The promoters' masterplan illustrations for the site are confusing and include numerous errors which vary between different figures. These maps also include regions identified as '**off site potential residential areas**', covering land not owned by the promoters and are outside of the proposed development area. The presence of the gas pipeline is a key issue and it's fundamental to the Garden Village proposal that it's moved. However, if it's not moved it's difficult to comprehend how the site will achieve the net developable areas requirement. There is no lead developer aligned to the PS37 proposal, unlike all other new settlement submissions, and therefore it is not clear how practical the proposal is to site 1500 houses in a Garden Village and accommodate all of the site's constraints.

**Q27. Will any impacts on the nearby Severn Estuary SPA/SAC Ramsar Site and SSI be adequately mitigated?**

No as it has not been assessed. Important documented PS37 evidence has been submitted to the council (Slimbridge Parish Council, WAG & residents) since January 2020. There is a statutory requirement for Local Authorities to check if a proposal might have a significant effect on a European Site. PS37 should have been identified and therefore as seen as functionally linked land and water to the SPA, within in the HRA. As PS37 has not been assessed using documented evidence and the risk has therefore not been adequately assessed, there is no way of knowing if PS37 would adversely affect the integrity of the European Sites either alone or in combination with other plans.

Therefore, mitigation measures such as exclusion zone for functionally linked land has not even been considered. No evidence exists to demonstrate SDC referred this to Natural England or shared the evidence with their own consultants (who produced the HRA). Note this relates to protected species, Eurasian Curlews identified as interest feature 7 of the SPA as part of the internationally important assemblage of waterfowl, using the proposed site allocation and the surrounding environs.

Natural England's consultation response to Regulation 18 suggests the River Cam (adjoins PS37) constitutes a functionally linked watercourse, where the critically endangered European Eel is present. No assessment has been undertaken.

The proposers' reports **(EB96b)** conducted in August 2019 highlight ecology concerns especially with respect to over wintering bird species and the proximity with the protected areas and the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust reserve.

The council's consultation summary refers to the feedback from The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust & Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust proposing that an EIA is required for PS37 with a detailed assessment of cumulative impacts, recreation pressure on Internationally, Nationally and Locally designated sites for PS37. A specialist independent professional to review the records and photographic evidence presented (**Rep00332 Regulation 18 & CD5d Rep954 Appendix16**) plus additional evidence since 2020). In addition, undertake an onsite assessment for a period of a year to align with the work undertaken at similar proposed allocation such as PS36.

The HRA assessment is incomplete as the risks to PS37 have not been reviewed in relation to functionally linked land and watercourse with respect to internationally protected species.

**Q28d. Has sufficient assessment been undertaken of any heritage and / or archaeological factors that may affect the site? For example, comments from Historic England refer to the site containing archaeology from medieval, potentially Roman and prehistoric eras. Does the policy adequately reflect any recommendations from relevant evidence base studies and assessments? Should reference be included in the policy to the need for development to take account of any potentially nationally significant features and the need to conserve them?**

Sufficient assessment of the archaeological factors has not been attempted.

The proposers, Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) and the Ernest Cook Trust (ECT) commissioned Cotswold Archaeology (CA) to conduct a Heritage Assessment in August 2019. The summary presented by (CA) was careful to point out that the site had high potential for Romano-British remains and, at the time, this was not anticipated to be such significance that it would preclude the development of the site. However, recent discoveries since 2019 disprove that assumption.

Archaeological excavations between 2020 and 2022 on ECT owned land in Slimbridge are just 1 kilometre from PS37 and next to Lighten brook which also flows through PS37. The discoveries suggest an extensive, high status and previously unknown, Roman settlement in Slimbridge with access to the River Severn and the Roman road adjoining PS37. Experts in Roman archaeology have visited the site, and, on their recommendation, an artefact of significant importance has been sent to the British Museum for detailed evaluation.

The GCC Heritage Team leader has visited the site and has been appraised of the findings. Despite being fully aware of the likely implications for the development of PS37, neither proposer has

instituted a full archaeological survey of the site. Leaving the programme of work until application, as required in ES10, will be too late and leaves open the possibility of further significant discoveries in PS37 which could seriously impact the deliverability, and consequently the viability, of the development should it be allowed to proceed. This could, of course, include part or all of PS37 being scheduled.

**Q29. The site lies within a Minerals Safeguarding Area (MSA). What steps, if any, will need to be taken prior to any development to ensure that this issue is mitigated? If extraction is required prior to any development taking place will this affect the viability or timescales for developing the site?**

Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) has objected to several site allocations on grounds that the policy has failed to have regard to the presence of underlying sand and gravel resources that are of economic importance. It rightly does so on the basis that mineral safeguarding policies contained within its Adopted Minerals LP require LPAs to ensure that valuable mineral resources are not needlessly sterilised by surface development (in line with paragraph 210c of the NPPF).

Despite the fact that PS37 site lies within an MSA (as defined in GCC's adopted Minerals LP), GCC has failed to raise any concern in its representations with respect to lack of regard given by Policy PS37 to mineral safeguarding. The inconsistent approach of the Mineral Planning Authority provides little comfort to WAG that a fair and consistent approach has been taken to the site selection process. It is also alarming that, as the joint site Promoter, GCC has not submitted any evidence to demonstrate that this important sustainability issue has been duly considered.

As such, there appears to be no evidence to demonstrate that the quality and quantity of the mineral resource has been assessed, nor the practicalities of its prior extraction and associated effects on the viability of and delivery timescales for the new settlement.

Furthermore, for the reasons set out in its representations [CD5d 953].and Matter 7a Statement, WAG is firmly of the view that PS37 is simply not required to meet housing needs for the Plan period and thus it is not reasonable to conclude that the overriding need for the development would outweigh the requirement to safeguard mineral resources of economic importance.

**Q31. Does the policy sufficiently ensure that the risk to existing flood risk management assets (due to climate change, rising sea levels and natural deterioration) will be addressed?**

As we consider that the measures suggested by the proposers to mitigate flooding in Cambridge and Slimbridge are inadequate for the current situation, then they are clearly totally inadequate for the future.

**Q32. Has the potential of canal towpath degradation due to increased usage by future occupants of the development been considered? How would this issue be mitigated and addressed if necessary?**

It would appear that the council have only considered the impact on the canal at PS36 as stated in the Duty to Cooperate Statement October 2021:

Stroud District Local Plan (2020-2040) ENVIRONMENT AGENCY STATEMENT OF COMMON GROUND between Stroud District Council Environment Agency October 2021 *'2.5 Since 2016 a range of meetings have taken place with Natural England, Footprint Ecology and the Environment Agency (West Midlands and Wessex Area teams) to discuss issues around potential development allocation at Sharpness and any potential impacts on the natural environment. Some of these meetings were*

***specifically with the Sharpness site promoters and their agents to discuss specific impacts and proposed mitigation. There were a range of interrelated matters such as visitor pressure, flood defence, drainage, and coastal squeeze and wildlife interests discussed’.***

Surprisingly, the council did not seek to establish common ground with the Canal and River Trust.

The towpath is already degraded and heavily used by residents, the many visitors and cyclists (using Sustrans route 41). Stroud District Council adopted a Canals Strategy on 4 October 2022 : ***‘The Canals Strategy sets out how the Council, our partners, communities and landowners can work together to deliver improvements to make better use of our canals for culture, recreation and leisure, to support the local economy and to enhance our environment and local wildlife’.***

Any increase in usage is likely to lead to further degradation which would only be mitigated by upgrading the towpath at significant cost. It would be another additional cost to any developer should one show any interest.

**Q33. Reference has been made to footpaths across the site that cross the railway. What is Network Rail’s view on this issue? Are there any safety implications that the proposed development would need to take account of? Does the policy need to refer to this?**

Network Rail’s (NR) position is set out in CD5b Rep3 ***‘Any development of land which would result in a material increase or significant change in the character of traffic using rail crossings should be refused unless, in consultation with Network Rail, it can either be demonstrated that they safety will not be compromised, or where safety is compromised serious mitigation measures would be incorporated to prevent any increased safety risk as a requirement of any permissions’.***

There is no evidence to demonstrate the council has considered any assessment or mitigation for the three rail level crossings adjoining P37 which are accessible via Public Rights of Way (PROW). However, the council state in SLP-01a P339, ***‘It is anticipated that the rail crossings will be closed for safety reasons. Further discussions between Network Rail, the promoters and the Council would be welcomed’.*** However, the council confirm they have not made any Policy Wording Modifications to reflect this significant matter directly related to PS37. The PROWS are used for leisure and access, there is a protocol to follow and therefore the council cannot simply state their intent is to close three level crossings which are used for leisure and access.

NR undertakes regular level crossing risk assessments which are used to develop their management strategy. One of the NR safety assessments referenced in CD5d states ***‘There are 108 trains per day. The highest permissible line speed of trains is 100mph. Trains are timetabled to run for 24 hours per day. Sighting can be challenging from the downside’.*** There would be significant safety considerations within excess of 1500 proposed new houses and employment site directly bordering the level crossings. It also states ***‘...it would not be reasonable to require Network Rail to fund rail improvements necessitated by commercial development. It is therefore appropriate to require developer contributions to fund such improvements’.***

If any changes are proposed to be made, a formal review process would take place. Stage 1 Feasibility - if a closure is found to be a viable option, a number of factors will be used to inform the development of a preferred closure methodology including a diversion, stepped footbridge, ramped footbridge, lifts or underpass. NR may also decide that closures are not a viable option. Stage 2 Engagement- a closure proposal is presented to local and statutory stakeholders for feedback and comment prior to any implementation decision being made. It is likely the process would take in advance of a year prior to agreement being reached.

Schedule 4 (j) of the Town & Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) Order, 2015) requires **that** *'...development which is likely to result in a material increase in the volume or a material change in the character of traffic using a level crossing over a railway' (public footpath, public or private road) the Planning Authority's Highway Engineer must submit details to both the Secretary of State for Transport and Network Rail for separate approval'*. There is no evidence to suggest any engagement has taken place with NR or the Secretary of State for Transport throughout the plan making process.

Please also refer to Matter 11 regarding infrastructure viability and costs. The Proposers did not know there were 3 level crossings; they do not mention them in their documents (**CD5d Rep955**) including their Masterplan, infrastructure plan/infrastructure costs or the Access & Movement Framework (AMF) document.

The policy wording should be amended to reflect the points raised in this submission.

**Q34. Are there any barriers to the site coming forward as anticipated by the housing trajectory? Are delivery assumptions realistic?**

There are numerous barriers to delivery as set out in WAG Regulation 19 submissions. Of particular note is the constraint posed by the need to move the high pressure gas pipeline before significant housing construction commences. Furthermore, the level of ground works to construct the massive embankments and dig the flood ponds will require the whole site to be actively 'worked' for a considerable period. If the build out rate is to be led by the provision of key transport infrastructure e.g. M5 new roundabout junctions, then the trajectory is very unrealistic.



## Matter 6 Site allocations – General Questions

### Q4 Site allocations that include housing development specify dwelling capacity figures.

a. **Is it clear that these have been determined for each site allocation? Are they based on suggested yields from the SALA or have they been updated to take account of more recent developer evidence or detailed assessments?**

With respect to PS37 there are no specific dwelling capacity figures published in the Promoter's Master plan (July 2021) and there is no reference to the SALA. The Masterplan states that the *'housing mix is not fixed at this stage...with affordable housing to be provided in agreement with Stroud District Council (Section 3.6 pp17 Para 4)'*. The Promoter has only published a proposed accommodation schedule to accommodate circa 1500 units.

b. **Is the scale of housing for each site allocation justified having regard to any constraint and provision of necessary additional infrastructure?**

PS37 has multiple infrastructure issues that would need to be addressed to ensure policy compliance. The need for a new cycle/ pedestrian crossing (over motorway and rail) along with noise abatement bund construction, gas main pipeline relocation issues, level crossing mitigation and extensive flood prevention strategies must surely question the viability of this site allocation. Note that the promoter's Masterplan states that *'detailed design, cost appraisal, viability testing and consideration of funding opportunities for infrastructure delivery will be undertaken during the next stages of the planning process'* (Section 5.1 pp34 para8).

c. **Do the site allocations achieve appropriate densities and make effective use of land in accordance with the framework?**

As stated in Q4a response it is difficult to comment where the housing mix has not yet been established. As such the promoter's Masterplan can only be seen as a visionary document.

d. **What are the reasons for using different terms for setting out the number of dwellings within each policy, such as 'compromising', 'compromising up to' and 'compromising approximately'? Is there a particular explanation as to why some sites are restricted by a 'up to number and is this approach consistent with national policy?**

Perhaps the most obvious answer is that the LP is vague and inconsistent in parts. PS37 has natural restrictions with respect to its boundaries being the M5 motorway, the main A38 trunk road and the Gloucester Bristol mainline rail. Again, the promoter's Masterplan is not able to provide detail at this stage.

e. **Overall is the development density and capacity for each development site justified?**

Again, the paucity of detail and the aspirational nature of the promoter's Masterplan makes further comment on density and capacity for PS37 extremely challenging. The dual challenges of dealing with the presence of the A4135, the site's complex infrastructure requirements (gas pipeline, embankments and flood ponds etc) whilst meeting the Garden Village principles mean the site is particularly challenged and may not have the capacity as advertised.

**Q5. Many of the site allocations propose a mix of development but only a number of dwelling is specified. Where other uses such as employment are also sought why is the size of that other use (i.e. floor space or land area) not also specified? How will a decision-maker determine if a future development proposal meets the policy and identified needs, if the requirements are not clearly defined?**

This question has particular relevance to PS37. The Promoter is clearly not in a position to specify this. The published Masterplan only makes reference to two proposed locations for employment use of about 5 hectares in total. There are no further details provided. In its Delivery Strategy (Section 5.4 pp35 para 8) the only observation is that ***'development of employment buildings to be agreed with Stroud District Council in line with demand.'*** As such it can only be assumed that the shared responsibility of identified needs will have to be met by a potential developer and not the promoter.

**Q7. Which sites are located on the best and most versatile agricultural land and is the loss justified?**

There is one proposed site allocation (PS37) located on the Best and Most Versatile (BMV) land within the District. This submission sets out why a significant loss of Grade 2 land is not justified.

Natural England's Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) Map (ALC006) documents land across the region according to its status. Please see map Appendix 11: Agricultural Land Classification Report within our Regulation 19 representations (p.359). It shows that in the Stroud District there is scarcity of significant land mass that contain Grade 2 (very good quality agricultural) land.

There are clearly many competing priorities for land, but it is essential to preserve the most productive agricultural land within the District from long-term loss, also recognising the importance of food production and food security. Once this precious asset is developed, it is lost for good.

Where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, the NPPF requires areas of poorer quality land to be preferred to those of higher quality (see footnote 58 to para 175). Evidence shows that this is not being achieved in practice. NPPF Para 119. states ***'Planning policies and decisions should promote an effective use of land in meeting the need for homes and other uses, while safeguarding and improving the environment and ensuring safe and healthy living conditions. Strategic policies should set out a clear strategy for accommodating objectively assessed needs, in a way that makes as much use as possible of previously developed or "brownfield" land'***. There is no evidence to demonstrate the council has made appropriate consideration or assessment of alternative areas of land previously developed or brownfield land.

NPPF Para 174. states ***'Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by: a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan); b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland'***. The council has not recognised or considered the importance of BMV land and the benefits to the District and the UK, therefore this important asset has not been assessed in line with the requirements of the NPPF. However, at the Stroud District Council Environment Committee approved action on 6 June 2019 Item 6 Progressing Carbon Neutral 2030 Appendix A Page 27 Para 3.6 it which states *'actions;*

- ***Ensure a food supply chain which is resilient to the effects of a changing climate***

- ***Review and publish the updated UK Food Security Assessment Stroud District can through the Local Plan***
- ***Protect the most productive agricultural land to allow conversion to production of crops for local consumption***.

Natural England's policies and guidance sets out how proposals on agricultural land should be assessed. If properly applied, it provides a robust and consistent assessment of the quality of agricultural land. It advises local planning authorities to take into account potential loss in excess of 20 hectares. This has been the threshold for consultation since 1987. The council failed to properly consult with Natural England at an early stage of the plan making process. It relied entirely on a flawed report commissioned by the proposers, without question or reference to Natural England. If the council had complied with the guidance, WAG considers PS37 would have been removed at an early stage of the plan making process. The majority of Stroud District Council elected members (2 political parties) did not support the loss of Grade 2 BMV land at the PS37, as it was unjustified. Please see the Green Party response to the Stroud District Council Local Plan Review - Emerging Strategy January 2019 (page 2) ***'The proposed Wisloe housing site should not be included in the revised Local Plan. The Natural England Agricultural Land Classification Map South West Region (ALC006) shows the land around Wisloe as being Grade 2 (Very Good), of which there is very little in Stroud District. Development should be avoided on such high-quality agricultural land, and such a high agricultural quality grading should reduce the sustainability rating of any proposed development on such land. In addition, with limited local facilities, the site has poor transport sustainability compared to sites closer to urban areas, or sites like Sharpness with sufficient size and a clear plan to develop services locally'***.

There is no evidence that the council informed Stroud District members that this land has now been correctly classified as BMV land (Grade 2), in June 2021, prior to the end of the Regulation 19 consultation or subsequently.

Furthermore, the council ignored evidence from our community and the professional opinion of other independent parties who responded on this point through the consultation processes. Our community was left with no choice but to fund and commission a review of the Proposer's ALC report. This evidence was presented by WAG to the council in February 2021 (see appendix 11 of its Regulation 19 representations).

It is not clear why the council decided not to publish this important evidence in the consultation which therefore denied respondents the opportunity to review the professional evidence presented by parties. Indeed, the report included in the SDC Reg19 submission on the website for PS37 under EB96a is the same incorrect ALC undertaken in Sept 2019, not the corrected assessment from a more reputable source.

Through pressure from our community, the proposers commissioned another ALC survey of the proposed site allocation PS37. The report was conclusive. PS37 is located on BMV land and predominantly Grade 2, the highest classification in Stroud District. The proposer's evidence however seems to suggest that the majority of land in the district is BMV. This is not a correct assumption, supported by other site ALCs; the majority are Grade 3b or lower.

The council published an evidence document (**CD3d**) later in 2021. It appears to just set out to 'correct' the narrative i.e. the land is Grade 2 BMV, as supported by the proposers' submission (**Rep955**).

There are alternative strategic size sites which have not been selected for inclusion in the plan which demonstrate they have poorer quality land i.e. not BMV, examples include PGP1 and PGP2. The NPPF has therefore not been complied with, as areas of poorer quality land have not been preferred to those of higher quality. The council has attempted to consider poorer quality land alternatives (to PS37) through the local plan process because decisions have been made based on the flawed grading of PS37. This has led to alternative sites not being assessed consistently. Developers of alternative sites have already completed ALC surveys demonstrating their land is lower quality land and not BMV. For example, alternative site PGP1 Whitminster, and Redrow Berkeley site which is under construction.

Such a significant loss (over 77 hectares) of the highest quality Grade 2 land in the District is not justified.

**Q8. Does the Plan clearly identify which site allocations are within the SAC, SPA and Ramsar core catchment zones and have suitable assessments been carried out to identify any impacts and appropriate mitigation measures where necessary?**

No, it does not. Important documented evidence was submitted to the council relating to PS37 (Parish Council, WAG & residents) since January 2020. There is a statutory requirement for Local Authorities to check if a proposal might affect have a significant effect on a European Site. PS37 should have been identified and therefore seen as functionally linked land and water to the SPA, within in the HRA. See response to Question 4. There is no evidence that demonstrates the council referred this to Natural England or shared the evidence this with the consultants (who produced the HRA).

The PS37 proposer's reports (**EB96b**) conducted in August 2019 also highlight ecology concerns especially with respect to over wintering bird species and the proximity with the protected areas and the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust reserve.

The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust & Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust propose that an EIA is undertaken for PS37 Wisloe new settlement with a detailed assessment of cumulative impacts, recreation pressure on Internationally, Nationally and Locally designated sites.

The minutes of the Stroud District Council Environment Meeting held on 20 April 2021 stated '**more work is required before examination**' but there is no evidence to confirm the council took action.

The HRA assessment is incomplete as the risks to PS37 have not been reviewed in relation to functionally linked land and water (internationally protected species). It has not been adequately demonstrated that PS37 would not adversely affect the integrity of the European Sites either alone or in combination with other plans. Therefore, the HRA conclusions are not sound. PS37 should be assessed based on evidence presented to the council (along with new evidence since the last consultation) through referral to Natural England.

**Q15. Overall, is each site allocation justified, viable and deliverable or developable (in accordance with the Framework definitions)?**

WAG considers new allocation site PS37 to be unjustified (there are sufficient housing numbers without this site), not viable (significant developer infrastructure investment required), not deliverable at the rate advertised (site complexities) and can only really be assessed as developable once a lead developer has assessed the proposal.

**Matter 6d Cam and Dursley site allocations - Strategic Site Allocation Policy PS24 Cam North West**

**Q31. The site is identified as a sustainable urban extension to Cam and is allocated for strategic housing development, to include approximately 900 dwellings and community uses. The policy seeks a development brief incorporating an indicative masterplan, that will address 18 listed requirements.**

- a. Paragraph 3.3.6 of the Plan states that the development will include ‘residential and community uses that meet the day to day needs of its residents’. Whilst the policy seeks educational and healthcare provision or contributions, there appears to be no provision for employment and retail uses which are generally necessary to meet day to day needs. Is this because such facilities are within close proximity and if so, what are the walking distances to such facilities from within the site?**
- b. Are all the 18 criteria, which list a varied range of requirements, justified by robust evidence? Are they sufficiently clear in their detail and is the policy wording effective?**
- c. Have impacts of the development on existing infrastructure been suitably assessed and are all necessary infrastructure improvements and requirements justified and set out clearly within the policy?**
- d. Do any policy requirements duplicate other Plan policies and if so, why is this necessary?**
- e. Paragraph 3.3.9 of the Plan refers to the need for substantial structural landscaping to protect Cam’s landscape setting and views from the AONB escarpment. Is this effectively set out in the policy and does the approach accord with paragraph 176 of the Framework as regards the setting of the AONB?**

This submission covers Q31a, b, c, d and e. It is not the intention of this submission to address the specific issues pertaining to PS24 but to highlight the more generic issues resulting from the combined impact of the Cam north extension with the proposed development at (PS37).

When combined with Dursley, Cam is identified as a Tier 1 area and housing development is progressing up to the extreme northerly parish boundary with the M5 where it meets the Slimbridge parish boundary. The villages of Slimbridge and Cambridge are classed as Tier 3b and 4a respectively. PS24 is correctly identified as an urban extension to Cam. The WAG and SPC responses to the Regulation 19 consultation show that PS37 effectively joins Slimbridge, Cambridge and Gossington with Cam via coalescence with PS37, which is repeated again in SPC’s response to this Examination. This coalescence effectively make the existing villages of Slimbridge, Cambridge and Gossington part of the urban extension of Cam and Dursley, the Tier 1 classification has therefore been extended into the Slimbridge parish.

With specific regard to question (c) covering infrastructure, it is not clear what additional infrastructure, if any, will be provided to cope with the net increase in dwellings by over 3000?

What is clear is there are minimal planned changes to the local road network to take traffic away from the A38/A4135. A very minor modification to extend the A38 two lane approach section to the A4135 roundabout has been shown to offer third order improvements at best and the modal shift assumptions provided in the latest transport report are unrealistic and unsupported by evidence. Road traffic along the A4135 has increased noticeably in recent years as the initial Cam north

housing developments, specifically along Box Road, have become populated. Action is required to improve the road infrastructure to address the future increase in demand.

Current evidence shows circa 1% of journeys in the local area use the train. There are proposals to improve the rail service at Cam and Dursley station but there are also limitations preventing more local trains from stopping as the line have a relatively high loading factor with numerous through trains. A significant increase in local rail use to justify the **'sustainable urban extension'** objective for Cam and to deliver a proposal which **'maximises the potential for residents to use active travel and public transport to access jobs, services and facilities'** for PS37 is required. This material increase in rail usage will not be achieved without a significant improvement in service, parking, access, platform upgrade etc, but none are planned.

Rednock secondary school is already at capacity, as are most other schools in the local area. Having been completely rebuilt recently, there are no plans to increase Rednock's capacity any further to cope with the increased demand generated by the additional housing, many of which will be young families with a disproportionately high level of children.

The Regulation 19 submission from WAG and SPC previously detailed the likely negative impact from the Cam north developments on flooding propensity and sewage capacity. This will be covered again under the PS37 submission for this Examination but it's important to recognise the combined effect the significant additional housing in Cam north will have downstream at PS3. Furthermore, unless the PS37 mitigation/management activities are effective then existing downstream villages of Slimbridge and Cambridge will be adversely affected. The separate submission on this highlights the risks and issues and concludes the proposed mitigation measures to be insufficient, further infrastructure is required to manage the flooding and sewage risks.

In conclusion, the existing common infrastructure has not been fully assessed and further improvements would be needed to support the net increase in housing numbers to accord with the proposal submissions and sustainability objectives.

Q31e covers landscape and the views from the AONB. The elevated section of PS24 generates particular visibility issues from Cam Peak and Cam Long Down but the housing already built in Cam north is plainly visible from these locations already. No amount of structural landscaping will hide all of the houses from the AONB and this problem becomes more apparent as the urban extension size, which would include PS37, increases. This also affects the view to the AONB (Cotswold escarpment) \_ from the Severn Vale, along with the impact of high acoustic bunds proposed on the west side of the M5.

## **Matter 9 Retail Provision and Town Centres**

**Q1. EB34 provides updates to the quantitative and qualitative assessments for convenience and comparison goods floorspace forecasts. Overall, it identifies there 'would not be an overriding need to plan for new retail floorspace across the five main settlements, as the focus should be on supporting existing provision in defined town centres.' It does, however, recommend provision of local retail and service facilities within the larger urban extensions and/or new settlements.**

**b. Does the Plan suitably provide for local retail needs within the larger strategic site allocation policies, including the proposed new settlements?**

New settlement site PS37 is split into two distinct areas either side of the busy A4135. The main bulk of the facilities e.g. school, sports ground and shops are in the northern section, there are few facilities envisioned on the south side. The development planned for the south does not have sufficient facilities allocated and it's arguable whether the north side does either.

## **Matter 10 Environment**

### **Matter 10a Sustainable future - Core Policy DCP1 Delivering Carbon Neutral by 2030**

**Q1. Core Policy DCP1 sets a target of achieving net zero by 2030, ahead of the national target which is to achieve the same by 2050.**

WAG provided a full response to this question in the Regulation 19 submission which showed the PS37 new settlement did not support the CN2030 aspirational target. The site's constraints and delays would mean few houses would contribute to the goal by 2030.

**Q1f. Does the policy provide sufficient support for the use of land for the production of food?**

No, it does not. There are many competing priorities for land, but it is essential to preserve the most productive agricultural land within our District from long-term loss recognising the importance of food production and food security.

Policy DCP1 should be more explicit with respect to protecting the best and most versatile (BMV) land for food production within the district, to capture the original intent which was agreed at the council's Environment Committee on 6 June 2019 (Item 6 Progressing Carbon Neutral 2030 Appendix A Page 27) which states 'to support this target ***all new development must be; designed to maximise green infrastructure to sequester carbon, achieve nature recovery and to support local food production***'.

It is clear that this has been missed from the DCP1 policy drafting as Stroud District Council Environment Committee also approved the following on 6 June 2019 (Item 6 Progressing Carbon Neutral 2030 Appendix A Page 27 which states;

***'3.4. Stroud District Council will:.....***

- ***incentivise good soil management practices that enhance soil's ability to deliver environmental benefits through future environmental land management scheme***
- ***protect soils and natural carbon stores.'***

To increase yields, farmers use inputs (for example fertilisers) which require carbon-based fuels to produce and also for application on the land.

BMV land produces more yields. The highest grade goes to land that:

- gives a high yield or output.
- has the widest range and versatility of use.
- produces the most consistent yield.
- requires less input.

If you protect the best producing land (BMV) to support local food production, you require less resources (inputs) to produce the highest yields.

***'We need our best land to be productive, 60% of our food is imported is this environmentally sustainable?' (CPRE Hertfordshire).***

***The March 2021 report from the Trade and Agriculture Commission states 'Our farmers are custodians of our countryside and the sector managers 72% of UK land. Farmers support***



***biodiversity conservation, food alleviation climate change mitigation and a host of other important public good services and delivery. Farmland acts as a carbon sink....'***

Other local authorities have gone further in the ambition to be Carbon Neutral with policies that are more explicit to protect their high grade agricultural land for example ***'Salford City Council's Policy CC1 - Climate change which states 'Development shall support Salford becoming carbon neutral by 2038, through where relevant: D) Responding to the economic and policy changes that are likely to accompany climate change, including by: Protecting high grade agricultural land'*** [Publication Local Plan, Chapter 5: Climate change](https://www.salford.gov.uk › salford-local-plan › 5-cl...)<https://www.salford.gov.uk › salford-local-plan › 5-cl...> .

Stroud District Council see themselves as the LA exemplar with respect to Carbon Neutrality, but this does not appear to flow through into direct action. Somerset West and Taunton Council are ranked 1<sup>st</sup> in the UK and also have an ambition to be CN by 2030, they have decided to go further and state ***'Environmental Protection Objectives (vi) To minimise the use of non-renewable resources including fossil fuels, minerals, water and the best agricultural land.'*** <https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/media/1063/taunton-deane-local-plan.pdf>

**h. Is the policy as a whole consistent with national policy?**

No it is not. It is an over-ambitious local target driven by ideology with no evidence base to support the viability.

**Q13. Is the requirement, where appropriate, for contributions towards surface water flood projects, including 'upstream rural SuDS projects' that are outside a site application boundary, justified?**

Development of sites like PS37 has a significant impact on surrounding settlements both downstream and upstream. In the case of PS37 the downstream impact is considered to be potentially existential to properties in both Cambridge and Slimbridge.

The southerly portion of PS37 is bisected by Lightenbrook (or Lighten brook) as is PS 24, west of Draycott, upstream and on the other side of the M5. Less than 100 metres separates the two sites and yet there is no evidence of joined up thinking about the interaction of the two sites and the resultant impact on Slimbridge which is also bisected by the brook.

In December 2020 the A38 was closed by flood water from PS37 including the now overwhelmed Lightenbrook. This is before the planned development of either PS24 or PS37. Therefore, we suggest not only should developers be responsible for contributions to upstream rural SUDS projects, but they should also be required to demonstrate awareness of the impact on surrounding settlements. They cannot operate in isolation.

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### **Maintaining quality of life within our environmental limits - Delivery Policy ES3**

**Q14. The policy sets a number of criteria against which development proposals will be assessed. Some relate to environmental limits and some relate to living conditions issues (such as noise disturbance and outlook). Is the scope of the policy justified in terms of the policy issues it seeks to cover? Is the policy effective or should it be split into two policies covering environmental limits and living conditions respectively?**

Please refer to Regulation 19 submission, Appendix 13, for a detailed response to this question.

**Q15. Are the criteria set out in the policy justified and consistent with national policy, for example criteria 8 which relates to the best and most versatile agricultural land?**

No, it does not. We propose that Policy ES3 Development proposals should be more explicit to be consistent with the NPPF footnote (page 50) '*Where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, areas of poorer quality land will be preferred to those of a higher quality*'.

There is no weighting in the policy to provide appropriate assessment by classification or by size i.e. no cumulative effect it taken into account.

**Q16. Does the policy take sufficient account of mitigation measures that might be used to make developments acceptable where there would be some level of harm, for example regarding soil resources?**

No, the policy does not provide any guidance on mitigation where they would be some or significant level of harm with respect to soil resources.

The council's head of planning suggested at the Environment Meeting on 20 April 2021 that the whole of proposed allocation PS37 could have all soil removed and moved to another location. Natural England confirmed this is the '*least preferred option*' and we suspect this is the least preferred option for small areas of land, not the size of a large development like PS37.

WAG has undertaken a conservative feasibility assessment to remove and move the soil from PS37. We are happy to share our calculations to support this, which show:

The total weight of soil to be moved off and on site is 1,760,000 tonnes.

Therefore 88,000 loads would be required (max load 20 tonne lorry)

A fleet of 20 HGVs operating 24/7 (which is very unlikely to be allowed) and making 8 journeys per day, the timescale would be 550 days.

If only allowed to operate for 8 hours per day the timescale would escalate to around 13 years.

The proposal to move this amount of soil goes against the DEFRA [Construction Code of Practice for the Sustainable Use of Soils on Construction Sites \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

The proposers seem to think it is acceptable to "*re-utilise the BMV land*" onsite.

The policy states that ***'once developed, even for other open spaces, the return to viable agricultural use is rarely feasible'***. We agree with this statement. It cannot be mitigated, especially for 77 hectares when there are alternative sites which have poorer quality land which have not been assessed but have been rejected without reason.

**Q17. When the policy refers to *'an acceptable level'* is it clear what is meant by this term and how development proposals will be assessed against it?**

The government's food strategy highlights that the UK maintains a high degree of food security. The strategy sets out an aim to broadly maintain domestic production at current levels to build the UK's resilience to future crisis and shocks. We have some of the best performing farms in the world, with 57% of agricultural output coming from just 33% of the farmed land area. Land is being taken out of cultivation at a rate of almost 100,000 acres per annum. We cannot afford to lose land to development that has no need to be there.

More consideration should be given to the highest value farmland used for food production in the policy.

The policy does not provide any clarity with regard to an acceptable level. It states, ***'Development proposals (as appropriate to their nature and scale) will demonstrate appropriate measures....'***

Given the scarcity of BMV land (in particular Grade 2) in the district, a robust policy is essential.

The SA undertaken also does not reflect the difference between "greenfield" and "BMV" with the exception of narrative. There is no differentiation with respect to any loss i.e. 1 hectare across the Stroud District (split over multiple sites) is very different to the potential loss of 77 hectares from one site! The assessments are not justified as they do not reflect national policy.

The Natural England Guide to assessing development proposals on agricultural land state that ***'any proposals that are likely to cause the loss (or cumulative loss) of 20 ha or more of BMV land'*** the council must refer to Natural England.

Planning Policy Wales Edition 10 (PPW) in para 3.54 and 3.55 state BMV ***'should be conserved as a finite resource for the future'*** and as a result needed to be both managed and protected (the ALC system was implemented in both England and Wales in 1966).

The other constraint is the visual impact on the countryside if BMV is lost to built form.

For the sequential test, the first question to ask is whether the use of agricultural land is necessary?

**Matter 10c Natural and historic environment**

**Q26. Policy ES6 requires development proposals to provide a minimum of 10% net gain in biodiversity (BNG). How will this requirement take account of emerging statutory requirements in the Environment Bill regarding BNG to ensure that there is no overlap or that the policy becomes outdated?**

The updated Environment Bill and Environmental Improvement Plan is now a legal binding requirement. They set out how the country will achieve these targets. Policy ES6 does not take this into account, and therefore within a few months the local plan would not be compliant.

**Q27. Is the minimum 10% BNG requirement justified and consistent with national policy? Should the amount requested be less, or indeed greater in some circumstances such as on strategic site allocations?**

Policy ES6 requires a minimum of 10% BNG under current statutory requirements, however, some sites will require significantly more. This is backed up by environmental organisations such as the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust and the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust proposing a minimum of 20% for proposed site allocation PS37. The council should be aiming to deliver exemplary outcomes not just delivering 'minimum targets'. There is nothing to evidence it would be anything other than lip service.

**Q28. Is the policy clear as to how 10% BNG will be calculated? Is additional information needed to make the policy effective?**

No, the policy is not clear, and additional information is required for this to work. There is also a presumption against development on irreplaceable habitat (IR), which represents critical natural capital (supporting protected species) that cannot be replaced or substituted. This should be explicit in the policy.

**Q29. Should the policy specify transitional arrangements for the implementation of this policy? A period of two years has been suggested. Is a transitional period justified or necessary?**

A transitional period is not required. Through the consultation process (180,000 parties involved) it has been clear more has to be done which commences in 2023. This includes interim targets and this is the transitional period.

**Q30. When the provision of a minimum of 10% BNG is not achievable on a development site, the policy requires off site measures to be provided. How will this requirement be implemented?**

A small number of urban sites may not be able to meet 10% and may require offsite measures, however sites such as PS37 proposed to be developed with exemplary garden village principles, the BNG would be required to be on site. However, part of the site has functionally linked land to the SPA and therefore this area could not be developed as it cannot be replaced.

**Q31. The policy does not currently explicitly refer to the delivery of new areas of SANGs. Is such a reference necessary?**

Yes, the policy should be amended to explicitly state the SANGs requirements, methodology, assessments and payments. Natural England updated their SANGS document in 2021.

The council requires a strategic approach to offset recreational pressure on protected sites. Developers can deliver their own SANGs after Natural England approval or developers pay financial contributions towards enhancement of open space land which is owned or managed by the council to SANG status and long-term management.

**Q32. Natural England have proposed some detailed amendments to the wording of this policy regarding Habitats and the HRA process. Has agreement between the council and NE been reached on this issue? What amendments, if any, are suggested as necessary to make the policy sound?**

There are outstanding matters to be addressed with regard to the failure to refer PS37 evidence to Natural England which has led the HRA not accurately reflecting the risks identified (protected

species). The policy could be amended to involve local community groups who can provide evidence with respect to the HRA but also monitoring of any development. We propose a policy amendment would be appropriate for Stroud.

**Q33. Has the council's viability assessment made a sufficient and realistic assessment of the costs associated with implanting this policy for developers?**

No. This is not evident. However, some sites such as PS37 (& PS36) should have higher standards due to the garden village principles and that a differential should be shown between different sites.

**Q34. The policy states that development should not adversely affect local wildlife sites, local nature reserves, local geological or geomorphological sites or local ecological or green infrastructure networks. Is this justified and consistent with national policy? Does the policy draw sufficient distinction between the different levels of protection that apply to international, national and local sites respectively?**

No, it does not. The policy should be made clearer.

**Q35. Is the policy as a whole worded sufficiently flexibly and positively to ensure that development that takes account of biodiversity and geodiversity (and complies with relevant legislation and regulations) is enabled? If not, what are the reasons for this?**

No, it does not provide sufficient protection. 6.49 Should not be at the discretion of developers to be on or off site or combination. This should be a decision reached in consultation with experts and community groups who are closer to understanding the best mechanism for the local area. BNG cannot be achieved if the gain is spread across a site. It is more likely (and is best practice to be in one or two larger locations without human (or pet disturbance) as well as a dark skies environment to reduce impact to not only wildlife but humans.

**Q39. Does the policy aim of seeking to retain the existing distinctive qualities of the landscape take account of the challenges presented by climate change and changes in the agricultural industry (for example changes to agricultural payments)? Can this aim be achieved and if not, why not?**

The delivery policy should not just focus on the AONB, there are qualities of the landscape that are set out in Stroud District Landscape Assessment. Climate change may have an impact on the land use and form with respect to certain landscapes and this is not addressed in the policy. Agricultural practices which lead to iconic and distinctive landscapes created over hundreds of years, such as arable fields and low lying grassland in the Severn Vale, should also be protected from development (including solar and battery storage, and light pollution). This is also important with respect to the impact to Internationally protected areas (estuary) and its environments.

**Q47. Is Delivery Policy ES10 consistent with national policy and are the criteria justified and effective? In particular:**

**d. Is it clear from the wording of the policy in what circumstances archaeological assessments would be required?**

It is clear from the wording of ES10 that archaeological assessments are required at the time of application and proposals should be accompanied by a description of the heritage asset's significance. The PS37 proposers have complied with the latter but, as no application is submitted until after a local plan is approved, they have chosen not to conduct an archaeological assessment.

This unfortunate loophole coupled with the outdated archaeological assessment by Cotswold Archaeology (CA) in 2019 on which the proposal depends, seriously underplays the likely significance of heritage assets in PS37. This is in sharp contrast with the developers of the alternative site at Whitminster (PGP1) and Cam (PS24) where a full archaeological assessment has been completed. Clearly, in this case, the developers were keen to prove the viability of their proposal and avoid potentially damaging discoveries later which could limit or even rule out development. The PS37 proposers have chosen not to take this step despite being fully aware of the post 2019 discoveries.

ES10 paragraphs 2 and 3 state that proposals will be supported which conserve and where appropriate, enhance the heritage significance of stone, bronze, iron age and roman settlements. The CA assessment points out the presence of copious amounts of roman building materials, coins and hypocaust simply laying on the surface of PS37 which indicates the existence of one or more roman buildings. The Gloucestershire Heritage Team leader himself is fully aware of the certainty of roman building on the site.

We find no evidence that either of the proposers has made the council aware of the current situation and the possible impact on PS37's inclusion in the local plan. This despite making the council aware of the early implications at the time of the Slimbridge Local History Society (SLHS) submission to Regulation 19 in July 2021.

Our response at Q28d describes the important archaeological discoveries that have been made in 2020-2022 since the CA assessment in 2019 and the SLHS Regulation 19 submission which could seriously affect the viability of PS37. If they are of significant heritage and cultural importance it is possible that part or all of the site could be scheduled.

**e. Criterion 4 of the policy refers to the protection and enhancement of key views and vistas. Is the policy clear on how these terms will be defined? Is it intended to refer to those which are relevant to the heritage asset's setting or all views?**

Key views and vistas are extremely important to communities and to retain a link to the past. The policy should be amended to define these as those recognised by a community for example records with the local history society, Village Design Statements (VDS) and Neighbourhood Development Plans. In a rural location, views are important to the sense of arrival in a particular village (clear gaps between settlements), key views from PROWS and an example in the Slimbridge Parish the VDS the spire of St John's Church (which is Grade 1) is a prominent feature within the landscape'.

**f. Is criterion 5 consistent with national policy, for example in its approach to the level of any harm or loss and the differences between designated and non-designated heritage assets?**

**Q48. Is the wording of the policy consistent with the recommendations in the SA to guide the form of future development and minimise harm to heritage assets (with reference to comments from Historic England)?**

As pointed out earlier under paragraph 47d, considerable time and effort could be spared if sites under consideration under a local plan were to be required to submit a full archaeological assessment prior to consideration for inclusion.

**Matter 10 - Equestrian Development Delivery - Policy ES9**

**Q56 - Does the policy as worded take sufficient account of the keeping of horses for sport and exercise.**

Policy ES9 summary states **‘Any proposal for the conversion or change of use of existing equestrian establishments to non-equestrian use will be discouraged, unless there is a strong case setting out why an exception should be made’**.

The policy does not set out any criteria or rationale for what a strong case should be. The policy needs to be amended with new text, to explicitly state this.

In addition, The NPPF states; ***‘Supporting a prosperous rural economy***

***84. Planning policies and decisions should enable:***

***d) the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship’***, and

***‘Open space and recreation 99. Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:***

***a) an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements***

***b) the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location***

***c) or the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use’***.

Recent legal cases such as Case Millwood Designer Homes Ltd v Secretary of State for Communities Housing and Local Government & Anor [2021] EWHC 3464 (Admin) (17 December 2021) <https://www.townlegal.com/wp-content/uploads/2021-EWHC-3464-Admin-17-December-2021.pdf> demonstrates why it is important to have more robust policy aligned to the NPPF.

Therefore, we propose the policy ES9 should be updated to reflect the NPPF requirements outlined above.

## **Matter 11 – Infrastructure General Questions**

**Does the Plan set out a positively prepared strategy for infrastructure to meet the Plan's development strategy and is this justified, effective and consistent with national policy? Are the policies relating to infrastructure sound? Is infrastructure provision viable?**

**11a. The policy identifies the Council's broad intentions in achieving infrastructure provision, rather than setting out clear development requirements. What infrastructure is actually sought from development proposals or is this appropriately set out within other Plan policies including the site allocations? Can the Council clarify the purpose of the policy and how a decision maker would use it when determining future proposals?**

The council published the Infrastructure Delivery Plan 2021 (**EB69**). Along with Core Policy 6 it notes a variety of funding mechanisms that are available with the developer expected to make up an infrastructure provision as required. Where the developer is unable to do so the Council will seek a proportionate contribution through legal agreement or via a levy. However, the process for determining this contribution level appears nebulous and unclear in published documents.

With respect to PS37 the IDP addendum document (Aug 2022) (**EB110**) is factually incorrect. Page 25 references the 'Developer' with respect to provision of a pedestrian and cycle bridge. There is only a proposer at present (ECT and GCC) who have published a Master Plan which states '*an incoming partner would inherit the design of the scheme and align themselves with the landowners' objectives*'.

The published Master Plan's viability appraisal work concludes with the fact that '*detailed design development, cost appraisal, viability testing and consideration of funding opportunities for infrastructure delivery will be undertaken during the next stages of the planning process*'. As there is no developer on board and no concrete information or planning for this development it is thus difficult to comment on whether this satisfies provision viability criteria per se. We would suggest not.

Most of the PS37 infrastructure is to be funded by the site developer, not utility providers and the Masterplan contained options/choices for infrastructure which were not identified as fundamental requirements. As such these infrastructure requirements have not been appropriately set out.

### **Matter 11b Transport**

#### **Level Crossings**

Further the Matter 5 submission regarding level crossings at PS37, assuming Network Rail through the review process decided that mitigation was required (noting there are three level crossings adjoining PS37), all costs will be directly attributable to the proposer. A number of lower cost solutions could be proposed such as miniature stop lights (MSL) or an underpass, both would be unacceptable, and it is likely only a footbridge would be permitted. According to [www.newcivilengineer](http://www.newcivilengineer) a basic rail footbridge would not cost less than £3.6million to purchase. If electrification of the route is under consideration, the footbridge would be built to electrification bridge standards, which is considerably more expensive. In addition to this, there would be construction costs for both sides of the rail track and the network would need to be closed during construction. Land would be required to be owned and ample space allowed on both sides of the



track. Land is required to be flat to accommodate this; this is not the case at PS37. Bridges are between 42-102 metres long. In addition, due to the height of the rail track in comparison to the land (it is raised) this would lead to a landscape issue from and towards the AONB.

**Q3. In general terms will Core Policy CP6, the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) and other policies of the Plan, including allocation policies, ensure that necessary transport infrastructure will be delivered and in the right place and at the right time?**

**Q5. Is the Council satisfied that the Plan proposals would not have an unacceptable impact on highway safety or that the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would not be severe?**

**Q6. How will the Council work with infrastructure and service providers (including National Highways, developers, landowners and neighbouring authorities) to identify and address any impacts of proposed development, including through the use of contributions, CIL and through the implementation of any highway improvement schemes?**

The following response addresses questions 3, 5 and 6. A comprehensive response to these questions has previously been supplied via the Regulation 19 submission and more recently through the mini-consultation held in October 2022. WAG secured through an FOI the following information provided by Highways England to the Council (May 2021) for the Regulation 19 submission - ***'Highways England would recommend that site allocation policies and Delivery Policies within the Draft Local Plan should be strengthened to clearly signpost the need for improvements at M5 Junctions 12, 13 and 14 and linked to allocations that are likely to impact on the SRN. At present, we consider there to be a disconnect between the findings of the TFR and IDP, and the policy commitments contained within the Draft Local Plan. Where improvements are necessary to support safe and sustainable Local Plan growth then this should be clearly highlighted.***

***The Local Plan should also set out how the delivery of development will be managed to ensure that necessary infrastructure is in place to prevent a severe or unacceptable safety impact on the SRN. Whilst improvements to the SRN are identified in the TFR and IDP, the need for their timely delivery to mitigate adverse impact on the SRN and support the delivery of sustainable economic growth across the Plan area is not clearly signposted in the Pre-submission Draft Local Plan. Whilst Highways England will continue to work collaboratively with the District Council and neighbouring authorities to explore funding opportunities and delivery routes for necessary infrastructure improvements, we recommend that development management and site allocation policies should be strengthened to ensure that development comes forward in line with the availability of necessary transport infrastructure.'***

Site PS37 is roughly halfway between M5 junctions 13 and 14 and much of the road traffic for commuting will be north and south along the A38 to these junctions. Other large sites, not selected for inclusion within the Local Plan (PGP1 and PGP2), are both virtually on the M5 junctions and therefore present fewer challenges to road network infrastructure.

WAG is confident that a similar situation exists regarding Network Rail and the need to improve the frequency and service provided at Cam and Dursley station and lack of agreement to build foot bridges over the line to replace the level crossings etc. Only 1% of journeys currently use the Cam and Dursley rail service and therefore its existence cannot be considered a material factor in deciding on future growth locations. The Cam and Slimbridge parish areas are predominantly dormitory zones and the primary means of transport remains the private car.

The Council has throughout pursued a policy of supporting the inclusion of two new allocations at Sharpness and Wisloe (PS37) and to exclude from the Plan any other similarly attractive site proposals e.g. PGP1 and PGP2 which came forward. The assessment for these alternative sites highlights the lower level of infrastructure required to realise them.

Clearly, as confirmed by the providers, the site infrastructure requirements to support PS37 new allocation is not supported by the necessary infrastructure and there are major concerns that supporting infrastructure will not be developed in time. This could cause unacceptably severe impact on the road network. As of July 2021, when the Regulation 19 consultation closed, little agreement (if any) had been reached with infrastructure providers regarding how the necessary transport network improvements would be achieved. The Plan has been allocation led, not infrastructure led.

**Q4. Will the mitigation measures identified be sufficient to address the highway impacts identified?**

**Q16. A38 Corridor (This package includes the following number of individual junctions which have been identified for highway capacity improvements in the Traffic Forecasting Report (EB61)):**

- **A38 / Grove Lane;**
- **A38 at Claypits;**
- **A38 / B4066;**
- **A38 / B4066 Berkeley Road;**
- **A38 / Alkington Lane; and**
- **A38 / A4135.**

**Are these mitigation measures necessary and justified? Do they represent a comprehensive set of mitigation measures required to support the levels of growth set out in the Plan?**

The following response addresses questions 4 and 16. A comprehensive response to these questions has previously been supplied via the Regulation 19 submission and more recently through the mini-consultation held in October 2022. Regarding site PS37, the only highway mitigation in the vicinity of PS37 remains the proposed widening of the A38 northbound approach to two-lanes (**ID23 in Table 4.2 of the TFRA**). The MWT report submitted for the mini-consultation shows the existing layout of the roundabout and that the A38 northbound approach already has two lanes as it approaches the giveaway line.

Any benefits associated with the proposed mitigation would therefore be minimal at best and likely have no material effect on junction operation, capacity or safety. Lengthening the section of two-lane approach may increase stacking space for northbound vehicles to queue but would do little to increase the number of vehicles that could physically get through the junction at peak times. Also, if land outside the adopted highway were to be required to deliver a material widening, its availability cannot be guaranteed as it is outside of the Wisloe promoter's control.

It is noted from Table C.1 (junction 23) that the A38 northbound approach is predicted to have a maximum flow volume over capacity (V/C) ratio of 105 in the 2040 Local Plan 'no mitigation' scenario. Practical operational capacity is normally taken as being 85 meaning the approach would cause significant queuing and delays. It is difficult to see how the proposed minor widening would

bring the northbound approach within capacity, yet Table C.1 also indicates that in the 2040 Local Plan 'with mitigation' scenario the maximum V/C at the junction reduces to 64 and switches to the A4135 westbound approach. In other words, the operation of the A38 northbound approach reduces from 105 to less than 64.

The above is considered unrealistic and indicates that the TFRA is likely to significantly underestimate the traffic impacts of the Local Plan on the operation of the A38 / A4135 roundabout. It also further draws into question the appropriateness of the large scale PS37 Wisloe allocation given its location adjacent to, and its reliance on, the roundabout and the A38 corridor.

It should be noted that the increased size of the proposed Land at Draycott allocation (200 extra dwellings, 122 and 102 extra two-way trips in the AM and PM peak hours respectively) would inevitably put further pressure on the roundabout compared to that assessed previously.

The STSA reiterates that the traffic impacts of the draft Local Plan require mitigation in terms of both highway schemes and sustainable travel schemes that focus on reducing the need to travel and enabling a modal shift away from private vehicles. Sustainable travel interventions should also be prioritised above purely highway capacity improvements. The STSA therefore includes **"...a greater level of ambition towards sustainable travel..."**

It is noted that each intervention or sustainable travel measure has been assigned a percentage reduction in trips that it is expected to deliver. This percentage has been discussed and agreed between representatives of Gloucestershire County Council (GCC), National Highways (NH) and SDC. Paragraph 5.9 of the STSA identifies that a balance has been sought between **"...the robustness of traffic generation reductions that can be achieved, along with the risks of under-assessing traffic impacts of the Local Plan, and the strong focus on sustainable transport needed to address the Climate Emergency."**

Despite seeking such a balance, it appears the percentage reduction values are little more than an educated guess agreed between GCC, NH and SDC. No evidence has been put forward to fully justify the percentage reduction values used. There can be no guarantee that the percentage reduction values will be achieved and that the resulting traffic impact of the Local Plan will not be significantly greater than envisaged.

Table 5-1 of the STSA provides a summary of the percentage reduction in traffic generation associated with the latest document compared to the previous iteration. For PS37 these can be summarised as:

- Travel planning, internalisation and reducing the need to travel – increase in reduction from 6% to 10%.
- Public transport measures on the A38 – increase in reduction from 10% to 15%.
- Pedestrian / cycle connection to Cam & Dursley Station – increase in reduction from 10% to 15% (noting overall target of 20%).

In addition, delivery of a sustainable transport spine through Wisloe, Cam and Dursley via the A4135 corridor is identified as delivering up to a further 10% reduction with this remaining unaltered from the previous version of the Sustainable Transport Strategy.

It is assumed that the increase in the percentage reduction applied is directly linked to the **"...greater level of ambition towards sustainable travel..."** put forward within the STSA. The

ambition may well be there, but it remains the case that there is no evidence provided to justify the values used and no guarantee that these higher percentage reduction values will be achieved.

It also appears extremely convenient that an increase in the assumed percentage reduction values serves to help 'mitigate' for the increase in dwelling numbers and employment floor area put forward within the latest draft Local Plan. It is no wonder the TFRA identifies no need for more highway capacity interventions when the basis of the 'with development' assumptions used within it have changed.

Professional technical assessment shows the mitigation measures identified for PS37 will not be sufficient to address the highway impacts identified and they do not represent a comprehensive set of mitigation measures required to support the levels of growth set out in the Plan. Further mitigation measures are required. The STS assumes high quality pedestrian, cycle and public transport infrastructure can be provided for PS37 with no evidence provided that it can. This is concerning as the now higher assumed percentage reduction in vehicle trips is predicated on just such a provision.

**Q21. The Sustainable Transport Strategy (STS) Addendum (July 2022) lists 14 interventions to be included in the STS Addendum (Table 2.2). The schemes include a number of significant infrastructure projects that are referred to in the Plan including public transport for a strategic park and interchange hub scheme for M5 J12 and a new railway station (s) south of Gloucester, north of Bristol. Under funding status, all the interventions state 'still required'.**

Stonehouse Town Council and Stroud District Council are promoting a project to reopen Stroudwater Station at Stonehouse on the Bristol to Birmingham line to give 55,000 people in the Stroud Valleys a fast, green direct link to Bristol and beyond. The proposal received recognition in the form of a £50,000 award in 2021 from the DFT's Restoring Your Railways Ideas Fund. The SOBC concludes that there is a strong strategic and economic case for a new railway station at Stonehouse served by one or two trains per hour. The councils are now awaiting an announcement on whether the project can proceed to the next more detailed Outline Business Case stage. The population in the catchment area, which runs along the Stroudwater Canal corridor, is now 55,000 and has been growing at twice the rate for Stroud District and the County. Further housing and employment developments are being developed or planned. Stonehouse is an employment hotspot for the District with over 4,000 people working on the industrial estates around the town. Along with Stroud, there is a concentration of successful high tech, IT and green businesses. In 2020, Stroud District Council's Environment Committee passed a unanimous resolution in support of the new station. Ten Town and Parish Councils support the proposal. Alternative site (PGP1) would benefit from the new station to support the existing sustainable transport links along the canal route.

**Matter 12 Monitoring and Implementation**

**Issue 12 – Is the Plan deliverable, capable of being effectively monitored and is it viable?**

**Q1. The Plan, at paragraph 7.12 states that a monitoring framework will be prepared to assess the performance of the Plan for the plan period. Has this been produced and if not when will this be made available?**

Community involvement is the development and management of monitoring of the implementation related to allocations would be extremely welcome.