



ROMSEY & DISTRICT SOCIETY Reg. Charity 269308

Planning Committee: Chris Amery
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2 December 2008

Mr S Lees
Head of Planning Policy and Transport
Test Valley Borough Council
Duttons Road
Romsey SO51 8XG

Dear Steve

Core Strategy DPD pre-submission draft

I write on behalf of the Romsey & District Society to respond to the above document.

We would like to re-affirm the whole of our letter (18 March 2008) on the Core Strategy Preferred Development Options. To save repeating ourselves we attach it as an annex to this one.

The major disappointment in this latest draft is the lack of any strategy on retail, on which our previous letter had strong views. We await with considerable interest the outcome of TVBC's further studies on this. We had also hoped to see a clearer view for Romsey town centre, and in this case await the forthcoming Town Access Plan from HCC and TVBC.

As to the broad locations for development, we oppose Great Covert because of its serious erosion of the gap between Valley Park and North Baddesley, because it contains a SINC that would almost certainly be lost, and because of the great difficulty (in such an isolated location) in creating a community with any real sense of character. Parker's Farm is superficially attractive, but on closer examination access and accessibility problems would make it very difficult indeed to 'link' to Southampton or any other existing community. We feel the most that could be said is that it should be kept under review in case of any major unforeseen problems with the preferred sites. Whitenap also contains a SINC (in Beggarspath Wood), but there we believe it can be preserved if a proper management programme is agreed with the developers and subsequently monitored.

We continue to favour Whitenap, Abbotswood, Nursling South, and Hoe Lane as the major sites to accommodate the numbers mandated by the South East Plan, subject to all the crucial provisos in our previous letter about design and layout. These caveats are absolutely vital to ensure that the new developments are genuinely sustainable. In the case of Whitenap in particular, if it is properly planned and designed we look forward to it becoming a real subset of Romsey: a vibrant, forward-looking part of this wonderful town and an enhancement to it.

As we said before, in this and many other respects the Southern Test Valley Area Action Plan will be the touchstone for TVBC's determination to 'get it right'.

To summarise our thinking: Romsey and southern Test Valley must respond to the national and regional requirement for more homes. The response should lead to a planned community, with a strong identity, quality design and access to a nearby town. On balance, Whitenap seems to be the best candidate, followed by Abbotswood and the other sites identified in the Core Strategy.

Yours sincerely

Chris Amery
Chairman, Planning Committee

ANNEX

Copy of R&DS comments on Core Strategy Preferred Development Options, March 2008

ROMSEY & DISTRICT SOCIETY Reg. Charity 269308

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5 The Harrage, Romsey, Hants, SO51 8AE
Tel: 01794 523135 chrisamery@ntlworld.com

18 March 2008

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.

ANNEX

*Copy of R&DS comments on Core Strategy Preferred Development Options, March 2008
(continued)*

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 Committee