Wealden Core Strategy Examination – Matter 8 Statement

Statement by Polegate Local Residents

Polegate, Willingdon and Stone Cross Area Strategy

Whether the Strategy for the Polegate, Willingdon and Stone Cross Area, including the Strategic Development Areas, is soundly based and deliverable

Policies in Core Strategy: WCS2, WCS3, WCS4 (SD4)

This is a statement on behalf of residents who live in the Brookside Avenue of Polegate and the adjacent streets in the western part of the town. We also represent residents of Guardian Court, the sheltered accommodation to the north of Brookside Avenue.

We support Wealden District Council's Core Strategy which excludes any development west of the trunk road and proposes new housing to the southeast of Polegate (Mornings Mill and Hindslands).

In the 2005 Wealden Non-Statutory Local Plan, land west of Polegate was proposed for development (Location PW1). Wealden District Council now excludes it from the Core Strategy. We would like to emphasise that the land west of Polegate was put into the Non-statutory Plan by a Panel of Councillors against officer advice, and was not subject to public participation or Public Inquiry. At that time residents were told that the opportunity to argue for a different site would come at the LDF - the Inquiry into which we have now at last reached.

In January 2011 residents in the western part of Polegate opposed at a public inquiry the planning application by Pelham Homes for 520 houses on 'Honey Farm' the fields west of Polegate, first applied for in 2006 and refused, and again applied for in 2008. This housing proposal would have required access to be made through the Brookside Avenue area and the building of foot and cycle bridges which would have been highly intrusive to residents. The plan would have brought insecurity and danger to our part of Polegate and was opposed by Sussex Police for that reason.

The Secretary of state said that the lack of safe and convenient pedestrian links to the existing footpath network and Polegate town centre, the poor surveillance of the bridge access and the associated opportunities for criminal behaviour, and the poor connectivity on foot or by cycle contravene development plan policies

The appeal was refused by the Secretary of State in May 2011. One important reason was that locations for housing at Polegate should be decided through the development plan process and not by appeal.

Residents in the western part of Polegate strongly support the rejection of the west of Polegate location for housing in the Core Strategy. We support the proposed site for housing at Hindslands and Mornings Mill, south east of the town (Policy WCS4 Location SD4)

Inspector's Questions

(a) Have reasonable alternatives to the Strategy been considered?

We support the current proposal for housing to be located SE of Polegate at Hindslands and Mornings Mill. The site outside the A27 (formerly A22) Trunk Road, which is the boundary to Polegate on its west side, is not a 'reasonable alternative'. Fig 8 of the Core Strategy (p46) shows how the A27 is an effective way to contain development and prevent sprawl.

(b) Is there a clear audit trail showing how and why the preferred strategy was arrived at?

We believe that the Wealden District Council SHLAA (March 2010) shows how sites were assessed and why some were found 'suitable' and others 'unsuitable'. The justification in the SHLAA for finding the site west of A27 ('Honey Farm' or Pelham Homes site in local parlance) 'unsuitable' is clearly expressed.

(c) Have the infrastructure implications of the strategy clearly been identified and supported by the evidence base? Is it clear who is going to deliver the required infrastructure and by when?

There are established proposals for improvement of four junctions on the A22 and A27 around Polegate. However the Highways Agency seems not to be intending to pay anything towards these.

(d) Has the impact of the strategy on the Strategic Road Network been adequately assessed and is there a reasonable prospect that the transport infrastructure required is deliverable?

The proposals to add signals to Cophall roundabout seem ill-judged. There were signals all round the junction some years ago. They were mostly removed because they caused congestion and delay. Cophall is badly designed as it is too big and for some people it is difficult to use.

The housing site still being advocated by Pelham Homes would add even more traffic to Cophall roundabout. It would be housing dependent on car use with little or no public transport and no safe pedestrian or cycle access (Bridges over A27 were found unacceptable as a means of foot or cycle access, by the recent Inquiry.)

The Secretary of State agreed with the inspector when he said the poor access arrangements by foot or by cycle would discourage the use of these sustainable modes of

transport and instead encourage reliance on the car such that this location would be inappropriate in terms of environmental sustainability.

(e) Is the strategy sufficiently flexible to respond to an unexpected change of circumstances?

There is flexibility to change the order in which the Strategic Development Areas are brought forward. The Hindslands / Mornings Mill location (SD4) could be started earlier than 2019.

(f) Is SD4 justified and deliverable ?

We support the proposed location for housing SD4 south east of Polegate (Hindslands and Mornings Mill).

(g) Is SD5 justified and deliverable ?
(h) Is SD6 justified and deliverable ?
(i) Is SD7 justified and deliverable ?

We have no comment on these proposals which are for land to the east of Polegate.

(j) Is there appropriate justification for the phasing of housing at SD4 from 2019?

It would take pressure off our area if the Hindslands site was developed earlier than 2019, as we will otherwise continue to face attempts by Pelham Homes to promote the land west of the A27 opposite Brookside Avenue for housing, yet again.

(k) Have reasonable alternatives to SD4, SD5, SD6 and SD7 been considered – omission sites?

Siting housing W of Polegate on the 'Honey Farm' location has been considered and rejected by Wealden and by the Secretary of State. The housing location southeast of Polegate is where the housing was originally intended to be located, in the First Draft Local Plan in 2003.

Many strong arguments against the Honey Farm location have been made already. We will speak about our reasons against it, at the Examination.

Polegate Local Residents Group

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