

Eastleigh Local Plan – EiP - Steve Brine speaking notes

Introduction

Thank you, it's a pleasure to join you on what I know is the second day of your proceedings and I note a wide span of speakers yesterday including of course a number of my constituents and certainly two of the parish councils in my area.

My former colleagues Mims Davies (Eastleigh) and George Hollingbery (Meon Valley) were planning to speak to the Examination but have stood down from their seats since the General Election was called so I am, as it were, the last man standing. They fully support my views on the Eastleigh local plan and I would like to pay tribute to the work they both did, over many years, to make their constituents aware of this Local Plan process and ensure their voice were heard. I wish them both well for the future.

I cannot be with you for long this morning as have another engagement I must get to but I wanted to keep my appointment with this examination and have a few points I'd like to put on the record.

Political motivations

On behalf of my constituents, we believe that this is an unsound scheme chosen for the wrong reasons, not because it is objectively the most appropriate scheme.

There is widespread belief among the people I represent, and it's a feeling I very much share, that there is something of a democratic deficit where this Plan and Winchester is concerned.

You will know, it is located at the very northern edge of the Borough of Eastleigh, ensuring that at least half the disruption caused by the development would be felt by my constituents who, of course, do not vote in Eastleigh and have no say over who runs that Local Authority.

They feel powerless, in a direct sense, and are pleased to be able to have a voice of sorts via the excellent ADD and representatives such as myself. I was on the doors in Colden Common just last Saturday and time and again concerns about Eastleigh's Local Plan were raised with me.

Lack of consultation

Consultation with Winchester City Council was late and inadequate. It only actually started in earnest after the decision to go for Options B and C had been taken, rather than being an iterative process.

Consultation with parish councils was almost non-existent and I am told, as well as representing a part of the Borough myself (in Chandler's Ford) that consultation with Eastleigh residents was a token exercise because the decision to go ahead with Options B and C had already been taken.

Indeed, ADD informed me and my constituents that an email exchange between the leader of Eastleigh Borough Council and the developers - in June 2015 - shows that they were already discussing a 'Joint Venture' six months before the public consultation began.

Ignoring the wishes of the public

Throughout the process, opposition to the Council's chosen Strategic Growth Option (Options B & C) has been ignored.

At the earliest consultation, the Issues and Options paper in December 2015, there were 25 in favour and 592 against Options B/C. That's to say many more objections than all the other eight options combined.

There was relatively little opposition to D and E, which enjoyed a significant level of support. This picture was confirmed by the most recent consultation, in 2018 and the Authority indicated at the time that objections to B and C were of insufficient quality.

Traffic congestion

Turning more to the specifics and I think traffic congestion is very near the top of resident concerns my side of the Borough line.

The Strategic Growth Option is in the most car-dependant location possible, in open fields on the fringe of the Borough. It is well away from existing public transport networks and places that people would like to go, such as Eastleigh town, Southampton and the motorways.

It is surely not unreasonable to expect lots of two-car households in the SGO and modelling by ADD's traffic consultants predict that, even with the link road, traffic congestion in the southern part of WCC will increase massively as a result of the SGO.

If financial constraints result in a portion only of the link road being built, the traffic chaos will be greater still, including in Eastleigh's own already overstretched road network. EBC has repeatedly ignored the opportunity to develop new rail links and services, including the potential for a new station at Allington, to promote a public transport strategy.

Viability

The proposals commit the Borough to delivering nearly 2000 houses above government requirements which it plans to build through to 2044. This leaves open the possibility that the houses will never be built because of lack of demand, in which case who will pay for the infrastructure?

Surely not the developers, who have already had to agree to a range of costly mitigation measures to reduce the environmental damage that would be caused by the scheme.

Wrong type of housing

Two other points if I may ...

The proposals would provide the wrong housing mix. Eastleigh will get executive estates for people who wish to live near Winchester, rather than the starter homes that Eastleigh needs. We know, for example, that new housing built recently near the proposed SGO start at around £400k for a three-bedroomed house, £500k for four bedrooms. This is unaffordable to most Eastleigh residents. Nor does the plan include accommodation for elderly people, which is in short supply in the Borough. It must be said this is not a problem unique to Eastleigh when it comes to building new large scale developments.

Damage to the environment

And finally, the environment which as you see every time you drive into the Borough of Eastleigh is self-stated their raison-detre ...

Advice given to ADD by several experts indicates that run-off from the proposed development will inevitably damage the River Itchen at a particularly eco-sensitive location, by the main breeding ground for Atlantic Salmon.

It also threatens several other species, most notably the Southern Damselfly, which has the highest level of protection. This is unacceptable to my constituents given the international importance of the river, and the fact that it is a Special Area of Conservation.

You don't have to take my word for it though; in January 2016, EBC's senior planner at the time told a meeting of the Colden Common Parish Council's Planning Committee, which is of course in my patch, that the road would definitely damage the life of the River Itchen. I am told that he has since departed, and EBC has now reached a different view.

Although these are the parts of the plan that have a direct impact on the environment in my constituency, I know my colleagues are also deeply concerned about its impact on several areas of ancient woodland and the South Downs National Park.

And to close, I was out talking to constituents in Colden Common just yesterday and one resident – who knows they may even be here this morning – made the point to me that, yes, transport and infrastructure and all the issues matter but it's the loss of landscape that will really impact on the quality of life.

My constituents choose to live – and pay a premium to live – in this part of the world because they have many of the amenities they need close to hand but they have the landscape setting of the Hampshire countryside on their doorstep and that is what makes it special. We must build new homes, and we are up in Winchester where they *have* a Local Plan but we must remember to keep viable, breathable communities at the same time.

Thank you.