

WBC SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – TUESDAY 24th JANUARY 2023

STATEMENT BY CLLR DAVID BEAMAN, INDEPENDENT FARNHAM RESIDENT COUNCILLOR FOR FARNHAM CASTLE WARD

Note : The views and opinions expressed in this statement are personal and my own and do not necessarily reflect the collective views and opinions of either the Farnham Residents Group of which I am a member or Farnham Town Council of which I am Joint Leader and ward councillor representing Farnham Castle ward. (This will be discussed at a meeting of Farnham Town Council Full Council being held on Thursday 26th January)

AGENDA ITEM 8 – LPP1 REVIEW

Thank you for giving me an opportunity to address this meeting of the Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee regarding the proposed review of LPP1. The following statement is not one that I have any pleasure in making given that I appreciate that the Local Plan represents a core matter of the current administration of WBC which as a member of the Farnham Residents Group I generally fully support.

The report is recommending that the plan requires updating and that it is likely to be a full rather than a partial review. It maintains that during the lengthy data gathering period required for a full review it is the opinion of WBC's Planning Policy Team that LPP1, LPP2 and Neighbourhood Plans should not be interpreted as being out of date.

I do not deny that LPP1 being 5 years old requires to be updated and indeed for most of Waverley the recommendation of a full review might have few material consequences. In Farnham, however, there are several outstanding appeals for residential developments on locations not allocated in Farnham's Neighbourhood Plan and with developers known to be looking at other unallocated sites for residential developments this review could not come at a worse time for Farnham.

It is very subjective whether the existing LPP1, soon (hopefully) to be adopted LPP2 and existing made Neighbourhood Plans would carry the same weight whilst a full review is undertaken. If a full review is approved then it does not, however, take much imagination to appreciate that developers will claim at appeals and when applying for further developments on new sites that WBC's existing Local Plan and associated Neighbourhood Plans are indeed "out of date" and will carry much less weight than is envisaged by WBC's Planning Policy Team.

I am particularly concerned that several pages into the report the annual housing need calculation based on the standard method at 744 homes is significantly (26%) higher than the present LPP1 figure of 590 homes - Annex 5 gives full details of the calculation of housing need based on the standard method. It should be remembered the LPP1 figure includes provision for meeting 50% of Woking's unmet housing need which increased the LPP1 figure by 83 homes.

In LPP1 the objectively assessed housing need for Waverley was 396 new homes a year from 2013 to 2032. However, given the need to tackle affordability, increase the provision of affordable homes and to take into account anticipated changes to migration from London to Waverley, there was a need to uplift the number of homes by an additional 111 homes a year bringing the total before providing for Woking's unmet housing need to 507 new homes.

If WBC now accepts adopting the higher housing need calculation of 744 homes in any full or even partial review of the Plan this will inevitably be seized on by developers to argue the case for further speculative development and that the existing LPP1 target of 590 homes is "out of date". I would add that in recent years although Waverley has exceeded the LPP1 target it has not, as far as I am aware, ever achieved 744 homes. As I understand the situation there is no mandatory requirement on Waverley to use the standard method to calculate housing need and why should it do so given that 744 homes is so much more difficult to actually achieve than the present LPP1 target of 590 homes?

What applies to Farnham would, of course, also apply to the rest of the Borough and potentially all the other made Neighbourhood Plans which is likely to make them not worth the paper they are written on.

I do, however, recognise that I am a Waverley Borough Councillor and need to act in the overall interests of the Borough and not just in the interests of Farnham where I represent Farnham Castle ward.

There is currently so much uncertainty surrounding proposed changes to national planning legislation and guidelines that, in my personal opinion, it would seem more prudent to go for a partial and minimal updating of LPP1 if indeed any changes are actually required at all however imperfect this might be. At least Waverley has a made Local Plan (which is more than can be said for many local authorities) and it seems foolish and short sighted to potentially just throw away this position.

There is an indicative cost of £850,000 to undertake a full review. Why make a commitment to spend so much money with so much uncertainty over developing national planning legislation and guidelines especially against a background of a General Election within the next 2 years that, depending on its result, might result in still further changes to national planning legislation and guidelines.

At a time when Waverley Borough Council is facing a difficult financial position to allocate £850,000 to a lengthy data gathering exercise to undertake a full review of LPP1 against a background of still undecided changes to national planning legislation and guidelines is not, in my opinion, in the overall best interests of Waverley as a whole.

If there are any spare financial resources available then it would be far better for these to be spent on ensuring that Waverley is able to meet the time targets for dealing with minor planning applications which all members are aware WBC have recently been advised by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) that it is failing to achieve.

For these reasons as a Waverley Borough Councillor and in particular as a Councillor representing Farnham I am afraid that I will not be able to support the proposed full review of LPP1 should it be recommended for approval at the Full Council meeting that is being held on 21st February.

Thank you for the time you have kindly provided to me to address the Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee