

High Lane Residents Association

Stockport Local Plan Consultation – comments from High Lane Residents Association

These comments concentrate on issues within and directly affecting High Lane and do not range more widely, although we recognise that the aim is an integrated plan that will guide the Borough to a sustainable future whilst meeting growing needs for jobs, housing and care.

We are also, in support, providing a copy of our response to the initial GMSF draft strategic plan as it covers many relevant points and, even if GMSF were to revise its plan, most of the points raised are still relevant to future planning for the area and therefore equally applicable to the Local Plan. Prior to responding on GMSF we conducted a survey on the relevant issues and the outcomes of that inform our earlier submission.

We have our AGM on 18th October 2017 and (notwithstanding that this falls after the closing date on this stage of your consultation process) if there is any mobile display relating to the Local Plan that we could showcase at that meeting this may be helpful in encouraging public interest and awareness of the Local Plan then please let us know.

Situation

High Lane is on the edge of not only Stockport Borough but of the Greater Manchester conurbation and also borders the outskirts of Cheshire East, where its outer boundary is even more remote from its administrative and population centre. Both sides of the border have copious and significant areas of green belt and green space. This situation raises some important issues about the role and development of our community and its place in the general environment of Stockport Borough.

Separation and delineation at the edge of the conurbation is one of the key grounds for green belt designation and we would argue that this is vitally important in our area. There is a serious question about the value High Lane gives to the wider community and environment. The green space that it provides is an amenity for neighbouring areas, especially those within walking distance like Hazel Grove, Offerton and Marple, as well as a key part of Stockport's balance of environment.

The general view of residents as reflected in our meetings and survey is that they live here because of its proximity to countryside and its village atmosphere which is in a large part because it is separated from the main conurbation. We consider it important that this fact is fully respected in the Local Plan. A community first, rather than numbers first, approach to planning as promoted by the Council for the Preservation of Rural England and others, suggests that additional development should be in smaller units and in style and units which fulfil and respect local community needs and is in keeping with the existing character and scale of the village. Additional development should enhance amenities for existing residents as well as provide for additional ones. Hence, prior agreement and the subsequent enforcement of provision for infrastructure improvements - whether transportation, medical, educational or commercial - would be essential. Also the primary needs of this part of the Borough should be thoroughly assessed with reference to the High Lane Village Neighbourhood Plan when completed and should focus around sheltered and supported housing and

limited other affordable housing for local residents which will have limited impact on congestion, pollution and the green environment.

Importantly, we cannot rely on neighbouring Cheshire East to maintain the greenbelt on their side of the border, as proximity to transport networks into Manchester and the motorway network, as well as remoteness from the administrative centre and the value of land to developers, make this a tempting and possibly 'easy' target and way for them to resolve their housing provision challenges, whilst limiting extended traffic journeys through the rest of their area.

We note and agree with the statement that the Borough has a 'town centres first' approach to development and work provision on grounds of sustainability, transport, closeness of affordable housing to jobs and the transport network.

High Lane local centre

In relation to High Lane specifically, we would support any measures to encourage the sustainability of small retail outlets, especially those which provide consumables for the local community and thereby avoid travel. The potential to serve the local community better and to limit congestion and pollution does exist. Business rates may be a disincentive and anything that could be done to incentivise small enterprise would be helpful.

Better signposting for the car parking near to the three small shopping parades along the A6 may help passing trade to enable shops to survive.

Also it is noted that when major development took place in the 60's and 70's, provision was made for retail within walking distance of the housing on the north side of the A6 on Fairacres Road. This presumably became economically unsustainable and is now office accommodation. However, with the imminent loss of the roadside shop at Doodfield, any effort to restore a small retail outlet not on the A6 would be helpful.

Transport

The challenge for High Lane is that public transport is poor and a half-hourly bus service to Stockport accessible only from the A6, with a two-hourly bus to Marple/Glossop and through High Lane to Stepping Hill is challenging. This latter service is under review and may be threatened; however it is infrequency which limits its usage, not the need for travel. With almost 25% of the local population being aged 65+ as confirmed by the Spatial Portrait, there is a clear and growing demand for public transport for non-drivers to access the amenities that cannot be provided in High Lane village itself. The nearest usable train stations are in Marple and carry a good service into Manchester but not to Stockport. Thus, jobs in Stockport or around the motorway network involve car travel with the ensuing issues of pollution and congestion.

Expediting the extension of the tram network to Stockport and on to both Hazel Grove and Marple would go some way to alleviating congestion and providing sustainable routes to employment and retail centres.

We have concerns about pollution along the A6 and especially after the current phase of the A6MARR is completed. It is well-publicised that the Dept of Transport considered the A6 through High Lane to be beyond its practical capacity by the mid-1990's creating a serious environmental impact yet the traffic movements through the village have increased markedly since that time but without mitigation of its impact. It is also inevitable that, once opened, A6MARR will provide the preferred through-route

for traffic (largely HGV's) between the M56/M60 and the M1 at Chesterfield, i.e. passing directly through High Lane Village. Pollution monitoring, whilst proceeding along the lines agreed some time ago in connection with A6MARR, measures only one element of pollution (i.e. NO₂) and by one method only, so that the benchmarking provided is of limited value and seems designed to allay fears rather than elicit a true view of risks. However the fact that no measurement of PM_{2.5} molecules is taking place is potentially disguising the true risks presented by traffic in this area and is a concern to the local community which the Local Plan ought to positively address. It is noted that the Spatial Portrait which supports the Issues Paper indicates that residents of the depicted Marple Area, which includes High Lane, will have a lower life expectancy than that enjoyed by residents of the Bramhall and Cheadle Areas and there is a serious question as to whether the pollution levels generated by congestion on the A6 through High Lane is a contributing factor. Whilst recognising that, over time, changes away from diesel fuel could alleviate things (though we note that the bulk of pollution on the A6 is inevitably from large HGV vehicles, including quarries traffic, for which transition will not be quick) we would urge that the Council keeps their monitoring systems under review and updates to the highest standards available, not just to serve High Lane but for the general welfare of the Stockport community.

Improving infrastructure to make local living more sustainable

We feel that there are improvements to facilities and transport that could significantly help to make our area sustainable, reduce travel and ensure full and beneficial use of the area.

- (a) Better public transport
- (b) A good public transport service to Stepping Hill Hospital
- (c) More sports facilities in the Marple area
- (d) Full utilisation of the High Lane Library building as a community hub
- (e) An extension of the allotment provision by purchasing of more peripheral land for this purpose
- (f) Strong adherence to TPOs and preservation of woodland possibly considering active planting especially in the hinterland for A6MARR to reduce the spread of pollution and noise
- (g) Improvements to the parks. Proper consideration of better facilities and mixed use for High Lane Park and for the smaller parks to provide a safe and attractive recreational area not just for toddlers and the elderly but also for teenagers and whole families.
- (h) Better and safer pedestrian access to Middlewood Station.
- (i) Recreational facilities in High Lane: note that residents of High Lane have no access to swimming, gym, indoor sports, cinema, etc. without travelling outside the Village. There is not even a youth club for the youngsters.

Maximising wider use of the local green space and heritage

The green belt and green space in and around High Lane is a facility not only for the use and enjoyment of High Lane residents but also for other Stockport residents within walking and cycling distance. We would support any efforts to widen usage and appreciation of the area's footpath networks, its heritage and natural features for leisure. Ideas include:

- (a) Better signage and publicity for the footpath network in and around High Lane including formal walking routes publicised more widely and not limiting people to the linear Middlewood Way. If this is to provide a 'green lung' for the Borough it needs to be well publicised and widely used
- (b) The area has many historic pubs. More could be done to publicise their history and part in the growth of this area as a mining and canal centre and through to the present day. A pub trail would be interesting and might attract visitors

- (c) Resistance to ‘over landscaping’ – retain natural environment and diversity for example along the Macclesfield Canal and surrounding countryside.

Housing

A more active ‘brownfield first’ policy is needed and it is noted that more could be done by the local authority to exhaustively identify redundant used land and to actively incentivise developers to work with this by grants, clean-up help and stronger resistance to allowing building on more ‘attractive’ areas. A late start was made in codifying what is available through a Brownfield site register and as yet it seems that a proactive policy to maximise brownfield land for development is non-existent.

Pressure on Government regarding grant facilities is supported, for example to revitalise the system of derelict land grants to encourage decontamination and make brownfield land more attractive to developers.

It is noted that the agricultural land in and around High Lane is designated as such and this should therefore not be considered for re-designation and certainly not before brownfield sites have been exhaustively and proactively utilised.

We note the apparent complete lack of consideration in the GMSF initial drafts to the role that the countryside around High Lane plays in flood prevention and the possible effect of the mining that underpinned the area. We urge that this is thoroughly taken into account in the Local Plan.

Appropriate housing is needed in the Borough and affordable housing is more likely to be truly affordable if built nearer the town centre where transport costs will be less, car ownership is less of an issue and jobs nearer. However we strongly believe that the volume and scale of any proposed new housing in the Borough should be needs-driven and not purely aspirational (as appeared to be the case in GMSF) in order to be sustainable and to respect the sense of place that residents want.

If additional housing is needed locally, decisions should be made by ‘bottom up’ consultation with the immediate local community which understands best the needs of its area. Our ageing community in and around High Lane¹ suggests that a need for the provision of suitable accommodation for supported living and nursing care in a limited way would be a priority, with consideration to the necessary support services. We therefore regard it as unfortunate that the Local Plan consultation starts with a ‘call for sites’ encouraging local developers and landowners to make their pitch first, rather than the communities.

Summary

- Residents support a ‘brownfield first’ and ‘town centre first’ development policy with much more proactive effort nationally and locally to identify and encourage development near to transport hubs and without encroachment on green belt
- A community-based assessment of local housing needs both in quantity and in terms of types of housing and infrastructure. This would almost certainly lead to a number of smaller developments less at odds with the current nature of areas
- Investment to increase the appreciation and leisure use of local green space by surrounding communities within walking and cycling distance

¹ the Spatial Portrait confirms our area has the highest proportion of residents of age 65+ years across the Stockport Borough

- Improved public transport to minimise congestion and pollution from necessary journeys
- Planning and investment priority to facilities that would increase the sustainability of community life, respect High Lane's existing sense of place and scale and limit the need to travel.

On behalf of High Lane Residents Association

5 October 2017