

Planning for New Homes in Mole Valley: The Options

January 2014

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PLANNING FOR NEW HOMES IN MOLE VALLEY – THE OPTIONS.

A note to explain the reason for preparing the Housing and Traveller Sites Plan.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The Mole Valley Core Strategy was adopted in 2009. Work commenced immediately afterwards on the preparation of a Land Allocations Plan that was intended to show where the development proposed in the Core Strategy would be provided. An Issues and Options document was published in January 2010.
- 1.2 In May 2010 the Coalition Government was formed and set about reforming the process for preparing Development Plans. The abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies and the preparation of new more focussed national planning guidance were signalled.
- 1.3 In view of this hiatus in national planning advice, the Council decided to pause its public facing work on the Land Allocations Plan and progressed the preparation of the Dorking Town Area Action Plan.
- 1.4 The Council thought long and hard about whether to continue with the preparation of a Land Allocations Plan based on the provisions of the Core Strategy or whether in the light of the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework which came into force in March 2012 to prepare a new Local Plan.
- 1.5 In February 2013, the Council decided to continue with the preparation of a Land Allocations Plan to give effect to the provisions of the Core Strategy, but recognising the need to set in train the work needed to prepare a new NPPF compliant Local Plan.
- 1.6 This note explains the issues that the Council took into account in coming to this decision.

2.0 Housing Land Supply

- 2.1 The NPPF requires local planning authorities to identify and update annually a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide five years worth of housing against their requirements. At the beginning of 2013, there were sites with planning permission for housing and a small allowance for windfalls that in total amounted to around 3.5 years worth of available housing land supply.
- 2.2 Under these circumstances, the Council recognised its vulnerability to applications for planning permission for housing on Green Belt land and other land which its planning policies seek to safeguard for other purposes.
- 2.3 It was therefore concluded that it was important to make rapid progress with the preparation of a new Plan that would identify sites for future housing development so that the Council and its communities would be taking the lead

in deciding where new housing development takes place rather than leaving it to the market to bring forward ad hoc planning applications.

3.0 Housing Requirements for Mole Valley

- 3.1 The Council was mindful of the Government's objective of boosting significantly the supply of housing and the NPPF's requirement for local planning authorities to ensure that Local Plans meet the full objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing in the housing market area as far as is consistent with the policies in the NPPF.
- 3.3 In line with the Duty to Cooperate, the Council made preliminary enquiries with adjoining local planning authorities in Surrey and in Greater London within its housing market area. It found that most were not ready to engage in cooperative working around future objectively assessed housing needs at this time because of other plan making priorities. Moreover, the London Boroughs pointed out that for them the matter of future housing targets will be determined by the review of the London Plan.
- 3.4 The Council concluded that the key driver for cooperation would be the review of the London Plan which was underway at the time the Council was considering its position. At the time, the indications were that this wider process of cooperation would be crucial to establishing the housing needs of Mole Valley. In regard to its own duty to inform, the GLA would need to demonstrate that it sought to engage with local planning authorities beyond London to ensure that the updated and rolled forward plan sits coherently with wider planning issues for the South East. Conversely, the Council recognised that it would have to work with neighbouring boroughs in Surrey and London to show that they have sought practical means to engage with the GLA to consider together what the London Plan may mean for their areas.
- 3.5 The Council came to the conclusion that the growth of London would be very likely to result in significant inward migration pressures on Mole Valley and that without the structure of regional planning bodies it would take time to for all the local planning authorities in the housing market area within which Mole Valley lies to establish ways of working together and agree the distribution of future housing needs.
- 3.6 Indeed the debate about accommodating London's growth that cannot be met within the Capital needs to spread beyond Surrey to take account of the historical tendency for it to leapfrog beyond the Metropolitan Green Belt.
- 3.7 When considering whether to proceed with the preparation of a site allocations plan or a new Local Plan, the Council was mindful of the difficulties of putting in place and sustaining management structures to coordinate the process of plan preparation and ensure cooperative working on such a large scale involving London.
- 3.8 It concluded that deriving a new housing target for Mole Valley out of London Plan based cooperation would be difficult to achieve in a reasonable or manageable timescale and could significantly delay preparation of a sound Local Plan. Moreover, the Council concluded at the time that there was no practical alternative because if it were to proceed independently on its own it would immediately put it in breach of the duty to cooperate which would mean

it would fail at the first fence of the examination process, something which had happened at Rushcliffe.

- 3.9 Many of the messages coming from Ministers and senior Communities and Local Government officials are about the pressing need to bring forward housing development. The Council recognises that one of the key means to assist this is the allocation of sites in development plans. The Council felt that preparing a new Local Plan which would review both strategy and allocate sites would take significantly longer than it would to prepare a plan allocating sites for new housing based on the requirements of the Core Strategy.
- 3.10 The Council decided that these were sufficient reasons not to try to take forward a new Local Plan at this time but to prepare a site allocations plan based on the housing requirements of the adopted Core Strategy to expedite the identification and delivery of land for housing through the plan led process.

4.0 Commitment to preparing a new Local Plan

- 4.1 The Council recognises that the preparation of a site allocations plan to identify an adequate supply of land for housing to 2026 is an interim measure to ensure there will be an on-going deliverable supply of housing land for the next ten years or so.
- 4.2 It is appreciated that it will be necessary to prepare a new Local Plan that takes on board the requirements of the NPPF to meet the full objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing in the housing market area and take account of any under provision resulting from the decision to prepare a plan based on the adopted Core Strategy rather than the objectively assessed housing needs of the District.
- 4.3 The Council has given a firm commitment to do this which is reflected in the Local Development Scheme (LDS).
- 4.4 The Council is preparing the foundations for this through its work with local planning authorities and the GLA to understand the extent that London can meet its housing requirements and the consequences of not being able to do so for the surrounding shire areas.