



PAUL HOLMES MP
Member of Parliament for Eastleigh

Cllr Keith House
Leader of the Council
Eastleigh Borough Council
Eastleigh House
Upper Market Street
Eastleigh
SO50 9YN

6 April 2020

Dear Keith,

I am writing in connection with the latest letter of advice from the Planning Inspectorate concerning the proposed local plan brought forward by your administration.

As you will understand, the draft local plan is a topic of huge interest for Eastleigh residents. It was therefore incredibly sad that the Council chose this moment to publish the latest update to the Local Plan in such a misleading fashion, both in your tweets and by Eastleigh Borough Council's press office.

Despite what your misleading statements suggest, it is clear that the Planning Inspector has a number of key concerns about your proposals.

I was particularly alarmed to read the damning comments of the Inspector, who highlighted major flaws in both the evidence and decision-making within the draft plan. A summary of my key concerns is set out below:

1) Misleading interpretation of Inspector's comments by Eastleigh Borough Council

The contents of the Council's press release are completely at odds with what the Inspector has said in her letter, which is a matter of public record.

The Inspector very clearly states in Paragraph 41:

"... because of the discrepancies I have highlighted above, and my assessment of landscape and transport issues, I regard the consideration of alternative options to be inadequate, such that the approach taken to the proposed SGO is insufficiently robust. As a consequence of this evidential shortcoming, policies S5 and S6 do not represent the most appropriate strategy when considered against the reasonable alternatives and are not justified. I therefore conclude that these policies should, therefore, be deleted from the local plan."

I fail to see how this can align with the Council's statement that "she has not dismissed the Council's proposed Strategic Growth Option, nor found it unviable" when the Inspector has found the approach "insufficiently robust" and concluded that the policies for the Strategic Growth Option (SGO) (S5 and S6) should be deleted from the local plan.



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2) Site selection is flawed by inaccurate or unsupported evidence contained within the Council's Sustainability Assessment

Paragraph 16 of the Inspector's letter makes it very clear that there are variety of flawed assumptions or conclusions guiding the site selection of the SGO that are not supported in evidence. This has skewed the Council's overall approach toward Option B/C with insufficient consideration given to other options.

3) Transportation and accessibility

Paragraph 18 makes it clear that the Option B/C is the growth option which creates the longest average journey time by car. It is also suggested in Paragraph 19 that bus routes could be diverted to support this area, but that is not an option for any of the other SGOs, which seems completely contradictory. Furthermore, greater use of rail connections could also be a possibility if Options D and/or E were included in conjunction with other options.

This unequal treatment in the assessment of site locations raises significant concerns as to how the Council has reached the conclusions on which sites to take forward. As the Inspector says in Paragraph 21: *"it is apparent that the process of considering the reasonable SGO alternatives has not been undertaken on an equal footing. Some forms of mitigation, or ways to reduce impacts, have been considered for some options, including the option selected, but not for others."*

4) Impact on landscape and countryside

The potential damage to the environment and character of the area around Bishopstoke is a major source of fear for thousands of my constituents, and I am pleased the Inspector has raised this issue in her response. The Inspector rightly draws attention to the fact in paragraph 39 that the Council's selected SGO has "the greatest impact on high-sensitivity landscape."

The Inspector goes onto point out the inconsistency that, despite this conclusion, *"the SA allocates an equal score in terms of landscape effects to the other SGO options."* This woefully underestimates the effect on the environment as part of the Council's overall assessment criteria of the SGO options.

The Inspector also highlights the detrimental impact that this site option could have on South Downs National Park.

Conclusion

My position on the draft local plan has been clear throughout: I believe it is a fundamentally flawed plan and that we should scrap it and go back to the drawing board.

The Inspector agrees that it is fundamentally flawed and that is why she has asked you to withdraw the flagship element of the plan, which is Strategic Growth Option B/C for the land to the north and east of Bishopstoke and Fair Oak.

The manner in which you have announced this latest development is contrary to the open and transparent way in which your administration should be operating. It is a time of national emergency and people are looking to their government and local authority for accurate



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information. This gross misrepresentation of what the Inspector has said damages that trust between the Council and the people it serves.

I believe that you should: withdraw the inaccurate press release you have issued and the announcements you have made on social media; scrap the current plan; and announce that work will begin on a new plan once the COVID-19 pandemic has subsided.

This is the only way to design a plan that commands the support of the local community and rebuilds the trust that has been eroded by this episode and by the conduct of the Council in relation to the plan over the last ten years.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Holmes." The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underlining the name.

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CC: Nick Tustian, Chief Executive, Eastleigh Borough Council

Cllr Margaret Atkinson, Leader of the Conservative Group, Eastleigh Borough Council