

COMMENTS FROM ALKINGTON PARISH COUNCIL

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Emerging Local Plan.

Having attended the public consultation in Sharpness and the Parish Council Conference and met with the local community at their meetings, Alkington Parish councillors have a number of grave concerns about the proposals for the south of Stroud District.

LOCAL ECONOMY AND JOBS

We broadly support key issues you have identified and the strategy to support the local economy and the creation of jobs. However, the reality is that this is something that has been ongoing for a long time, but without success because of the poor infrastructure and lack of high-speed broadband in the majority of the area. Building a garden town in the Sharpness area will not necessarily attract major employers, but it will have a huge impact on the road network, adding to the traffic jams already experienced at the M5 junctions, in particular J14 as people commute to Bristol and, to a lesser degree, J13 for Gloucester and Cheltenham. There is only an infrequent direct bus from Berkeley and Newport (in Alkington parish) to Bristol, as that is the main destination for the few commuters who use public transport.

The M5 motorway junctions are already over-capacity and this will only get worse, without the addition of thousands of new homes at Sharpness. Around 4000 new homes are planned at Buckover, near Thornbury, South Gloucestershire, as well as a development at Falfield; both will have a significant impact on J14. Junction 13 will also be majorly affected once the West of Stonehouse development is complete.

There has been talk of a train service to link Sharpness with Cam & Dursley rail station, and major routes, but the old line finishes close to the Prince of Wales at Berkeley Road on the A38, which is still a few miles from Cam & Dursley, so plans would have to be made to set up a rail-link.

HOUSING

We do not underestimate the need for new housing, but there seems to be a focus on a huge development at Sharpness in a number of the proposals. Your Key Issue 1 states that new housing should be located in the right place, supported by the right services and infrastructure to create sustainable development. Nobody can disagree with that, but the land around Sharpness is mainly greenfield and only in October 2017, in the Local Plan Review, Issues and Options paper, it stated that 'Access to services and facilities elsewhere is rated very poor'. A year later, although nothing has changed on the ground, in the Emerging Local Plan, access is now rated as good. This upgrading seems to be for the convenience of making the proposal for a new garden town fit, rather than being based on evidence.

Interestingly, Whaddon appears in the Issues and Options paper 2017 as a potential site for housing/employment/community uses, but is hardly covered in the Emerging Local Plan when it could take large numbers of housing and is not constrained by being in the Green Belt. It appears that this has been done to help Gloucester City meet its housing needs, which will have a negative impact elsewhere in Stroud District.

Any new housing should be proportionate and not concentrate 80% of the required housing in the south of the district. Communities such as Berkeley, Cam, Dursley, Kingswood, Newtown & Sharpness, North Nibley, Uley and Wotton-under-Edge, to name a few, have the potential for some growth, but none should be swamped by significant developments or even a new large settlement.

NEWPORT – TIER 4

We were interested to note that Newport remains a Tier 4 settlement, but Stone in Ham & Stone parish is now a Tier 5. Both are within a few miles of each other on the A38, sharing the same limited bus routes. The only difference is that Newport has a public house, which is shortly to close down. We do not disagree with Newport being a Tier 4, but it does highlight the rather random approach of the strategy. A proportionate development of up to 10 houses, outside the settlement development limits in Newport, would be welcomed, in addition to the 39 units that have outline planning permission for the Newport Towers site.

SUMMARY

To develop a large new settlement at Sharpness is probably the easiest for planners and developers, but it overlooks the fact that many smaller communities across the district would welcome some proportional development in order to make them sustainable. Many young people would like to remain in their own community, rather than having to move to a large new settlement, so making it easier to provide affordable housing on rural exception sites would be logical. The impact on the infrastructure would be immense as there is no evidence that significant numbers of employers would be attracted to the area.

We ask that our comments are retained as part of the official documentation.

Alkington PC 14.1.19