

Review of the Emerging Eastleigh Local Plan's Strategic Growth Option & the Evidence on which its selection is based

Shortcomings in the Evidence Base

The scale of development proposed is very significant comprising 5,200 dwellings; a local centre and 30,000 sq m of employment in a sensitive area which includes substantial ancient woodland and is close to the River Itchen SAC and the South Downs National Park. The evidence base is, however, still very insubstantial. Key issues that need assessing in relation to this proposal include:

- Biodiversity;
- Transport;
- Landscape;
- Viability

Of these all there is at present is a high level landscape appraisal. Key impacts that have not been assessed include:

River Itchen Special Area of Conservation (SAC): The officer's report acknowledges that there is the potential for an adverse impact on the River Itchen SAC and that *'if an adverse effect cannot be ruled out, the Plan can only proceed if there are no alternative solutions and there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI) for it to do so.'* Paragraph 71 acknowledges that B & C contain *'significantly more headwaters'* than the other options. Development could affect the amount; quality; and nutrient levels of the headwaters.

Ancient woodland: Options B & C are adjacent to 5 ancient woodlands classed by national policy as irreplaceable habitat. Development of B & C would have a detrimental impact on ancient woodland through severance; loss of interconnected hedgerows; air pollution; and increased recreational pressure. There is no evidence that these issues have been assessed.

Protected species: B & C have the potential to support rare bats such as Bechstein's and also dormice & otters, but no information is provided on these protected species.

Traffic modelling: The traffic implications of 5,200 dwellings and 30,000 sq metres of employment are potentially very significant. Yet again the traffic modelling has not yet been completed.

Impact of Link Road north of Bishopstoke: the high level landscape assessment states that the most sensitive part of Option B is where it drops down to the River Itchen Valley. However, this is precisely where the link road would go.

South Downs National Park: there would appear to have been no assessment of the potential impact on the tranquillity of the National Park through increased road traffic or the effect on dark skies from increased lighting in the vicinity of the park.

Sustainability Appraisal (SA) & Habitat Regulation Assessment: Councillors have not been provided with an updated SA on which to base their decision. This is significant as the Planning Practice Guidance advises that the SA must be developed in tandem with the Local Plan and influence its contents in an iterative manner. Similarly, an updated Habitat Regulation Assessment has not yet been produced.

Conclusion: The Strategic Growth Option is a major development proposal and currently there is insufficient information to decide which is the most appropriate strategy. No decision should be made until this evidence is available and officers and statutory consultees, such as Natural England have had sufficient time to assess it.