

FAO. Mr Simon Berkeley, Inspector, SLDC Local Plan

Dear Mr Berkeley

Comments on the Modified Local Plan – August 2013

The recently published revised plans for the proposed housing site to the East of Castle Green Road feature a revision note that access will no longer share the existing narrow Oak Tree Road. This revision apparently arises due to negligent due diligence by SLDC Strategic Planning Team (SLDC-SPT) in that a critical part of the land that would be needed, is actually not available.

SLDC-SPT has expended significant public funds to commission AECOM to assess to confirm the 'viability' of access via Oak Tree Road of this 'unavailable site'. Many members of the public have also made considerable efforts to make detailed and extensive comments; all of which has been now proved unnecessary, and a complete waste of their time. This would seem to a further demonstration of the incompetence and wastefulness, and an indication of the lack of a sound approach on the part of the SLDC-SPT.

Revised roadway and increased biodiversity impact

The revised plan is now apparently for a full access roadway to be constructed across an area which has several major ponds and streams known to be populated and intensively used by a large colony of Great Crested Newts. It is noted (Ex061, p7, MM07) that additional stress on Biodiversity and Geodiversity has been included in the modified "Local Plan":-

Biodiversity and Geodiversity – considerations including the potential impact of development on the conservation, enhancement and restoration of habitats and species and geodiversity assets, and scope to maximise opportunities for restoration, enhancement and connection of natural habitats.

Standard recommendations are that a distance of 500m separation is given between such areas and sites of major developments. The proposed revised roadway would bisect and destroy major parts of the GCN habitation.

Noise impact due to proximity of high speed railway

Although a proposal to inflict serious damage to wildlife is regrettable, a further far more serious omission on the part of the SLDC-SPT is their apparent failure to assess the severe potential noise impact of the West Coast Mainline Railway (WCMR). The proposal to place ~60 dwellings at very close proximity to the extreme noise impact of many trains per day (estimate ~100) forms a clear potential damage to the health and well-being that the NPPF directs should be improved, and not put at risk. Looking through the large set of documents on the SLDC Planning website reveals not one consideration of this major threat to public health.

There are many current legislative instruments acts that address this issue. It appears that SLDC-SPT are relying solely upon an apparently mistaken assumption that because the line is in existence any building can take place adjacent to it. It is apparent (at present) that the Railway authorities cannot be sued for compensation in terms of impact on existing buildings. However, the public are progressively being asked to deliver remediation to transport noise sources such as the WCMR

under the EU Environmental Noise Directive, and its noise maps. The Noise Planning Statement, which forms part of the NPPF, also directs that transport noise should be considered. It also mentions the need to do this at a stage where noise impacts can be addressed now, rather than repaired in the future. There appear to be several standard methods to assess noise and many experts are available.

As a local comparison: a number of years ago local planners permitted development in the area off Sedbergh Road, now named "Rusland Park". This low lying flood plain development has been very prone to flooding. Recently ~£4m of public funds has been spent on remediation in the Stock Beck Flood Alleviation scheme. Of course the original planners, landowners and developers have all received major rewards for their 'work', and the public has been left to up the bills.

It is likely that in the future the high level embankment site of the WCMR in the vicinity of the proposed development will be identified under future Noise Maps (in particular as traffic increases as all predictions confirm) as an area requiring public funds to remediate noise impact on the newly planned development if it takes place. There is also a significant risk of funnelling noise (due to the hard-landscaping of a new development removing significant noise absorbing grassland). This would increase the noise impact to existing housing to the West of the proposed site. Councillors and officers have clearly never visited this site and asked the simple question: is it appropriate to place houses directly in the face of the high embankment on which fast trains transit throughout the day and night.

Summary

Many members of the public have raised clear reservations about the wisdom of the proposals for this site; in the light of biodiversity impact, the potential increased surrounding flood risk, the landscape impact, and the clear potential of the major health impact of many high speed trains each day and night running at high speed with major noise emissions in proximity of ~150m+.

Sustainability must include planning to avoid such future potential impacts and costs.

SLDC-STP have expended public funds on aspects to aid developers (to find access roads etc) but have apparently spent zero time, and taken zero steps to gain an expert assessment on the serious potential damage to health of future residents, despite their clear duty to do this under the NPPF.

It is clear that other sites for modest numbers of houses exist in areas which do not have the same very high count of negative indications and impact on the biodiversity, on the environment, and upon public health.

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