

## **South Wiltshire Review: Core Strategy**

### **Further representations from Catesby Property Group (Reps 29-32)**

#### **Matter 5: Implications for strategic allocations and infrastructure.**

*What are the implications of the revised housing and employment figures on the delivery of the strategic allocations identified in the Core Strategy and the infrastructure associated with these, including the Transport Strategy?*

#### **Introduction.**

Catesby Property Group are the key investors and developers behind the Longhedge strategic site at Old Sarum north of Salisbury. Since we had not confirmed and concluded our interest in the site at the time of the previous Examination in January 2010, we were not formally represented at the previous Inquiry, although we did attend as observers. However, the landowner was ably represented at the previous EIP by their agents, SmithsGore. We have now indicated a wish to appear at the Examination in Public in August 2011 and therefore our submissions should be read in conjunction with those of Steven Briggs from SmithsGore.

#### **The strengths of the Longhedge Site.**

The Longhedge site has emerged as one of the strongest strategic sites within the South Wiltshire Core Strategy. Its 'pedigree' as a location for future growth has been well established over a considerable period of time and this has been supported by the Council, both at the previous Local Plan Inquiry and the more recent Core Strategy Public Examination in February 2011.

It has clear advantages in terms of assisting in building a greater critical mass to the existing Old Sarum development and sharing services and facilities and by including 8ha of employment land provides a contribution to re-locating firms from Churchfields industrial area in the centre of the City, which too is allocated for residential development within the Plan period.

It has an ideal strategic location, adjacent to the Beehive Park & ride site, whereby people can access the City within 10-15 minutes and hence provides a genuinely sustainable option, compared with its competitors. It also has good access to the wider road network with good links northwards to Amesbury and the A303 trunk route.

An ecological assessment has been undertaken which does not reveal any significant constraints. The only issue of any great concern at Longhedge is one of visual impact – which has been expressed previously by English Heritage. However, now that the Persimmon site at Old Sarum (adjacent to Longhedge) is being built, arguably the impact has to some extent already occurred. There is, in any event, a considerable quantity of development both in the foreground (in the form of intensive pig farming sheds), and in the background, in terms of the Old Sarum Airfield and surrounding development, which is arguably much more offensive to the eye.

Longhedge provides the opportunity to deliver a much more sensitive development which can help mitigate visual impact rather than exacerbating it – creating new vistas to the north and 'celebrating' the Old Sarum hill fort through longer distance views, both towards Old Sarum and towards the Longhedge site. There is also scope to landscape the upper slopes before they are developed, which has been agreed in a Statement of Common Ground between the Council and English Heritage.

### **The implications of reducing the size of Longhedge.**

In our view, the proposal to cut the size of the Longhedge site has not been properly explained or justified. Is it because less housing land is needed ie. 'needs led' or is it for environmental reasons, ie. 'constraints led'? We feel the decision to reduce the size of Longhedge is illogical.

The most important aspect of planning for landowners and developers is certainty. They need to know before promoting and planning a site how much land will be allocated in order to calculate infrastructure requirements, work out viability and assess land values with any potential developer.

The Council has proposed the reduction of the Longhedge site from 800 to 450 dwellings. However, it has suggested in its evidence and within Topic Paper 20 that (under the proposed Review) the second phase of Longhedge could emerge in a subsequent plan period. This must clearly demonstrate that the Council regard the second phase of Longhedge as acceptable in landscape terms, otherwise this statement would not be made. Indeed, as Topic Paper 20 emphasised, all the strategic sites are regarded as suitable and deliverable, otherwise they would not have been chosen in the first place.

Against this background, it is illogical that the reason for downgrading the merits of the site within the Sustainability Appraisal (the English Heritage objections) are not regarded as sufficiently serious to reject the future expansion of the site – either it is suitable and adequate mitigation measures have been proposed (as has been agreed in the Statement of Common Ground and was supported by the Council at the earlier examination) or it isn't!

In our view however, the suggestion to reduce the site in size from 800 dwellings to 450 dwellings in size is neither logical nor satisfactory. It would mean that the site could not be planned comprehensively. The amount of infrastructure required would be unclear. The proposal for an additional primary school would become uneconomic (based on 450 dwellings) and the relationship with the current Old Sarum site would therefore become more complicated.

Local people would not know whether further development might occur or not and it would be difficult to undertake viability assessments as a result. The employment site (which tends to be the less profitable element) would be more vulnerable without the scale of the overall site and the balance which was proposed initially would be lost.

From the practical point of view, the landowner and developer would be unable to promote the site effectively without knowing how much of the site was going to be allocated for development.

### **Conclusions.**

In our view, the Longhedge site performs well in any objective assessment of sustainability. It has been promoted for development over a long period of time and has considerable merits, not least in terms of its transport advantages. In practice, due to the linkage between the two, Churchfields could well be affected by the change to the Longhedge allocation.

The reduction in the size of the site would result in a piecemeal approach to development which runs counter to good practice and would create difficulties from the point of providing new infrastructure.

It is not an example of good planning to dissect a site in this way, and certainly not to propose a unilateral reduction without drawing the developer into the debate.