

14 January, 2020

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Rt Hon. John Howell MP
National Champion for Neighbourhood Planning

Dear Mr Howell,

The Wheatley Neighbourhood Plan Committee request your support as Champion of Neighbourhood Planning. Now in our fifth year, we submitted our Final Draft Neighbourhood Plan (WNP 01) to SODC in September 2019. The District in turn processed it through their Public Consultation and it has been with the Examiner since 19 November.

Between the WNP submission (September) and the current Examination (November), the Housing and Communities Minister, Mr Robert Jenrick, directed SODC to take no further action towards adopting the SODC Local Plan until further notice. A consequence of that directive, perhaps unintended, has been that it has prejudiced and perhaps paralysed the justification and legitimacy of some of the proposals in WNP01 at the time when strong affirmation and support is needed.

For instance, at the Public Hearing for the Appeal lodged by Oxford Brookes University (OBU), in November, the barrister for the appellant, when discussing STRAT 14 (the OBU site in the WNP designated Area), referred to LP 2034 as no longer relevant, thereby making some of the WNP01 proposals based on WNP's four years of work appear of no significance. The WNP Committee outlined its position in Third Party Presentations on the first day of the Hearing: we opposed OBU's proposal of a development of 500 houses. This quantum of development was disclosed by OBU only on 11 August 2016 after nearly ten weeks of SODC publicity, including statutory Public Consultation for LP 2034, had elapsed. In 2018, we also supported SODC's unanimous refusal to grant outline planning permission for this proposal.

We attach Mr Jenrick's Letter, 07 January, to the Leader of SODC. As you know it has had considerable media coverage since 07 January.

The Wheatley Neighbourhood Plan Committee is entering its fifth year. Since 2016 it has built up an excellent working rapport with the SODC Planning Advisers, not to mention our own community. Consistently since 31 May 2016, the Committee has supported the SODC recommendation of "at least 300 homes" on STRAT 14, while equally consistently questioning the ambiguous use of "*at least*". The WNP support has been conditional, in that a Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) cannot argue to reduce the minimum figure for a Strategic Site development advocated by the District. However, the WNP Committee has employed local knowledge to question the wisdom of developing a site separated from Wheatley by the A40 dual carriageway, lacking connectivity with Wheatley, and lacking even shopping facilities. As shown at the Public Hearing for the OBU Appeal, it will also damage Holton Park (OBU campus), a key Civil War site from where Fairfax, Cromwell and Ireton led the siege and fall of Oxford and King Charles.

The WNP Committee has developed an "Enhancement" proposal for parts of Wheatley, locating affordable housing appropriately on suitable sites and relocating commercial sites to support its realisation. We developed this proposal alongside SODC advice and through 28 hours of workshops

2016-17, involving both Holton and Wheatley Parishes. In two Draft WNP's during 2017 and 2019 we negotiated the proposal outline formally with landowners, the community and Statutory Bodies. In November 2017, the SODC Planning Committee councillors described the "Enhancement" as "refreshingly positive" and "non-Nimby".

It is clear that the Examination of WNP01 is being affected due to the fact that LP2034 remains "frozen" although there is no disagreement between SODC's LP 2034 and the WNP01. More importantly however is the potential impact of the OBU Appeal against SODC's refusal of Outline Planning Permission for 500 homes. If this Appeal is upheld it will undermine the aspirations and proposals of WNP01.

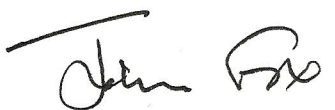
We believe Mr Jenrick's letter acknowledges he is aware of situations like ours.

"Decisions on Intervention will also be informed by the wider planning context in each area (specifically the extent to which authorities are working cooperatively to put strategic plans in place, and the potential impact that not having a plan has on neighbourhood planning activity." (Letter to SODC Council Leader, 07 January 2020, p. 2, Para 1).

At present the progress of WNP01 faces two issues; (a) the uncertainty surrounding LP2034 because it underpins the "Enhancement" in that Green Belt can be released and (b) the really crucial issue of the OBU Appeal which, if upheld, effectively represents a proposal for housing that is not only contrary to the intentions of LP2034 and but also competitive with the "Enhancement". This letter urges you to make representation to Mr Jenrick to go forward with LP2034 and recommend that any development at OBU is limited to a quantum of 300 houses which is a proposal that has community support and also enables WNP01 to be realised.

We would both welcome an opportunity to discuss with you personally the Minister's decisions on the OBU Appeal, LP2034 and WNP01, all three are inextricably linked. We are asking you to consider representing our (and our community's) case to him. Without urgent, focussed action, the aspirations espoused in WNP01 could be superseded by a development which has little regard either for SODC recommendations or for community opinion and beliefs.

Yours sincerely,



John Fox
Chairman



Roy Gordon
Vice-Chairman

Wheatley Neighbourhood Plan Committee
January 2016 – to date.

Cc: Clerk, Wheatley Parish Council
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