

Submission on the WDDC Local Plan – Matter 11 - BRIDPORT

Introduction

1. I write as a resident of Bridport who has been fortunate to live and work in Dorset for 35 years and who has seen his family thrive growing up in this beautiful area. My children have returned to Dorset to raise their families and to work, so I want them to continue to have the same opportunity to live, work and take leisure time this beautiful county. For me, this means taking an interest in the proposed development of the area and standing up when things appear to be going awry. It is clear to me that the proposed development of Bridport is wrong for the town; in particular, it is the excessive scale and nature of development proposed for Vearse Farm (BRID 1) in the Local Plan for West Dorset that cannot be justified.
2. The Local Plan has been amended following a decision taken by WDDC to re-submit it to take account of the Inspector's comments and analysis in 2013. It still includes plans to build 760 houses on the Vearse Farm site to the west of Bridport, which is disproportionate for a town the size of Bridport. At this scale, Vearse Farm development will effectively create a New Town, separate from rather than integrated into the town of Bridport. It will have its' own character; it will not be fully integrated with other parts of Bridport.

High density house building on Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

3. The Local Plan fails to take account of the Vearse Farm location on a site classified as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
4. Regarding the scale of the development, the plan identifies 760 houses at Vearse Farm in an area of 4 hectares, as well as industrial units. The area occupied by housing will be around 3 hectares giving a housing density of 253 properties per hectare; this is an average of 120 square metres per property. This average plot size leaves little or no room for green space, such as parkland, allotments and gardens.
5. Vearse Farm slopes down into a river valley. The AONB is visible from the surrounding hills around the site from every direction. Views from iconic landmarks such as Colmers Hill, Allington Hill and Eype Down will be of an urban sprawl, rather than natural beauty. The scale simply does not allow for a development that is in keeping with Bridport, the AONB or the Jurassic coast.
6. Recent surveys and letters to the local press during the summer and autumn 2014 show that there is close to unanimity of opposition to the development of Vearse Farm. This highlights the flawed consultation process that took place in 2012, which failed to engage with local people or garner the views of local people, in such a way that the local politicians could represent the views of local people.
7. The people of Bridport are against the development and no case has been made that "there are exceptional circumstances to warrant planning consent", which is a requirement of the National Planning Policy Framework (Ref. 1). Development of Vearse Farm is therefore not in the public

Matter 11 Western Localities of West Dorset - ID: 3538 - Dr David Lee

interest as the Local Plan fails to comply with National Guidance, and the development should be rejected on this basis alone.

Disproportionate scale of development and impact on the market town

8. The proposed development of 760 houses over a 10 year building period on the Vearse Farm site (BRID1) will occupy 4 hectares of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) west of Bridport. The plan proposes an additional 173 houses for Bridport (BRID 2, 3 & 5). The total plan is for 933 new houses within a current population of around 8,500 for Bridport and around 12,500 when taking account of the surrounding parishes. Using an average household size of 2.3 for UK, Vearse Farm represents a population growth of 1,748 (20% of Bridport; 14% of Bridport and surrounds) and the total for Bridport of 933 households represents a population growth of 2,146 (25% of Bridport; 17% of Bridport and surrounds). These figures serve to illustrate that the Vearse Farm development is totally disproportionate for Bridport. Furthermore, it is not needed to meet the housing demands of West Dorset and Bridport area in particular.
9. A development of this size will cause disruption for more than ten years of building phase. It will place a strain on the economy and infrastructure of the market town, rather than enhancing the local economy. There will be a negative impact on the local economy, tourism and infrastructure. The impact will be more severe during holiday peaks, which will be disastrous for the local economy. There is already traffic disruption due to the increase in traffic volumes during peak times; local people and holidaymakers will be put off by delays and the excellent reputation of the town will be harmed. Access to parking will become more difficult and will cause financial harm to shops and businesses in the town. It will be made more difficult for local traders to carry out their normal business.
10. It is notable that the infrastructure plan does not include any measures to ease traffic disruption to the town of Bridport as the main focus of transport funding is aimed at Dorchester and Weymouth. It is clear that WDDC has not paid attention to the transport infrastructure of Bridport as the scale of the Vearse Farm proposals have not been properly considered, adequately funded or understood, nor has there been proper consultation regarding the views of the local population on these matters.

Economic sustainability

11. The Local Plan sets out the Councils' strategic approach to achieving a sustainable pattern of development (Ref. 2 Ch3 p45). The plans for Bridport do not match local demand, so, for Bridport, the Plan is not self consistent as it does not take account of:
 - a. "the needs, size and roles of the areas settlements," or "imbalances of houses or jobs"
 - b. "the benefits of concentrating most development in locations where homes jobs and facilities will be easily accessible to each other and there is a choice of transport modes"
12. The high cost of houses in Bridport will make them unaffordable to local people who live and work near to Bridport, where average salaries are in the region £15k per annum. This implies that they will be occupied by people moving into the area to retire, second home owners for

Matter 11 Western Localities of West Dorset - ID: 3538 - Dr David Lee

holiday letting and people who will need to commute tens of miles to work in higher paid jobs to enable them to afford to live in Vearse "New Town". This is not sustainable development and is contradictory to achieving the sustainable development detailed in Ref. 2.

13. Ref 3 para 1.6.9 states that "The economic climate which is particularly weak at the beginning of the plan period will have a bearing on the availability of government funding to support significant infrastructure projects, e.g. flood defences and major road improvements. Expected cuts to local government funding allocations will continue to affect the delivery of services at a local level."

14. This is a weak basis for this oversized development at Vearse Farm. Of particular concern are:

- High cost of infrastructure improvements to off-set scale of development and available infrastructure
- Little attention is given to lower cost and phased options including Brown Field sites in and around the urban area
- Absence of an integrated approach in West Dorset on planning for homes and jobs with respect to transport options
- Failure to understand what makes Bridport special and to preserve the character of the town to provide economic stability through gradual organic growth
- Failure to learn and apply the lesson that New Towns, which Vearse Farm will become, do not create their own economic growth. Those that have succeeded economically do so because they are close to major rail and Motorway links into London, which is not the case for Bridport.

15. Any development of Vearse farmland should be sympathetic with the character of Bridport, a thriving market town which has attracted national attention from other towns looking to improve their markets. Bridport is also nominated as one of Britain's favourite historic towns, which shows the town is highly regarded nationally, not only for its' culture, but also for its' history and the way that history has been preserved and presented. The disproportionate development of Bridport and Vearse Farm is a serious threat to the character and hence the economic sustainability of Bridport. With fewer houses, a more integrated approach can be taken which would achieve organic growth of the community, match housing with local employment and require less intensive infrastructure funding, whilst maintaining the high regard held for the town by its' residents and visitors.

Transport Infrastructure

16. Ref 3 Para 5.3.2 states "Strategic development sites across the plan area will put pressure on existing transport infrastructure. In Bridport, junction improvements between West Road and the A35 at Miles Cross together with more localised traffic management in West Allington will be required as a result of development at Vearse Farm."

17. A similar paragraph to that for Dorchester in Ref 3 para 5.3.8 applies to Bridport: "Traffic in Dorchester is now at the level experienced before the by-pass was opened and residents and

Matter 11 Western Localities of West Dorset - ID: 3538 - Dr David Lee

those visiting and working in the centre are, as a consequence, facing severance through high volumes of traffic. There are also difficulties for pedestrians at junctions and on narrow pavements due to the high traffic volumes in historic areas; as a result they are unable to enjoy the qualities and attributes of the central parts of the town. The situation is exacerbated on market days due to increased traffic and higher levels of pedestrian activity.”

18. And for Bridport, the impact of holiday peak traffic demands must also be considered.
19. Construction of a new Waste Management Facility is underway at Broomhills Farm, close to the site of proposed development at Vearse Farm. This is a relatively small scale (£8.5 million) project compared with Vearse Farm and it is already having an impact as traffic diverts away from delays on the A35 into Bridport, with consequential increases in traffic volumes and delays in the Town centre. Transport during Vearse Farm construction, including mainly HGV movements, will be 5 to 10 times greater than those for the construction of Broomhills Waste Management Centre. Broomhills will become operational during the building phase for Vearse Farm, so this will add to the traffic density. The new traffic corridors of A35 and West Road to Miles Cross will become jammed at peak travel times (commuter and holiday traffic) thus adding traffic accident risk to each route.
20. Furthermore, accident rates at Miles Cross, which are already of concern to the Highways Agency, will be made more serious by the increase in traffic along both corridors and the increase in HGV traffic. Each of these increases has the potential to increase the frequency of serious accidents at Miles Cross, unless major and costly mitigation work is undertaken.
21. There is currently an alternative route through Bridport when the A35 is closed between the Crown roundabout and Miles Cross, as has happened on numerous occasions over the past 5 years. The route through town becomes busy and traffic is slow, but it does enable people to get to work, children to get to schools and people to get to medical centres and hospitals, for example. Increases in traffic density and accident rate will adversely affect the only credible alternative route to the A35.
22. It's inevitable that the increase in population will cause an increase in town centre traffic, putting added strain on parking and increasing pollution due to more traffic and slower travelling speeds.

Environmental Impact – Flooding

23. Ref 1 states that “Inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding should be avoided by directing development away from areas at highest risk”.
24. Despite the recent history of flooding of the Vearse Farm location, no consideration has been given to flood alleviation for Bridport in the Plan. The term “expensive” is used for the cost of infrastructure improvements in Ref 3, which is not a sound basis for a plan.

Matter 11 Western Localities of West Dorset - ID: 3538 - Dr David Lee

25. Flooding is prevalent in the flood plain and even at this time of year (November 2014), when rainfall has been well below average for an extended period, the ground is saturated already.
26. Flooding affects many, if not all, of the allotments to the East of Vearse Farm.
27. Building on the flood plain will increase the amount of water running off the valley into the river and its' flood plain as natural absorption and hold up will be reduced. As stated above, no consideration is given to flood relief on Vearse Farmland in the Local Plan. Increased run off will increase the frequency and level of flooding threat to downstream properties and amenities near to the Vearse Farm site and along the river, including housing, allotments, parkland, Bridport Football Club, local businesses, Bridport Rugby Club, Bridport Leisure centre, public footpaths and West Bay Holiday park.
28. Climate change will have an impact on Bridport because of its' proximity to the sea, which will exacerbate the downstream effect of flooding to the East of the Vearse Farm site, where many homes have been affected in the past 3 years. Sea level rise will mean that flood relief schemes will need to be put in place upstream of West Bay, potentially at Vearse Farm, as there are few sites that are suitable between Vearse Farm and West Bay. Ref 1 requires the following considerations in relation to flood relief:
- "safeguarding land from development that is required for current and future flood management;"
 - "Local Plans should be supported by Strategic Flood Risk Assessment and develop policies to manage flood risk from all sources, taking account of advice from the Environment Agency and other relevant flood risk management bodies, such as lead local flood authorities and internal drainage boards"
29. It is recommended that the Inspector should undertake a site visit after a longish spell of heavy rain to see the flooded areas, including the allotments and areas downstream of the flood plain.

Summary of key points

30. AONB
- The people of Bridport are against the development and no case has been made that "there are exceptional circumstances to warrant planning consent", which is a requirement of the National Planning Policy Framework (Ref. 2). Development of Vearse Farm is therefore not in the public interest as the Local Plan fails to comply with National Guidance, and the development should be rejected on this basis alone.
31. Proportionality

Matter 11 Western Localities of West Dorset - ID: 3538 - Dr David Lee

- The demand for housing in Bridport does not match the unnecessarily large scale of development proposed for Vearse Farm. The size of the development is disproportionate to the size of the Town.

32. Economic sustainability

- Disruption during the building phase is expected to have a significant negative impact on the economy and reputation of Bridport. A more integrated approach should be taken for Bridport, based on organic growth within the community and matching housing with local employment.

33. Transport

- Increase in transport during the building and operation of Broomhills Waste Management Centre and Vearse Farm development will pose an unacceptable level of accident risk and severity in the two transport corridors (A35 and West Road to Miles Cross) and at Miles Cross Junction. No funding has been identified in the local plan to mitigate this risk.

34. Flooding

- Despite annual flooding with downstream impact, no plans for funding have been identified for flood relief at Vearse Farm in the Local Plan. There is no strategic flood risk assessment and no consideration of climate change for the site.

References

1. National Planning Policy Framework. Department for Communities and Local Government. March 2012
2. CHAPTER 3 - ACHIEVING A SUSTAINABLE PATTERN OF DEVELOPMENT West Dorset District Council and Weymouth and Portland Borough Council. Amended_Chapter_3_SPOD
3. WEST DORSET, WEYMOUTH & PORTLAND INFRASTRUCTURE DELIVERY PLAN - SUPPORTING THE DRAFT WEST DORSET, WEYMOUTH LOCAL PLAN AND COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY – PRELIMINARY DRAFT CHARGING SCHEDULE.
ACG_fn_Infrastructure_Delivery_Plan_FINAL_120625