



ROMSEY & DISTRICT SOCIETY

Reg. Charity 269308

Natural Environment Committee

For the attention of:
 Planning Policy and Economic Development Service
 Test Valley Borough Council
 Beech Hurst
 Weyhill Road
 ANDOVER
 SP10 3AJ

Please find below the comments on the Local Plan Issues and Options document from the Natural Environment Committee of the Romsey and District Society.

The problem with Romsey now is that any future developments are too far out for people to realistically want to walk or cycle into the town centre. To be more sustainable there needs to be at least a local shop in each middle-to-major sized development, to meet day-to-day top-up shopping needs; maybe also a café or other meeting place.

2.4 Climate change. The increased emphasis on sustainability and green issues is welcome. However new homes currently being built are energy-rated B or C so are still contributing to an increase in global emissions. Whilst this is dependent on central government revising building regulations TVBC should think of imaginative ways of encouraging developers to go beyond current regulations to achieve the carbon neutral situation that local people have said is a priority.

In order to minimise the impact of new development we need to have:

More street trees, maintained/owned by the council, not householders, so that they are not removed or over-pruned;

Solar panels on new builds, or at least factored into design and layout of developments;

Better public transport into town centres from new developments;

Parking to adjoin houses so that charging points can be used by residents;

Joined-up spaces for nature: these need to be wildlife-friendly with cover and natural food sources, not just token bird and bat boxes. Broad hedged routes with native species should be a priority, particularly along roadsides.

5.10 If our Housing Land Supply is robust, why is TVBC allowing so many developments not in the Local Plan and in designated countryside? The current local plan requires 550 homes to be built per annum. The borough has achieved this and has Hoe Lane and Whitenap in the pipeline for future years. The brewery site is also in the mix although there is no sign of that being resolved and only built units count in meeting the target. One of the questions posed is where sites can be identified to meet ongoing housing targets. The council is looking at reviewing settlement boundaries and considering whether to approve sites in the countryside. Sites need

to be identified which should not be built on, including SINC, land put forward for consideration as SINC and land adjoining them.

5.12 Housing market areas These should continue as at least 2 areas, but we consider that TVBC should go further and that there should be a third area, of rural Test Valley, in the middle. Also, Michelmersh, Timsbury and Braishfield should be included in Southern TV as they look more towards Romsey than towards Andover.

5.14 Rural sites help to maintain viability of village shops and schools, but local views should be taken into consideration.

5.25 Settlement boundaries. We would like to see the existing settlement boundaries retained to stop Romsey coalescing with neighbouring villages and especially in the south, to avoid becoming part of 'Greater Southampton'. However, we accept that there may need to be some minor adjustments to meet targets as there are no sites of any size available within Romsey itself. To this end TVBC should endeavour to find a solution to the Brewery site.

6.5We support building higher density houses in town centre sites where appropriate

6.8We support encouragement for rural pubs to offer B&B as it helps to keep them alive.

7 Enjoying Test Valley–Environment and quality of life

Test Valley lies just outside 2 national parks and the North Wessex AONB, and therefore its countryside is under more pressure for development. However, its landscape has value and this should be taken into consideration. HBIC has done some valuable work on Landscape Character Areas which should be taken into account.

7.12 Local gaps should be maintained to allow wildlife/ecological networks around settlements and to prevent coalescence into endless suburbs. They provide an opportunity to provide green space for informal recreation and for wildlife

7.16 Local Green space– preferably with links to other green spaces: important for informal recreation and socialising as well as wildlife. However, recreational uses should not be at the expense of wildlife.

7.31,32 Biodiversity

Ecological network mapping needs to be readily available and viewable. Green corridors need to have appropriate management, e.g. hedges/shrubberies to provide safe passage for small animals, not just mown grass. There appears to be no mention of the LBAP. We consider that the local plan should identify opportunities for supporting the species and habitats contained within the plan. It should also flag up the importance of providing for species such as bats, swifts, sparrows and starlings through the development process. Inclusion of 1-2 integral nest boxes in all new housing, e.g. swift bricks, would help to alleviate the decline in nesting places for a range of birds, as these are often occupied by starlings and/or sparrows as well as swifts.

7.33 Biodiversity net gain–This should be more than just putting up a few bird boxes or wildflower seeding. The policy of *dig/apply weed killer/sow wildflowers/repeat* is not a sustainable system; it is better, if more complicated, to see what comes up and perhaps add appropriate plant plugs of native/local origin. Areas of importance for arable weeds, such as Ganger Farm should be appropriately managed to sustain these.

7.38 Public open space and green infrastructure

Green spaces need to join up. The plan's new emphasis on green infrastructure and green corridors is very welcome. The recent pandemic has brought renewed awareness of the need for good quality, informal, connected green space close to where people live. If cycling and walking are to be promoted, safe, accessible and pleasant green routes will be essential. Some of the earlier post war estates have few communal green areas, later ones have some but they tend to be fragmented and would benefit from a more sensitive maintenance regime. In particular more thought should be given as to when and how to mow grass areas to allow wild flowers to flower and therefore insects to thrive, benefitting the whole food chain. A less frequent and more specific mowing regime in many public open areas, as well as road verges, would have benefits not only for wildlife diversity, but would also increase the opportunities for longer grass/ more varied wild plants which would be appreciated by residents/visitors as well as by small mammals and insects and would reduce maintenance costs. Mown paths through longer grassed areas can look very attractive and help to keep people to the areas where higher footfall is less damaging. Very recent developments such as Abbotswood do have a much better approach with a number of wide green routes both around and through the estate, planted with native shrubs and trees, requiring very little maintenance. These are well used and popular and provide good habitat for a wide range of species. There need to be large green spaces where owners can let their dogs run free without detriment to wildlife, and children can ride bikes and kick balls about. SINCs and nature reserves are not appropriate places for such uses.

7.39 Tree cover - an increase in tree cover is welcome. Such planting needs to include native oaks to secure succession. The area is characterised by many old and splendid oaks which are reaching the end of their lives and urgent action is needed now to start planting replacements for the future. At present, oaks are plentiful in our local hedgerows and although they are often retained during development, they decline thereafter because insufficient space has been left to accommodate them and there has been insufficient planting to secure succession. Tree planting needs the right trees in the right places, not destroying one ecosystem to create another. Additional trees in urban areas provide welcome shade for some but others want uninterrupted sunshine. They also provide shelter and food for wildlife.

7.40 Water—rainwater harvesting should be included in new developments to reduce the use of treated water for gardens; cars etc. and reduce abstraction from our chalk streams and rivers. Also, a practical way of reducing water use would be to install a water butt by the driveway/garage for car washing, but not a mains water tap.

Where space allows, the groundwater drainage system should be formed of ponds and open ditches with gently sloping sides, rather than closed pipes, providing opportunities for greater biodiversity and being better able to cope with sudden heavy rainfall. The balancing ponds at Abbotswood have led to the creation of a large colony of House Martins.

8.8 Sustainable transport—There is a need to consider how far people will walk to catch a bus, and what frequency of service is needed to make it useful or viable. Car charging points will be needed for new homes, so parking must adjoin homes and not be in dislocated parking courts.

8.9 Cycling and walking - safe routes are needed for cycling, but also for walkers who need safe routes without cyclists, who may seem threatening when travelling at speed. Shared routes need to take into account that most people cannot hear a bicycle approaching from behind. There is a need for pleasant accessible routes between housing areas and the town centre to encourage walking and cycling and provide linear routes for wildlife corridors.

8.13 Car parking There should be a presumption against conversion of garages to residential use where on-street parking is already widespread. Reduced/zero parking standards for town centres just put more cars onto streets and car parks.

Please note that the above comments are entirely those of the RDS Natural Environment Committee and you may receive other comments from the Planning Committee of RDS. Please record and consider the points of each RDS committee separately.