

12th July 2016

Programme Officer for the West Somerset Local Plan to 2032  
West Somerset Council  
West Somerset House  
Killick Way  
Williton  
TA4 4QA

Dear Sir

**WSLP TO 2032 PROPOSED MODIFICATIONS - MATTER 6: OTHER SITES - WAT9**

I am writing to comment on the modifications to the Local Plan and recent introduction of early release sites to the Plan included in the modifications of February 2016. I am particularly interested in the inclusion of a site at Liddymore Farm, having a personal interest living very close to the site.

Firstly I would comment that there does not seem to have been a full and proper public consultation over the inclusion of these sites at such a late stage in the Local Plan process and it is very difficult to find anything about them on the councils web site. When the Local Plan information is viewed online it does not include the revisions proposed to the plan and the information about the proposed changes and the details of how the sites have been selected is quite difficult to find. I do not feel there has been sufficient consultation over late changes to the Plan that seem quite significant.

The sites that had been included in the plan originally have had several points of public consultation that have allowed full and detailed information about the them to be discussed and commented on over a period of many years, to introduce sites last minute with no consultation does not seem to meet the requirements of the Local Plan process? Or do you now intend to step back three or four years with the plan process?

Obviously I have a personal interest in the land identified as WAT9 as our property is directly adjacent to it, so we will be particularly affected if any development takes place. Not having had any form of notification about the intention to include the land in the Local Plan and no opportunity to comment on its inclusion does seem unreasonable.

I know everyone wants to avoid having development that affects them personally and if that were reason to stop it there would never be anything built. But sites that are proposed must meet the needs of the community and the goals of government housing strategy and while I do not like the site for personal reasons I also feel there are significant problems with it that will affect what can be achieved and feel there are better sites for achieving the goals of the plan. So perhaps I can comment on the nature of the land and why it does not fit with the policy requirements and why it is unlikely to meet any of the aims for it.

Firstly the site is set out as being an early release site, with the first housing projected as being available for occupation as early as 2017. The nature of the site is unlikely to allow for it to be developed so quickly principally as the site includes two Farm Houses. Unless the farm has already closed down, which I know it has not, the logistics of dealing with changes of this nature are extremely unlikely to be solved in a short period of time. The process of relocating is likely to take several years and then the process of selling the land to developers, doing the appropriate development surveys and gaining planning approval would mean it is extremely unlikely for any form of development to take place for a significant number of years.

The inclusion of any sites that have not already been in the Local Plan will inevitably have a much slower lead in period to any that are already allocated and been considered for a sensible time period. So possibly it could be looked at as a post 2032 site to give time for proper assessment of the implications of its inclusion and build up to its inclusion, if appropriate, after suitable study and, of course, public consultation.

There are also physical properties of the site that make it unsuitable, it has a stream running through it which is subject to flooding and a large part of the flat field adjoining the school road is flooded with the majority of the land sodden for a significant part of the winter. Large areas of the right of way along the stream are water logged most of the year and access is quite difficult all the time. This may not be a problem for its use in farming, although I am sure it does affect how it is used, but it does not make it an ideal site for housing.

I also believe there are protected species in and around the stream including slow worms, crested newts and bats. I say this as we believe we have slow worms in our garden and newts in our pond, which backs directly onto the fields. Bats use the area to feed and there are permanent roosts close by, we can stand by the hedges in the fields where bats feed on the insects around the stream and they fly within inches of your head, it is quite an amazing experience. There has been no study of this land to determine how important a site it is for wildlife, or if it is a suitable site for housing at all, so it must be inappropriate, at this stage at least, to include it in the Local Plan.

I have noticed from the "Matter 6: Other Sites" document in February 2016 that land to the east of Watchet (slightly further east than the Liddymore Farm site) was rejected as a possible site. However this site has gone through a planning and public consultation process which has included assessments of the land and has a developer on board ready to submit a planning application. It seems to me that this site is at least a few years more advanced in the process and so may easily, if accepted, be capable of providing early release housing on the basis hoped for that the Liddymore Farm site will not.

I would even say that it is a more appropriate and more sustainable site overall than the Liddymore Farm site as part of the proposals include revising access from the current housing in the former MOD quarters and improving road and pedestrian links to the

existing housing. On balance significantly improving those links for over 100 existing houses will outweigh the additional travel for the new houses, which will actually not be that much greater than any proposed from the end of the Liddymore Farm site. The improvement of the existing roads on the former MOD site will also be of benefit generally so that site has an added benefit to the whole community (I notice in the details of Matter 6 this is used as a reason not to include the site which I cannot understand).

Access to the Liddymore Farm site is also quite difficult, with the private road to Knights Templar First School meeting the private road to the housing of Ingrams Meadow. Any junction there from a hundred houses or more would make for a very unsafe access to the school, it does not seem that this has been properly considered.

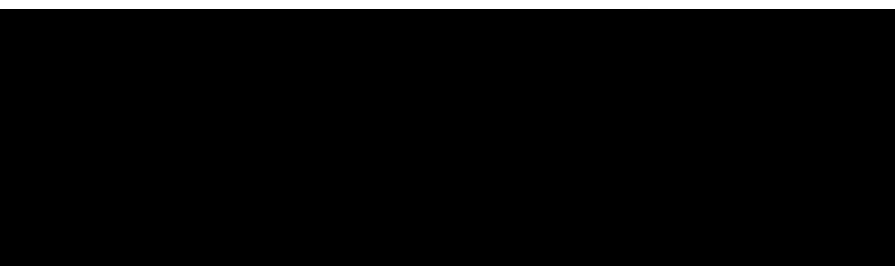
Another problem with the Liddymore Farm site would be the inclusion of affordable housing. The nature of gaining suitable access (if it is even possible), dealing with flooding + poor ground conditions and the relocation of the farm houses is all likely to put the cost of the site to a level that a suitable level of affordable housing could not be achieved. Again I would refer to the site further east on the former MOD land which proposes a significant amount of affordable housing. This again would achieve the aims of SC4 of the Local Plan much better than the Liddymore Farm site.

To overcome the issues with the Liddymore Farm site there would need to be a significantly greater allocation of land, probably three or four times that proposed to cover the cost of ground remedial works, problems with access and roads, protected species mitigation, new infrastructure + drainage and the re-location of part of the farm. Of course that would involve a significant decision in principal to work towards linking the eastern boundaries of Watchet and Williton, I am not sure that is appropriate at any point in time and certainly not at this time.

The land at Liddymore Farm is also open countryside and any inclusion of this land would isolate small pieces of land at the top of the hill between Watchet and Williton and make them unsustainable for farming, where as the former MOD land is partly brown field having had buildings on it in the past.

I would therefore ask the council and inspector to consider removing this site from the current Local Plan to 2032 to allow for more detailed assessments of the land to be made and the issues its inclusion for housing would raise to major decisions in principal about housing around Watchet and Williton. I would suggest that if the sites that have been in the Local Plan for many years or have been included in the recent past through full consultation are not expected to meet the needs of the plan a step back should be taken and the process reassessed with early consultation to make sure what is proposed can actually be delivered.

Yours sincerely

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area of the letter.

Christopher Mitchell