

Representation No1

Re Chapter 3 Vision and Objectives

Legally Compliant: Yes

Sound No

Fails the test of consistent with National Policy

Comment

A fundamental tenet of national planning policy is community involvement and support for their place.

NPPF Para 16c): "The Local Plan should be shaped by early, proportionate and effective engagement between Plan makers and communities". RCC fail in this regard, which in our view renders the Plan as submitted unsound.

The RCC peer group review of November 2019 found the major weakness of the Authority to be that they communicated but did not consult. The Vision statement is testimony to that conclusion.

The last time the Council effectively consulted on the vision for the County, ie what sort of place do Rutlanders want for their future place, was 2008. The Vision statement that emerged then was widely endorsed. This Vision was supposed to be reviewed every five years or at any point of significant change within the County. This has never been done. There were some changes at the Cabinet meeting 15 06 10 with a four-week consultation period to align the Vision with a new Corporate Plan. Since then various Visions have just appeared, without any consultation whatsoever.

Throughout the process of preparing the current submission there have been various Vision statements, all different, none of them consulted upon. To repeat the Peer group conclusion simply announcing a vision is not consultation.

Para 3.6 of Chapter 3 states that the vision has been developed by the Council together with partners and stakeholders. We would challenge the veracity of that statement by asking when and how. As a Parish Council presumably we are a stakeholder. The Statement of Community Involvement defines us as such. We have no recollection or minute as to our involvement. We have been presented with numerous *faites-accomplis*.

Para 3.6 goes on to say that the vision also reflects the vision set out in the Council's Corporate Plan (2019-2024). That Plan was published in November 2019 i.e well into the first year to which it relates, and well after Reg 18 consultation finished, when stakeholders could make meaningful comment, even though they were not asked to do so. Moreover, the very first strategic priority of that Corporate Plan was to consult Rutlanders on a 50 year vision for the County. This was

supposed to commence in November 2019 and be finished by March 2020. Needless to say no evidence of any work on this strategic priority has emerged. In any event what is the point of consulting on such a task, when the future of Rutland will in large part have been determined by the Reg 19 submission of the emerging Local Development Plan which was finished before the Corporate Plan was published. We thus exemplify the cavalier attitude to public engagement and buy in, a fundamental requirement of national policy.

The emergence of the plans for SGB in 2018 are another striking example of the Council's disdain for public engagement. In June 2017, the Council published a version of the Local Plan which was widely endorsed. See the relevant comments on the 2017 Plan on the Council's website. Before the ink was dry on that spatial strategy the Council were secretly drawing up a Memorandum Of Understanding with the MOD to "jointly develop" the recently announced redundant site with a development of between 1500 and 3000 houses. This was not only a secret unbeknown to the general public, it was a complete surprise to most Councillors. The bland announcement that the Council were in discussion with the MOD over the site closure is a long way from actively agreeing a joint proposal for developing it.

The MOU was signed in early September 2017 under the supposed delegated authority of the Chief Executive. This was completely against the Council Constitution then in force. The Council when challenged relied on a section "admittedly widely drawn", the monitoring officer's words, which allowed the Chief Executive to act in furtherance of operational efficiency. Other sections of the Constitution which explicitly required Council approval relating to key decisions and matters affecting a certain number of wards were ignored. In any event if a Chief Officer can take a decision which fundamentally alters the County, which a new town would do, what is the point of elected members. It is a widespread view in Rutland, and certainly that of this Parish Council, that the SGB joint development was deliberately kept under wraps because of the widespread opposition it would generate. Far from community involvement when the MOU finally emerged in February 2018, SGB was presented as a fait accompli. The roadshows round the towns and villages in the spring of 2018, were not concerned with asking Rutlanders do you want to fundamentally change the development of Rutland by endorsing another town, half as big again as Uppingham our second largest town, but a presentation of what the new town would look like.

Our view that the Council deliberately kept the development secret for as long as possible because of the probable resultant public outcry is borne out by subsequent events. The response to the so-called focus consultation in August 2018 was unprecedented and astonishing. For an authority with a total population of less than 40,000 to receive 1700 responses to a pro forma full of planning gobbledegook, 95% against the scale of the development, is unheard of.

Such was the scale of the response that the Chief Executive blandly announced that she did not have the staff to analyse the responses. It was several months before the extent of the opposition was made public. Even then the Council could not resist skewing the response, by publishing their "own analysis" of the Gilman survey. An ex councillor Eg Gilman, at his own expense,

commissioned a county wide survey which he said demonstrated even greater opposition than the councils published response. Unfortunately, because of his personal circumstances this could not be verified. Nevertheless, the published response was astonishing.

The public response was mirrored at councillor level. The only time the previous Council were allowed any debate on whether or not SGB was appropriate for Rutland, was January 2019 when debate was held over whether to apply for a HIF grant in aid of the development. Despite the majority party whip, the application was approved by just 12 votes to 11 with two absentees and the Chairman committed to vote against. It scraped over the line with the Leader promising that the grant would only be accepted after the full Council had discussed any conditions attached, which has still not happened despite viability and infrastructure development being heavily reliant on HIF. Again evidence that the leadership of the Council have no truck with opposition, the HIF monies are assumed throughout the plan, before the promised Council debate.

This evident substantial opposition did not stop the Council continuing their work with Homes England and the MOD during the autumn of 2018. There is ample evidence of such work being pursued before the results of the consultation in August 2018 had been published or discussed by Council. Whatever the scale of the opposition the leadership had a closed mind, they would ignore the results of the consultation. This is just one of a number of examples that we refer to in other representations that SGB was a given since the MOU was signed, and ever since the evidence has been made to fit.

The above demonstrates in our view that far from community support for the new town, the opposite is true. Completely against NPPF policy of community buy in, rendering the Plan unsound as it offends national policy.

Mitigation measures to ensure soundness

Meaningful consultation over the need for a new town in Rutland and acting on the results. The movement from Regulation 18 stage and consultation to a radically different Plan without the necessary technical information, for example a relevant sustainability appraisal, effectively means the Council have to start again at Regulation 18.