

DERBYSHIRE DALES LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION

WIRKSWORTH CIVIC SOCIETY - HEARING STATEMENT

Session 11 – 09.30 Wednesday 17 May 2017

Matters 10 and 11

Strategic Allocations and Settlement Boundaries

Wirksworth

Purpose

The purpose of this session is to examine the strategic allocations and settlement boundaries for Wirksworth.

Policy S8 sets out a development strategy for Matlock/Wirksworth/Darley Dale. There are two strategic site allocations in Wirksworth at Middleton Road/Cromford Road (DS6) and Middle Peak Quarry, (DS7). The former is for mixed use development of residential and employment whereas the latter is for residential development and community facilities.

Some modifications are proposed by the Council to Policies DS6 and DS7.

The Council has indicated that Statements of Common Ground (SOCG) are to be prepared for some strategic sites setting out the latest position on deliverability and phasing.

Opening Statement

The Society would not totally oppose development of the sites, subject to the following provisos being met:

- A. A commitment from the local planning authority that there would be no further green field development within the next 20 years, thereby protecting the town's outstanding landscape setting.
- B. A liaison group be set up to shape the proposals in line with local needs, with the majority of places on the group given to representatives of the Town Council and with one place given to the Civic Society and one place to Transition Wirksworth.
- C. A design forum be set up to work with the developer's design team to produce a design vision, with advantage being taken of such a discrete location to allow experimental energy saving design or non-experimental pre 1900 energy saving construction technology using Middle Peak stone and lime, and the provision of plots for self-build housing.
- D. Omission of the green field parts on the west side from the Cromford Road/Middleton Road development site.
- E. A much lower limit to the number of houses to be constructed, in line with the first draft of the 2016 local plan.

F. Town centre parking: The Civic Society believes that an absolute requirement, prior to any further significant increase in housing, must be the provision of extra town centre car parking. The District Council is the only body which can make this possible and it has a duty to do so.

The revised local plan MUST include arrangements for the creation of extra town centre parking.

There are very limited sites which could be made into car parks:

1. Land at the rear of The Lime Kiln PH, Fire Station and Telephone Exchange
2. Land at New Bridge currently used as a heavy goods vehicle yard. This would involve the business using it being found an alternative location
3. Land at the Railway Yard
4. The Meadows

Of these the first two seem the better options. The Society believes the Meadows would be a poor option.

Issues

1. Land at Middleton Road/Cromford Road

Is further ecological assessment required before the site is allocated?

Is the site deliverable in the timescales envisaged by the SHELAA having regard to constraints such as contamination, infrastructure and viability?

Are the criteria within Policy DS6, including the requirement for phasing of employment and residential development, justified?

It is essential that any proposal be in conformity with the Wirksworth Neighbourhood Plan and in particular with the Plan's concept statement for development of this land.

Wirksworth Civic Society's main concern is the impact that such a large number of people and cars would have on the existing town. A development of 126 new homes will mean a possible extra 200 vehicles on the streets. Narrow streets and lack of carparks must be the first concern. Our small historic town is a precious asset, brought back from a condition of decline in the 1970s to physical and economic well being. It cannot support such a massive expansion in population without severe impacts upon its character.

The Neighbourhood Plan includes a Character Statement for the town as a whole. This should be used as a guide to ensure development proposals respect the town's special character and setting.

Landscape - Study of early maps and other documents reveals a landscape of historic lead mining, early narrow field enclosure of medieval strip fields, quarrying, and latterly natural regeneration of plants and trees producing a rich ecology. Inevitably the development will impact severely upon this. In particular the development should not negatively impact on the setting of the Rantor and Nether Ratchford lead mine scheduled monument or on the area of associated mines and strip fields which is identified as a High Priority Lead Landscape. The integrity of this landscape should not be damaged or masked by development within it. Every effort should be taken to minimise damaging impacts.

Urban Form - A clear design philosophy is essential. Many questions must be answered as to the type and style of housing needs of Wirksworth, and this must be evidence-based. The Society would strongly oppose the building of houses which are outside the price range of local people. The relatively low density proposed seems appropriate. As does the scale of two storey houses. The choice of brick for nearly all the development does not seem appropriate. It is recommended that the proposed development be referred to a design review forum - either the regional one OPUN - or a more local one. Whilst the disposition of the housing, in two groupings, does largely respect the site's landscape character the grouping of industrial sheds does not. This proposal for a 1980s type industrial estate seems totally inappropriate and sits clumsily in the historic landscape. There are already empty industrial sheds in the town. Wirksworth has

latterly become a town of makers and people working in the creative industries. Live/work units would be much more appropriate and could be built in the 'brown-field land shown as 'Potential Station Car Park' which the Society doubts is needed. Has Wyvern Rail been consulted? Are they prepared to take on the maintenance and would it be used? Alternatively this part of the site might be suitable for a new joint infant/junior school. The Society does not believe Middle Peak Quarry is an appropriate location for the school, largely because of distance from the town centre and associated access problems.

Recreation Routes - The proposals must take account of established recreational routes through the site.

Access roads - The proposed road engineering of the access off Middleton Road urbanises this rural lane. Design approaches advocated in Manual for Streets and Manual for Streets 2 should provide a steer rather than using standard designs from the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges.

Rock House - The Society has received a number of representations saying the demolition of Rock House would be a wasteful and unnecessary loss.

The Society notes that the Sustainability Appraisal of the Draft DDDC local Plan commissioned from ClearLead Consultancy Ltd by the District Council identifies, for this site, negative impacts upon the historic landscape and in particular the lead mine scheduled monument, geology, ecology and the setting of the Wirksworth Conservation Area.

2. Land at Middle Peak Quarry

Is the site deliverable in the timescales envisaged by the SHELAA having regard to constraints, infrastructure and viability?

In particular what are the implications for deliverability of ecological constraints, contamination, quarry faces, stability and the mineral resource?

Are the criteria within Policy DS7, including the requirement for phasing of employment and residential development, justified?

Quite aside from the considerable logistical problems of development in a quarry the provision of so many houses here would be a massive increase in the size of our small town, presenting major challenges in terms of town centre parking, road cycle and pedestrian access, sewage, health care and schools.

The scale of the area identified in the draft Plan, relative to the size of the town, is such that it merits a 'master plan' of its own, with its own design code, and requires the skills of expert urban designers plus a stand alone public consultation process. It is hoped the Council will be able to negotiate successfully with the owners to secure the skills required as well as a commitment to a thorough public consultation process. The initial housing number identified for this location is noted but clearly with extensive remediation the whole site is capable of accommodating a significantly greater number. The Society believes that the total number should be limited by an assessment of the number which, if exceeded within the plan period, would damage the character of the town - which the Council has stated publicly it is committed to preserving.

It may be helpful to consider the overall site in three zones: The former Dale Quarry or Big Hole Zone, the Middleton Road Zone and the Middleton by Wirksworth Zone.

The Society has noted that the owners are willing to agree to the extinguishing of their mineral planning permissions. However there are outstanding conditions on these permissions which need to be complied with - most importantly the work needed to fulfil the promise to create a park from the former Dale Quarry by land-modelling to create a relatively level surface some 10m/30' below the quarry edge, thereby creating a wind protected landscaped environment with public access. No development should be allowed in this zone.

It is understood the Middleton Road Zone will accommodate the initial phase of dwellings.

The northernmost part of the former quarry relates more to Middleton by Wirksworth than Wirksworth. Development in this area should be planned as an extension of Middleton by Wirksworth, thereby assisting in developing and underpinning community facilities in Middleton.

The master plan for the whole site should provide the opportunity for some self build development.

Employment uses for some parts of the former quarry would help to meet sustainability objectives, but this may require some subsidy.

Connectivity is a major issue. The opportunity to create pedestrian links to Wirksworth town centre via The Dale and Greenhill needs to be explored. There is a danger that development in the former quarry could be an enclave, separate from the town, if appropriate pedestrian infrastructure is not put in place.

The opportunity for the creation of a new road access, other than off Middleton Road needs to be explored, possibly across Middleton Road and through the other site identified for mixed use, to the west of Cromford Road.

The T junction of Middleton Road and Cromford Road will need remodelling but the Society would strongly oppose any proposal to create a roundabout here, which would have severe negative impacts upon the character and appearance of this entry to the town centre.

3. Settlement Boundaries

Is the settlement boundary for Wirksworth justified?

No comment.

4. Infrastructure

Will the infrastructure to support the scale of development proposed be provided in the right place and at the right time, including that relating to the highway network, health and education?

Do the strategic allocations need to make explicit provision for a new primary school?

It is noted that Wirksworth is considered to be in the top category of the three level settlement-hierarchy, ie the market town category, but this is an unhelpful simplification if applied without regard to factors such as the availability of town centre parking, school capacity, sewage infrastructure etc. Also it is presumed one reason for market towns being at the top of the settlement hierarchy relates to a relatively high level of access to public transport. The withdrawal of subsidies from certain bus routes has reduced(?) the sustainability of Wirksworth to accommodate a large increase in housing without adverse impact on car numbers and parking or access to wider support services for those without private transport options.

The Society has been pleased to hear from the Leader and officers of the Council that there is a strong commitment to protect the special character of Wirksworth. The existence of a relatively large number of small independent shops is a strong part of this character. Many are of marginal commercial viability and therefore particularly vulnerable to impacts such as the arrival of out-of-town or town-margin retailers. It is hoped the Plan will prevent this happening.

The growth of housing has the potential of benefitting the town in supporting the local shops and keeping comprehensive school pupil numbers up. However if new residents shop predominantly out of town and place their children in schools elsewhere the dis-benefits will outweigh any benefits.

Wirksworth has significantly less town centre car parking provision than other market towns in the District. This is a major problem. The protection of existing town centre car parking provision is therefore of the highest priority and the Society hopes the Plan will make provision for some new town centre parking. The only undeveloped site of any size relatively near the town centre is the heavy goods vehicle depot in

Coldwell Street. The Society believes the Council should give serious consideration to zoning this for parking and helping the business find an alternative base to make this possible, over the duration of the Plan.

A site should be identified and set aside for a new combined infant and junior school, either within the development boundary or elsewhere in town.

Main Evidence Base

- SD03 – Schedule of Modifications CD25 – SHELAA EX/08 - Council response to Inspector's Preliminary questions of 15 February
- Participants DDDC Roger Yarwood for various clients (2164)
- DLP for Chevin Homes Ltd (6222)
- Mr William Bevan (6240)

Appendices

- Wirksworth Civic Society Comments on DDDC Draft Local Plan
- Wirksworth Civic Society comments on Tarmac's proposals for new houses and employment on land off Middleton Road, & Middle Peak Quarry Wirksworth
- Wirksworth Town Character Statement