

## **TVBC LOCAL PLAN 2029-2040: NORTH TEST VALLEY**

### **General observations**

It is very disappointing that the TVBC draft local plan appears to have been prepared without communication with the Wiltshire Unitary Authority. The TVBC Draft Local Plan proposes 350 homes on a site to the north of the A342 on land east of Ludgershall, and 1,150 homes on land south east of Ludgershall, a total of 1,400 homes which it is proposed to be built on land at the very edge of TVBC, (pages 79-83 of the plan). Meanwhile, Wiltshire Unitary Authority has produced a draft local plan which includes proposals to build 2,080 homes to the South West of Empress Way, Ludgershall and 270 homes to the South of Empress Way (pages 99-103 Wiltshire plan). Between the two authorities therefore the proposal is for 3,750 homes. The 2021 census population of Ludgershall was 5,390. It has grown a little since then. Ludgershall has very few amenities, and limited shopping for its existing population. What population increase would 3,750 new homes bring? Within a short while there will be some 12,000 – 13,000 additional population for a town that can scarcely provide for its existing population. I have searched in vain in the TVBC local plan for an assessment of the impact of more than doubling the population of Ludgershall. There is grand talk in the Wiltshire local plan of a “Tidworth and Ludgershall Market Town” but no detail. Where is the planning? I appreciate the Government wants local authorities to find space for new homes, but homes should be seen as part of communities not just built without any reference as to how the occupants will live their lives. Tidworth offers a little more than Ludgershall in terms of shopping, but it must be borne in mind that many people who live in Tidworth are either in or closely connected with the Army. They have their own facilities which will not be available to the civilian population in Ludgershall.

Have lessons been learnt from a review of the 2011 – 2019 local plan? It would seem not. There is no assessment of how local infrastructure has coped with the additional house building that has taken place. Is the answer “not very well at all” ? The Authority Monitoring Report for 2022-23 shows that the rate of housebuilding has slowed from 169% of Revised Local Plan (RLP) requirement in 2015-16 to just 65% of RLP requirement in 2022-23. The inference is that there was an over-estimated need for housing in North Test Valley. This is not altogether surprising given that (a) jobs are to be found primarily in South Test Valley and (b) there is insufficient infrastructure in place to support the RLP. It is very dispiriting for anyone affected by the TVBC draft local plan to find no consideration within the plan as to how the previous plan actually worked, what has or may have not gone to plan, and how any such failures will be addressed in the next plan. I do not wish to be offensive, but are we not lurching from one ill-thought plan to another?

Also missing from the plan (unless I am much mistaken) is any assessment of the numbers of people who may take up the new proposed Ludgershall housing who are economically and socially dependent. How will TVBC support such people?

### **Section 106 agreements and provision for the community**

Neither TVBC nor Wiltshire have allocated any space for community facilities. A new community of 1,400 homes must be provided with community facilities. The TVBC plan suggests that this need can be assessed later. Really? Is that not simply an exercise of kicking the can down the road, prior to ignoring it altogether? Now, not later, is the time to put in place proposals for community provision and as TVBC is doubtless strapped for cash plans need to be put in place now for s 106 agreements to make such provision as TVBC cannot realistically afford. Once a developer has its planning permission to build 1,400 it will be too late to make necessary s 106 agreements that will stick (and must be enforced).

## **Roads and Transport**

The Plan reads well as to integration of the proposed developments with the road, cycling and pedestrian routes, but it is inescapable that most if not all the occupiers of the proposed new homes will need cars. Any vision of an adequate public transport system would be illusory. There really does need to be a proper study of the ability of the A342 to cope with the additional traffic which will come not only from the TVBC developments but also the Wiltshire development of Ludgershall. There may be a total of 2,720 homes built, many of which will be attractive in terms of cost to young families. Congestion, particularly in the early morning (wage earners and school-children) and late afternoon, is likely to be a real problem. How will the junctions where the proposed developments join the A342 be managed? Has this been thought about? If any such consideration is in the Plan I have missed it.

## **Health and Safety : Railway line**

Is there any concern that the railway line might become a magnet for young children as a play area. Its use is infrequent, and therefore the more dangerous. Will the Army be giving it up? If not, should not safety barriers be incorporated into the development? Too often there is a great wringing of hands after a tragic accident. Too seldom is prior thought given to risks and protecting against them.

## **Employment**

TVBC acknowledge that some areas designated for employment in the 2012 plan have not yet been developed. But where is the assessment as to why that is the case? Why is that? How will the provision of jobs be better in the new plan? The draft plan recognises that there is more work in the south of the borough than there is in the north. The reasons are obvious. Yet the draft plan proposes more new homes in the north of the borough than in the south. What will TVBC actually do to ensure that there is work for the wage-earners who want to take up the new homes? This needs to be addressed in the plan if it is a serious piece of work. Surely it cannot be sensible to build 1,400 new homes and then only consider where wage-earners will find work after they have moved in.

What confidence does TVBC have that there will be jobs for all the new residents who want to work? Where will those jobs be? Are there local employers desperate for workers who will be able to take up the slack? The answer is no. As job vacancies of the scale necessary to meet the needs of 1,400 homes (ignoring the 2,000 + homes Wiltshire propose around Ludgershall) do not exist now, where are the proposals to ensure that jobs will be ready for the influx of additional wage-earners?

The draft plan (para 4.409) identifies a need for 'advanced manufacturing' and 'knowledge-based uses' together with employment related to aviation and motorsport and suggests that this is a future source of employment. Thruxton Aerodrome is to expand the use of its site (4.122) with expansion to land to the South (4.108) with 'substantial redevelopment' of Thruxton Business Park (4.113) and collaboration between the two (4.115). So far so good. But as it appears on the draft plan this development would seem to be able to provide a rather limited number of jobs. Have prospective employers been identified? And when will these jobs be available? Given the fact that the 2012 plan employment projections have not been met would it be unduly cynical to suppose that the draft plan proposals will also fail to deliver?

Also of concern is the limited (and some negative) reference in the draft Plan to agriculture. It is to be hoped that some agricultural land will survive the drive to create solar farms, housing and (albeit) industrial developments. The draft Plan recognises that we face a climate emergency, but does little to comfort the reader that agricultural use of land will be encouraged. Agriculture does come with animal odours but anyone who lives in the country not has to get use to odours but most soon do.

### **Health and social care**

The draft Plan does nothing to reassure the reader that the need for health and social care facilities is considered by TVBC to be important and will be addressed. At present the local community is largely dependent on the Castle Practice (Wiltshire) for GP services and limited dentistry, but an influx of 11,000 – 12,000 people will stretch their resources. Fortunately the Castle Practice is looking into the provision of GP services for additional residents. Hopefully they will manage. But dentistry will remain a real problem. With regard to care for the elderly and others in need the local care and nursing homes all have waiting lists for patients. Care homes struggle to fill staff vacancies; they are affected by the national shortage of nurses, health care assistants, carers, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and other ancillary staff. Home carers are thin on the ground. Does TVBC have any proposals to meet the needs of the additional population they are considering bringing into the area? This is an important area of life and should not be ignored. There should be a well-thought and explained plan in place to cover health and social care before any permission is given to build homes for 11,000 – 12,000 people.

### **Crime and policing**

There is no recognition in the draft Plan of the general lack of policing in rural North-West Hampshire. At the present we are reliant on two active police officers covering an area of over 200 square miles. Not that urban North-West Hampshire is any better. Compared with the national rate the crime rate in Andover is 200%, whereas the rate of rural crime in Hampshire is 107%. It would be encouraging to read in the draft Plan that this situation is recognised, that the impact of substantial development around Ludgershall has been assessed, and that TVBC have plans to improve policing in the north end of the Borough. But if any such assessment has been undertaken it is being kept well-hidden.

### **Infrastructure and Utilities**

#### **Water**

Southern Water are rarely out of the news at present. There has been a significant failure to maintain and repair the infrastructure, with the resulting chaos on some roads due to local flooding. There is sewage being pumped into the river Test and other local watercourses. In times of heavy rainfall there is flooding and leakage of sewage into the potable water supply. In times of drought there are water shortages. It would be encouraging if the local plan addressed these issues and stated what steps TVBC plan to take to ensure that Southern Water perform satisfactorily after the substantial increase in proposed housing.

#### **BT / Openreach**

There has been a serious lack of interest in what BT apparently see as unimportant rural areas. The green boxes and lines through which telecommunications pass (whatever provider is used) are well

past their sell by date. BT/Openreach are clearly not prepared to spend anything on improving the infrastructure and were therefore incapable of supplying a service fit for purpose, presumably because the number of consumers for whom the service would be improved are considered to be insignificant. Rural residents have been forced to turn to alternative suppliers which are appreciably more expensive. With the proposed increase in housing in the TVBC draft plan, have TVBC considered liaising with BT/Openreach to ensure that a reasonable service is provided in future. It must be borne in mind that telecoms are not just a recreational facility. Many people now work extensively from home.

### **Education**

There is a great shortage of places for children in the Ludgershall, Kimpton, Appleshaw, Fyfield, Thruxton area in all categories. Pre-school, Primary, Secondary, and College / Further education. There is also a severe shortage of SEND provision. The development proposed in the draft plan suggests young families not retired people. One s.106 primary school really will not cut the mustard. It is very disappointing that the draft plan simply does not get to grips with what will be a really serious problem if the proposed developments are allowed to proceed without significant educational resources.

What proposals exist to provide SEND support both for the current and for the expanded population?

### **Summary**

The sheer volume of new homes proposed by TVBC and Wiltshire Unitary Authority around Ludgershall could have an adverse impact on the existing towns and settlements unless it is holistically managed. With the benefit of sufficient and improved amenities and infrastructure, the new developments could have a very positive impact. The draft plan proposes, in effect, the dumping of 11,000 – 12,000 people into an area which does not begin to be able to cater for them.

Such a dumping will also have a significant adverse impact on the existing communities in the area. To have plans for houses without proper plans for communities which will arise out of the houses is a serious failure in planning. It seems to me that the easy bit (finding pieces of land) has been done. The difficult bit (working out the people who come to live in the proposed houses will settle into viable communities with the necessary facilities and infrastructure for modern life) has yet to be tackled.

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