

## **Stroud District Local Plan Review Examination**

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Ms Kathy O'Leary  
Chief Executive  
Stroud District Council

Sent by email

2 October 2023

Dear Ms O'Leary

### **Stroud District Local Plan Review Examination**

Thank you for your letter dated 12 September 2023, along with the Local Plan Action Plan. We also acknowledge the letters you have forwarded from the site promoters for the proposed Wisloe and Sharpness new settlements.

We are currently considering the information submitted along with the Council's request to pause the Examination for six months whilst the work listed in the Action Plan is undertaken.

Regarding the junction improvement works required at J12 and J14 of the M5, due to the strategic nature of these infrastructure projects, partnership working will be required to ensure a successful outcome. Several of the steps listed in the Action Plan will require the agreement and co-operation of National Highways and Gloucestershire County Council, as well as South Gloucestershire Council. These are the organisations who were invited to attend the focused session at the start of the Examination to discuss Strategic Road Network matters.

We would therefore like to invite comments from these organisations on the Action Plan. This will help to inform our view on the next steps in the Examination.

In responding to our request, we would ask that the following points are specifically considered:

#### J12 and J14 of the M5

1. Is the timetable set out in the Action Plan realistic and achievable? If not, why not?
2. Are there any important steps / workstreams that have been omitted? And if so, why are these necessary?
3. Is there agreement as to the traffic data and forecasting and that this stage has been completed?
4. Is it realistic for a concept design to be agreed by all parties and for a preferred option to be agreed by December 2023?
5. Is it realistic that scheme costs and a budget can be agreed by all parties by January 2024?
6. Can a funding and apportionment methodology be agreed with neighbouring Councils by January / February 2024? Are all relevant parties confident that this timescale is feasible, and that agreement can be achieved?
7. Can a delivery scheme be agreed by the end of 2023?

#### Housing supply

8. We note the workstream referring to assessing the potential for housing supply from sites not impacted by J12 and J14. In this regard, we are aware that National Highways has raised concerns that this has not been evidenced in modelling terms. We would therefore request that further information be provided as to the modelling that has been undertaken to demonstrate that any sites identified would not impact on these junctions (including those listed in the appendix 2ac6 note on housing supply). Any modelling would also need to be agreed with relevant partners including National Highways, and as such we would need clarification of this.

Whilst we note that the Action Plan refers to identifying sources of funding, our letter dated 4 August acknowledged that it can usually take many years to bid for and secure appropriate funding for strategic road infrastructure. If we were to agree to pause the Examination for six months to allow for the completion of the Action Plan, we will require evidence (agreed with all relevant parties) of a firm commitment to the funding and delivery of improvements to J12 and J14 including clarification of when they would be programmed for implementation. Can this be achieved?

Specific funding streams will need to be identified and secured in order to provide certainty. Importantly from what we have heard to date this infrastructure would need to be delivered during the Plan period and so significant external funds would need to be secured prior to this. Is this realistic and achievable?

A further point to consider is that even if we were to agree to a six month pause in the Examination, there can be no guarantee that the work undertaken will fully address the concerns that we outlined in our letter dated 4 August. We understand the Council's desire to have a Plan in place to proactively guide development in the area. However, we feel it is only appropriate for us to highlight the possibility that following the pause we could still be in the position of writing to advise you that withdrawing the Plan remains the best option, in our view. Accordingly, there are risks, in terms of time and cost, associated with undertaking the proposed additional work, if it does not provide the evidence we seek.

Having said that, we currently remain open minded, so before we make our decision on whether to pause the Examination, we wish to invite National Highways, Gloucestershire County Council and South Gloucestershire Council, to comment on the Action Plan. We also look forward to receiving a reply from the Council to the queries we have raised in this letter. We would be most grateful to receive the responses by Tuesday 17 October 2023.

Please note that as this is a focused request we are not at this time inviting or accepting any other comments from other interested parties. If received, such responses will be immediately returned to the sender by the Programme Officer.

Yours sincerely

*Victoria Lucas and Yvonne Wright*

Inspectors appointed to examine the Stroud District Local Plan Review