

## **MAGWATCH LOCAL PLAN MEETING WITH BCP OFFICERS**

**17<sup>th</sup> July, 2023 5.30 – 7.30 p.m.**

*Canford Magna Centre*

*Present for BCP: Steve Dring (Interim Planning Policy Manager),*

*Present for Magwatch: Frank Ahern (SLNoM), Inge Axt-Simmonds (Merley Park Rd Group),*

*Marion Brown (MPRG), Peter Chesterfield (BAG), Gail Lankstead(BAG),*

*Jeremy Orme, Dominic Stubbing (SLNoM)*

### **MEETING NOTES**

This meeting was a follow-up meeting to that of 13<sup>th</sup> March, since which time a new administration of BCP has taken control, and work has progressed on the Local Plan.

#### **1. BCP Local Plan Update**

The new BCP administration wants the Local Plan looked at afresh. This may mean a delay in publishing the draft Local Plan. A new timetable will be published shortly.

##### *1.1 Individual Ward Policies*

A significant innovation will be the production of individual policies for each BCP ward.

##### *1.2 Housing target*

BCP continues to work on the basis of a target of around 1600 homes per year rather than the government figure of 2800 which, while derived from standard methodology, is flawed. The figure of 2800 is based on ONS figures from 2014, which have since been revised downwards by ONS. The government, however, in its quest to meet its manifesto pledge of 300,000 new builds per year, had wanted local authorities to maintain the 2014 figures. Further complications in the original government target figures arise from the false assumption that all BCP university students will remain in the area after graduation and also from the inclusion of invalid immigration figures when drawing up the target.

BCP's average figure for new homes over the last 15 years is 1250 p.a., so achieving a target even of 1600 houses p.a. will require a significant uplift.

##### *1.3 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)*

Certain aspects of the emerging Local Plan are predicated on a revised version of the NPPF, which would enable BCP to protect the Green Belt and not be forced to release Green Belt through the local plan to meet housing need. Green Belt boundary. Due to be released in the spring, it is yet to see the light of day.

##### *1.4 The Politics of Housing*

The climate in which the Local Plan is evolving is an uncertain one. House building will be a key issue in the next general election. Labour is pledged to restoring government-ordained housing targets, while the Tories are beset by factional differences of opinion (essentially 'blue wallers' who want housing targets scrapped to protect the Green Belt versus 'red

wallers' who want an ambitious building programme) – a probable reason why the NPPF revisions have been put on hold for the time being.

### *1.5 Longevity of Local Plan*

The intended time-frame for the Local Plans is 15 years, with a review every five years. However, changes in local and government administrations and in planning law inevitably result in local plans having to be reviewed and updated much more regularly.

### *1.6 Examination*

All responses to the draft Local Plan will be sent to the Inspector. The subsequent Examination will be open to the public, but participation will be upon the invitation of the Inspector. The response form for the consultation includes a tick-box in which respondents can indicate their wish to speak at the Examination. The advice is that a group representative is more likely to be called to speak than an individual. Closer to the time, it will be worth considering how best Magwatch can co-ordinate an appropriate response to the draft local plan.

### *1.7 Developers*

In response to being asked whether he had been in many discussions with developers Steve Dring said that, since the end of the public consultation in March 2022, he had adopted a 'not talking now' approach. He illustrated this approach with reference to the possible development of the site of the former Oaks Garden Centre. The purchasers of the land wanted to discuss it as a promoted site (which, as the Local Plan stands at the moment, will not be allocated) and were told that it would not be discussed as part of the Local Plan at this stage due to the desire of the administration not to release Green Belt in the Local Plan. Instead it would need to go through the usual channels of a planning application, where the developer would have the very difficult task of providing 'very special circumstances' to develop in the Green Belt.

Developers will be very vocal and very active in their responses to the draft Local Plan.

Asked whether developers had more sway with Planning Inspectors than other groups, Steve Dring suggested that, yes, since the crash of 2008 the government has leant on inspectors to facilitate greater numbers of house builds. However, changes to the NPPF (should it ever be published in its original draft form) will lessen that developer influence on inspectors.

## **2. Specific Local Issues**

### *2.1 Bearwood and Merley Ward Housing Targets*

The housing target for Bearwood and Poole is 1400 new homes within the 15 year term of the Local Plan. Because UE1 and UE2 have not been built yet, they will be rolled into the new plan. Whilst we must be aware of the caveats stated above (changing political climate, as yet unchanged NPPF, shelf life of the new plan), this is very good news: the implication is that no Green Belt land will be released for development.

### *2.2 Cruxton Farm Buildings*

These were allocated under the Poole Local Plan but Richborough did not include them in their outline planning application. It is likely that they will be allocated again, for use as work spaces of some kind or perhaps for recreational use, or both. Either before the draft Local

Plan is published or afterwards, in response to the consultation, we should be suggesting a use that benefits local people.

### *2.3 Lack of Facilities in UE1*

Although the Reserved Matters application for UE1 (APP/23/00541/R) is not part of the Local Plans remit, an interesting submission from Public Health Dorset was posted on the planning portal last week questioning the lack of community facilities in the plans. (These comments would have been more pertinent had they been made when the Poole Local Plan was being drawn up!) PHD's comments nevertheless stress the importance of ensuring that the allocation of the Cruxton Farm buildings is put to good use.

On a related point, a 60-bed care home was part of the allocation requirement of UE1 when the Poole Local Plan was adopted in 2018. Since the Covid epidemic, there has been a dramatic decline in care home usage, with predictions that future usage will continue to fall. It might be worth exploring with Cala Homes the possibility of the space allocated for the UE1 care home being used differently, perhaps including a shop and other community facilities.

### *2.4 Transport*

There is a strong feeling amongst local people that previous consultations on transport have not taken account of local opinion. There has been no significant improvement either of trunk roads or of local road networks. Where new developments are approved, transport infrastructure solutions appear to be minimal. Unaddressed areas of concern remain: Canford village, Magna Road, the Willett Arms junction and the Merley Park Road junction with Oakley Hill are all deemed by locals to be problematic.

The Bearwood and Merley ward, with its relatively isolated location in north Poole, will almost certainly fail to make the desired 'modal shift', upon which so much of the Poole Local Plan of 2018 was based and upon which the new BCP Local Plan will be based: local roads, carrying traffic beyond their official capacity, are congested; cycle paths and routes are incomplete and dangerous at points of discontinuity; the bus services (even assuming their adequate existence) will never be speedy or efficient enough to be attractive to people working in Poole, Bournemouth and beyond.

The problem, according to Steve Dring, is twofold. Firstly government policy is to reduce car usage and therefore discourage road building. Secondly, local limits (of geography and of the built environment) constrain the possibilities of improvement.

He explained that BCP's Local Transport Plan 4 (LT4) is currently underway and there will be a public consultation in the autumn, which he encouraged people to take part in.

Magwatch will attempt to co-ordinate suggestions for local transport solutions, for submission both to LT4 and to Steve Dring for consideration of the Bearwood and Merley Local Plan.

On a positive note, two recent improvements have been made to Canford village. A double yellow line had been added from the Canford School entrance corner to the chicane, making negotiation of this virtually blind bend safer. And a permissive footpath, running on Canford School land parallel with the unpaved bit of village road, has been opened, resulting in the possibility of much safer pedestrian access to Magna Road.

### *2.5 Local Consultations*

With the new administration's change of emphasis towards individual ward policies in the LP, local consultation becomes more important. Steve Dring and his team have conducted a number this year, with more in the pipeline. Where wards have neighbourhood forums, these are a good medium of consultation, but meetings with groups such as Magwatch have been effective and Magwatch members who have attended the two consultations with Steve Dring have found them helpful and productive. Ward councillors will of course be a main avenue of consultation. Our councillors met with Steve Dring last week for a preliminary discussion.

In April Magwatch attempted to gauge local opinion on the desirability of creating a Neighbourhood Plan (via, initially, a neighbourhood forum), with the various advantages it would bring to future planning issues. To test the water, opinion was sought from a small but important area, Canford vilage (including Floral Farm), with all houses being leafleted or emailed. However, the response was extremely disappointing, suggesting minimal interest. It is possible, of course, that other parts of the ward might be more interested in mobilising an appetite for a Neighbourhood Plan.