

RESERVE SITES AND PROGRESSING THE LOCAL PLAN - CALL-IN OF THE CABINET DECISION OF 20 OCTOBER 2014

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What is the Commission being asked to do?

(i) To consider paragraphs 43 and 44 of the Improvement and Review Commission Protocol, and then decide whether the reasons put forward are sufficient to proceed with the call-in of the two resolutions of Minute 50 (20 October 2014) of Cabinet, which related to the 'Reserve Sites and Progressing the Local Plan' and

(ii) If it is decided to proceed with the call-in the Commission is asked to review the Cabinet decisions and determine the next steps based on the three options outlined in the report.

Cabinet Decision

A copy of the minute of the Cabinet decision is attached as **Appendix A** along with the detailed report at **Appendices B and B1-5**. The decisions taken by Cabinet, which are now 'called in', were as follows:

(i) Having considered the recommendations of the Local Plan Task and Finish Group meeting of 1st October 2014; the recommendation at Appendix 5 be agreed; and

(ii) Having in mind the issues set out in Appendices 3 and 4 of the report, the reserve sites (Abbey Barn North, Abbey Barn South, Gomm Valley and Ashwells, Slate Meadow and Terriers Farm as shown in the plans in Appendix 2 of the report) be released for development to contribute towards the Council's 5 year housing land supply, and the detailed planning of these sites be taken forward with public involvement.

Call-in of the Cabinet Member's Decision

The intention to call-in the decision was made by Councillor T Snaith within the required time-limit and the call-in process was instigated at that point. The call-in has been submitted on the basis that it meets the three requirements below (only three are required);

- It proposes expenditure in excess of £250,000 (b);
- It affects at least one quarter of the wards of the District (c); and
- The request is made by at least 5 members of the Improvement and Review Commission, excluding the Chairman but including members of at least two political groups (d). The call in is supported by Cllr Khalil Ahmed, Cllr Ian Bates, Cllr Gary Hall, Cllr Alex Slater and Cllr Trevor Snaith.

The reasons given by Councillor Snaith for the call-in are as follows:

The cabinet has not made a robust, transparent and well-founded decision based on the degree of opposition and feedback from consultations with residents and other groups.

The cabinet decision will involve the council in considerable expenditure and expose it to considerable risk. There is no robust business plan nor performance indicators defined that the council and members may assess delivery against.

As a New Local Plan will not be available at this stage Members and residents need to see a business plan on the infrastructures and services we need across the Town (not just the reserved sites) to ensure that the sites fit in to the local area

Areas that need to be addressed and considered:

1. Infrastructure planning and improvements must precede any development of the Reserve sites and must be given the highest priority. This is clearly contrary to the Council's own Core Strategy which states in Policy C8 that "Before release of any land at these locations all necessary infrastructure will need to be provided including solutions that deliver sustainable transport modes and minimise congestion". The current situation is intolerable and is worsening almost daily given the present development projects. – only when spare capacity is demonstrable may anything further be considered. This is to be done in co-operation with BCC / TfB as primary infrastructure requirements are Highway related. Further schools / social services impacts follow close behind. Issues such as community facilities may progress simultaneous with development but is WDC responsibility.
2. Primary requirement is for 'Affordable' homes of mixed tenure (buy / rent / shared ownership) and this feature must be developed / planned in conjunction with RSLs such as Red Kite / Guinness / Paradigm etc. Demand is mainly from local people and this class of housing must be reserved for local residents.
3. If local need is prioritised, Points 1 & 2 above may be more easily accepted by those local voices currently objecting. Low density of housing is both more acceptable to current objectors and more attractive to future occupants.
4. Phasing the release of sites to ensure High Wycombe isn't turned into a massive building site.
5. Developing the sites will effectively lead to gridlock in High Wycombe and other parts of the district. No one has produced any convincing arguments about how the infrastructure can be improved. The Infrastructure and ability of BCC/Highways to deliver is called into question as a result of comments made by BCC Leader Martin Tett. He stated in public that he has no solution to the Congestion and there is no plans/funds to improve the road structures in High Wycombe. It raises serious questions as to how we can justifiably bring forward and additional housing or reserved sites in High Wycombe when BCC can't deliver!

6. The Head of Planning was asked to come back to Cllr T Snaith and members with Martin Tett/BCC response ahead of bringing item to Cabinet, This hasn't happened and we haven't had opportunity for Members to look into this issue.
7. The issue of actual number of homes needed has been questioned and hasn't been addressed to satisfaction of both members and residents.
8. Bringing forward the reserved sites contradicts and breaches WDC policies on Environmental issues <http://www.wycombe.gov.uk/council-services/environment/being-green/greener-council/environmental-policy.aspx>

Other issues on process to date:

1. Allowing members one minute to make statement /questions was deemed by members to be inadequate.
2. The decision should be taken by all councillors at full council. Concern has been voiced that members whose wards affected were not able to vote on the decision. Local people do not understand why their elected local members in the areas affected have no vote on this issue.
3. Residents feel that WDC is not acting on feedback received from consultations.
4. Releasing reserve sites when there are so many reasons not to release them will only fuel residents views that the Cabinet does not understand the issues that impact our Town and local residents.

In conclusion

The Cabinet has not fully taken account of the strength of public interest and concerns. There is a need for a business plan before releasing sites. There has been insufficient opportunity for Members to have input into this issue.

This Cabinet decision is called in under the following criteria.

32 (iii) The request is made by a member of the I&R Committee (Cllr T Snaith) seconded by Cllr Gary Hall

(b) It proposes expenditure of in excess of £250,000 (although figures are not mentioned in the report it is stated that there are financial implications, this level will be exceeded given the amount of work required)

(c) It affects at least one quarter of the wards of the District

(d) The request is made by at least 5 members of the Improvement and Review Commission, excluding the Chairman but including members of at least two political groups

Those I&R members are -

Cllr Trevor Snaith (Liberal Democrat)

Cllr A Slater (Liberal Democrat)

Cllr K Ahmed (Labour)

Cllr I Bates (Labour)

Cllr G Hall (Independent)

In addition verbal concerns have been expressed by many other members The list continues to grow

Cllr B Pollock

Cllr Paula Lee

Cllr R Farmer

Cllr A Turner

Cllr B Pearce

Cllr S Parker

Cllr C A Ditta

Cllr M Hanif

Cllr S Graham

Cllr R Knight

Cabinet Member's Response

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Sustainability has been asked to respond to the Call-in, the Cabinet Member's response is attached as **Appendix C**.

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Sustainability has been invited to the Meeting.

Consideration of the Call-In at the Commission's Meeting

The first decision required at the meeting is whether the Commission proceeds with the call-in. An extract of the Improvement and Review Commission's protocol contained in the Council's Constitution is attached **as Appendix D** this sets down the points to be considered when deciding whether to proceed. This will be decided by a majority vote at the meeting.

If the Commission decides to consider the call-in then, following discussion, there are three options:

Option 1: To request the Cabinet Member for an extension of time to express a final view back to Cabinet, because the Commission requires further investigation or information. If agreed by the Cabinet Member, the Cabinet decision cannot be implemented until such time as the Cabinet consider the response from the Commission.

Option 2: If the Commission does not propose that the decision should be reversed, amended or further investigated, then the Cabinet's decision will take effect at the end of the Commission's meeting on 12 November, 2014..

Option 3: To agree the Commission's response for referral to the Cabinet meeting on 17 November 2014 for consideration. The Cabinet will then decide, based on the Commission's response whether to proceed with the original decision or change its original decision. If Cabinet do not accept the Commission's recommendations the reasons for not doing so will be recorded in the minutes of that Cabinet meeting. The decision will then be implemented at the conclusion of that Cabinet meeting.