

UPDATED: Response to DPD Consultation

Carl Thomson [REDACTED]

Sent: 31 July 2015 16:23

To: Planning Policy

Dear Sirs,

I am writing in my capacity as the councillor for Mount Hermon East in response to Woking Borough Council's consultation on the draft Site Allocations Development Plan Document. ***Please note that this correspondence supersedes my submission from earlier today and contains a number of minor amendments.***

I appreciate that the council will have received a substantial number of representations with regards to proposals for future development plans in the green belt, particularly from residents in Mayford, Pyrford and St Johns and Hook Heath. However, these areas do not lie within my ward and I believe it is up to elected members to raise concerns about specific proposals in their divisions. I would therefore like to restrict my remarks to the sites contained within the wards of Mount Hermon East and Mount Hermon West.

In each of the locations outlined below, the council makes a number of recommendations with regards to the level of affordable housing which could be delivered in each site. I am concerned that the council has been falling behind in terms of delivery of affordable homes in recent years and would agree with the affordable homes aspect of the DPD recommendation for each of the sites listed below, with the exception of the Oriental Road car park and the Royal Mail Sorting Office, which I do not believe should be included within the DPD.

Coals Yard/Aggregates Yard (UA41)

I agree in principle with the allocation of this area for high rise housing development. It is in a sustainable location and as a brownfield site it should be a priority for new housing or flatted developments provided it is possible to secure relocation of the aggregates yard.

Coroner's Court (UA47)

I agree with the inclusion of this site within the DPD given its sustainable location and that the suggested density would be in keeping with similar developments in the surrounding area.

Southern House, Jubilee House and Lynton House (UA42)

I agree in principle with the inclusion of this location within the DPD. It is in a sustainable location and surrounded by other high density developments. However, this part of Guildford Road suffers terribly from congestion and a lack of parking to support existing commercial activity. Any future planning application must ensure that there is adequate parking provision in place. Ideally, the council will work with the highways authority to secure a redesign and road widening if possible.

Any development at this site should also respect the existing character of the listed buildings from 1-10 Guildford Road. Where possible, similar visuals to the current frontage should be maintained.

St Dunstan's Church Site (UA44)

I agree with the principle that this site should be allocated to mixed use housing and retail. At present, it is an under-utilised site that could play a role in meeting some of the housing need in the borough. Where possible, efficient use of the surrounding development sites including Owen House (UA45) should be maximised in order to reduce the overall height of any development and ensure that it does not block light or overshadow the much smaller homes at the top end of White Rose Lane, while at the same time maximising the number of units that can be delivered.

It is important that the visual impact of any development at this site is minimised since, due to its elevated location, any new building will be more prominent than other high rise buildings on the south side of the railway line, and which would create a visual burden and eyesore. The Planning Committee has previously rejected applications for a 23 storey building and a 17 storey building on this location on the grounds of visual impact and loss of amenity and so the 7-11 storeys currently granted planning consent is likely to be far more acceptable than previous schemes to both residents and the Planning Committee.

I agree with the council's analysis which suggests that this site is not a gateway to the town centre. Any development here must reflect the fact that White Rose Lane is quieter and more suburban in character than other sites which have seen approval granted for large flatted developments.

Owen House (UA45)

I agree with the allocation of this site for mixed used residential and office space development. I agree with the proposed number of dwellings set out in the DPD document. Where possible, any developer should be encouraged to bring forward proposals to jointly develop this area alongside the St Dunstan's Church site, which would ensure a more efficient use of available space and increase the number of units that could be delivered while reducing the need for a much higher development to meet the required dph.

Somerset House (UA46)

At present Somerset House is a lower density building that acts as a transition between an area of high rise development to the south and closer to Guildford Road, and the quieter, more suburban character of Oriental Road. Should this site be included in the DPD and come up for redevelopment in the future then the current size and scale of the building should be retained as much as possible in order to keep the separation with Oriental Road.

I do not believe that any redevelopment of this site on its own would be desirable unless it take place as part of a much wider redevelopment incorporating other sites such as St Dunstan's Church and Owen House.

Oriental Road Car Park (UA40)

I strongly disagree with the inclusion of this site within the DPD. As mentioned above, the existing properties on Oriental Road are small and suburban in character and a flatted development of 200dph as proposed here would be totally out of keeping with its surroundings. As part of the debate around the Core Strategy in 2012, residents and ward councillors received reassurances from planning officers that the inclusion of Oriental Road within the boundaries of the town centre would not signify any intent to fundamentally alter the character of the area by bringing forward applications for major flatted developments. To include this site within the DPD as currently set out would go against a previous promise to residents that Oriental Road should retain its distinct and peaceful character with one or two family homes, rather than high density buildings.

Removing capacity at the Oriental Road car park and replacing it with further housing, particularly flatted developments without adequate parking would also exacerbate problems with traffic flows around Woking station.

Should the council wish to develop this site, it is important that safeguards are in place to ensure that three criteria are met. First, any development must respect the character of Oriental Road and be small, suburban and no more than two to three storeys in height. Secondly, there must be alternative parking provision for the station put in place before development commences. Third, any such development should only take place as part of a fundamental redesign of station approach and the road network at the entrance to Woking station to address existing problems with congestion and gridlock.

Royal Mail Sorting Office (UA39)

I strongly disagree with the inclusion of this site within the DPD and the suggested capacity for 88 dwellings for similar reasons as given above for the Oriental Road car park. Oriental Road is a quiet suburban street with low density housing and is not a suitable location for this kind of development. Building a crammed development of 88 units here would fundamentally change the character of Oriental Road close to the station. It would create an unacceptable precedent which would see the traditional character of Oriental Road being eroded. It is also impractical and unfeasible given the traffic, congestion and gridlock at the junction with the station.

Quadrant House (UA43)

I agree with the proposed allocation of this site for office use. The site could also be used for lower density, 3-4 storey housing. However, its location further down Guildford Road towards the park and amongst lower density flats and townhouses around York Road and Mount Hermon Road do not make this a suitable location for high rise flatted developments.

Conclusions

I do not believe it is an exaggeration to say that we have a housing crisis in Woking. The average house price in the borough is around £440,000. Taking the measure of mortgage affordability as three times annual salary, this means that even with a £40,000 deposit a couple would need a joint income of £130,000 to be able to purchase a family home in Woking, a staggering calculation when we consider the average national salary is around £26,000. Such a situation is plainly unsustainable in the longer term despite the fact that the South East in general and Woking in particular are prosperous parts of the country.

With house prices expected to increase by as much as 25% over the next five years, there is a very real risk that we will see home ownership becoming unreachable for the bulk of the population, with the result that social mobility is reduced, inequality is deepened and that professional people feel they can no longer build a future for themselves in the borough. At the same time, Mount Hermon has taken a disproportionately larger share of new housing developments over the past decade than other areas. While the Core Strategy states that the town centre will take the bulk of new developments, and my broadly positive response to the DPD reflects an awareness that we have a special responsibility within the borough to shoulder a greater burden than other areas, the infrastructure is starting to struggle with the scale of change, particularly in terms of rail capacity at peak times and access to GP and dental services, while areas around Guildford Road and Oriental Road struggle with traffic flow problems in the early mornings.

The current approach of the council has been to focus new development on high rise buildings in the town centre in order to retain the character of the green belt in other wards. However, while helping meet a numerical target, large flatted developments do not address the issue of affordability as they are often aimed at the higher end of the market, and have not given us the number of three and four bed family homes we require in the borough.

When coming to a final conclusion on the DPD allocations, the council must ensure that the burden of meeting housing demand is shared more equitably across the borough and that all communities are asked to deliver their fair share if we are to meet our immediate housing needs as well as our obligations for future generations.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Carl Thomson

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