



**ROMSEY & DISTRICT SOCIETY** Reg. Charity 269308

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Mr S Lees  
Planning Policy Manager  
Test Valley Borough Council  
Duttons Road  
Romsey SO51 8XG

Dear Steve

### **Core Strategy Preferred Development Options**

I write on behalf of the Romsey & District Society to comment on the above document. Overall we are impressed with it and the depth of the research behind it. It is a serious and largely successful attempt to get to grips with the challenges that Southern Test Valley has to face.

#### 1. Locations for development

We accept that the imperatives of the South East Plan are unavoidable: Romsey has to grow. Given that, we believe that the growth can (and of course must) be managed in such a way that the town derives real benefit and prosperity from an influx of new residents. This will require, among other things, rigorous insistence on sustainability pre-requisites such as better transport infrastructure, water and waste management, ecological best practice, etc. We look forward to more detail on these in the Southern Test Valley Area Action Plan.

We accept the preferred broad locations for development identified in the Core Strategy: Abbotswood, Whitenap, North Baddesley and Nursling. The relative proximity of the Whitenap broad location to Romsey town centre is a particularly important factor and priority should be given to maximising the benefits of it, though we recognise that the interests of the allotment holders must also be taken into account. The most serious reservation we have about the Whitenap broad location is the notion of a road bridge over the railway somewhere just south of the Rapids: it is difficult to see how any design could be acceptable given the height of the railway at that point.

In general we want to see more emphasis on the need for good design, which we believe to be crucial to the integration of the new sites into the existing settlements. We fear an outcome in which the new sites are too monolithic and homogeneous. 1600 homes at Whitenap is a large number: it must be broken down into smaller 'clusters' of homes with variation in design (modern/traditional), layout (through roads /cul-de-sacs/more traditional village-styles), density, and where possible topography (hillside/contouring/woodland edge), etc. People should feel part of their subset rather than of the new development as a whole, and these subsets or clusters should have recognisable social space of some sort between them, that in turn should help to create definition and identity.

Thus the Core Strategy, and even more the Southern Test Valley Area Action Plan, should be the place for TVBC to face up to its responsibility to exercise greater control over the details of such development than it has demonstrated in one or two instances in the past. A prime aim of such control should be the avoidance of uniformity and mediocrity and the promotion of diversity: these must be recognised as ends in themselves, not just as means to other ends.

## 2. Retailing

Here we think the Core Strategy may not be radical enough. Romsey's strong point is its range of non-supermarket shopping (in the jargon, comparison shopping) with Bradbeers at its centre: the Core Strategy should seize the opportunity to strengthen this strong point. We acknowledge that such a policy could involve some significant changes. It may well be that with some creative planning and design a new supermarket could be included in a high density retail development at Broadwater, which might include an underground car-park.

But with or without a new town centre supermarket, this is a real opportunity. Given proper strategic focus, the town centre can thrive as a comparison shopping 'centre of excellence'.

In any event we are strongly opposed to having a new supermarket on the bypass site. In the 1990s the Inspector described the area as countryside, even with the football club there, and we think that with the Whitenap broad location developed it would be absolutely essential to keep that green countryside edge where it is. The supposed advantages of the site are illusory: as we argued before, it is no more than a fond hope that supermarket shoppers would walk into Romsey across the bypass and continue shopping on foot, rather than simply returning to their cars.

## 3. The Town Centre

Returning to what we referred to above as a proper strategic focus necessary to support the town centre, we want to emphasise particularly the need to improve the bus station, railway station and its approach, car parking provision generally, and the Crosfield Hall. We suggest that to promote ease of access to the centre any review of car parking should include specifically the current on-street parking in Alma Road, Cherville Street and elsewhere.

We also welcome the proposed review of the Market Place. Here too we are inclined to favour a radical approach – the successful continental innovation of the 'no priority' space, with a wall-to-wall single-level pavement, minimum signage and clutter, and maximum 'respect for others'. Trials of this system in the UK should be monitored very closely indeed and any opportunity taken to participate in one.

Yours sincerely

Chris Amery  
Chairman, Planning Sub-committee