

From: Richard Izard (rizard@winchester.gov.uk)
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It does your council credit that at the meeting on July 20th you voted to leave the door open on options for your emerging Local Plan, pending further key evidence from continuing research.

That, at least, is the public stance. This has never been an exercise in collecting the evidence relating to all options and then making a choice. Options B&C were chosen by Keith House as his favoured options when the process of gathering the evidence had hardly begun, and the research, subsequently, has set out to try to prove that this would produce the basis of a sound plan. That contravenes National Planning Policy Guidance for Local Plans which states that: 'the evidence needs to inform what is in the Plan and shape its development, rather than being collated retrospectively'. The Planning Inspector is likely to take a dim view that Eastleigh councillors have been encouraged to put the cart before the horse, rather than follow the terms of the guidance.

I hear on the grapevine that developers have been discouraged, by EDC, from putting forward planning applications within Option D, although they were prepared to do so. Why would that be? Could it be a deliberate attempt to rule out Option D because it conflicts with Eastleigh's agenda to promote B&C? Perhaps you should ask Cllr. House if he knows whether or not this is true. If you don't ask him, the Planning Inspector certainly will, and will also press potential developers for the facts.

At the meeting on July 20th, you heard some of the weight and range of evidence in opposition to B&C. As I said in my own presentation, there is nothing in the National Planning Policy Framework or other planning guidance, or logic, or the law, or professional or expert advice from environmental organisations and others, which suggests that Options B&C are the right ones to pursue. In fact just the very opposite is true. And you heard the strength of public opposition which will only increase in the weeks ahead.

You may know that the South Downs National Park has been designated an International Dark Sky Reserve, a designation with strong government support. A bright new housing estate just across their boundary will be vigorously opposed. Also there is emerging evidence that there is a roost of ultra-rare Barbastelle bats (check them out on Google) in one of the copses near to the proposed feeder road. You will also be aware of serious concerns about the effects of increased air pollution from vehicles on the habitat of the southern damselfly, one of the species which gives the Itchen its internationally-recognised protection status.

And on the subject of the road, there is a section which would need planning permission from Winchester City Council's Planning Committee. While discussions between your council and mine will inevitably continue, and we are directed by a Duty of Co-operation, we do have a get-out clause if we consider your proposals to be wholly destructive, in breach of planning guidance, or if more appropriate sites for development are available. There are no guarantees, therefore, that planning permission for the section of road which crosses the Winchester District will be forthcoming.

I should also remind you that just a few weeks ago, a planning inspector rejected an appeal from a developer who wanted to build on land almost adjacent to Option B, on the Winchester side of the border. He said it

would be a harmful encroachment into the countryside which would fundamentally alter the open character and appearance of the landscape. Are you confident that the inspector who examines your plan will think differently about the same landscape?

At a meeting this month between your representatives and officers of Winchester City Council, it was evident that research on many of the matters needed to make an informed decision on the most appropriate choices for your Local Plan, is far from complete. These include major issues such as transport, ecological and mitigation proposals, development quantum/land budget concerns and many more.

All I'm asking is that you take ALL the evidence from ALL the optional sites into consideration before making your final decision in the weeks ahead. It would be wrong to assume that you HAVE to propose B&C as the location for most of the development needed in your Local Plan. I know you need the houses, and Options B&C would give you a convenient package of land for the majority of them. But the cost in landscape and environmental terms is too high a price to pay.

So is the cost in financial terms. EDC will be throwing very large sums of money at consultants to try to get the Plan adopted. Will your ratepayers really be happy to learn that they are likely to be contributing more than £1,000,000 to try to persuade the Inspector to support your proposals? Wouldn't it be more sensible to spend much less money on a Draft Plan which can be justified on proper planning and environmental criteria, and has a broad level of support from interested stakeholders?

Sufficient evidence has already emerged to convince the Planning Inspector that Options B&C will not form the basis of a sound Local Plan; and as you get further evidence from your research, so will your opponents. The case against B&C is already strong, and it is getting stronger by the week.

While Graham Tuck's paper to your Cabinet (July 20th) favours B&C, he

does warn of some possible pitfalls, and puts forward some alternative options to consider, including D&E. He does refer to the need to include part of C also, although with the revised housing numbers, that might not now be necessary.

I won't press my case further in this letter. You know what I'm saying. It's in my interests, as a Colden Common councillor, as well as yours, to get your Local Plan adopted. None of us wants to open up the area as a free-for-all for unstructured development. But even that would be better than your current plans for B&C. Eastleigh's last draft Plan was rejected. Don't squander this opportunity to lay down a sound framework for the growth of the Eastleigh borough over the next 20 years or so. It's not a legacy you would want or deserve after the hard work and commitment that I know it takes to be a councillor in a progressive local authority.

With best wishes and good luck with your difficult deliberations.

Yours Truly,

Richard Izard,
Lib Dem member of Winchester City Council for Colden Common and
Twyford ward;
Chair of Colden Common Parish Council.