

Sandra Hutchings

Ack 28.5.13

From: David Stone
Sent: 24 May 2013 16:42
To: DPD
Subject: TIVERTON EASTERN EXTENSION - COMMENTS

78/2283

Masterplanning Consultation
Forward Planning
Mid Devon District Council
Phoenix House
Tiverton EX16 6PP



Sir,

TIVERTON EASTERN URBAN EXTENSION – COMMENTS ON THE MASTER PLAN

I have read the relevant documents at Phoenix House and have attended the local public consultation displays staged in Tiverton and Halberton. I have also taken the opportunity to discuss this matter with MDDC officials and the various development specialists who were present at the latter events. Accordingly, I now wish to record and register my comments upon the MDDC intention to urbanize the large area of agricultural land between Post Hill, the A361, the Grand Western Canal and the eastern boundary of Tiverton.

To assist your consolidation and consideration of my observations I have followed the succession of boxes shown at the Tiverton Eastern Urban Extension questionnaire/comments sheet provided at the local public consultation display. However, notwithstanding my detailed response set out below, please note at the outset that, as a Halberton resident, my particular concerns relate to the current apparent lack of any plan to deal with the potentially devastating impact of this development upon the roads through Halberton and Sampford Peverell and that to and from Willand via Halberton; but also with an inevitable and dramatic increase in traffic flow at the already busy M5 Junction 27 roundabout and slip roads and at the Bolham Road/Hartnoll roundabout. Indeed, I was surprised by the MDDC officials' ready admission that this was in fact so, while giving due credit to those officials for so openly conceding that no viable solution to deal with these particular aspects of MDDC intentions currently exists.

GENERAL COMMENT

Before moving on to deal with my structured response, I wish to register my overriding concern that this intended urban development is ill-judged, unnecessary, and will inevitably do great harm to Tiverton, the area to the east of the town and the villages of Halberton and Sampford Peverell both in the short to medium term and for future generations. This harm will manifest itself in the physical destruction of the existing rural environment throughout and beyond the intended development area, and in its impact upon the life of the existing settled community throughout that area and further afield.

I attended the various public consultation events and information displays perfectly prepared to be convinced of a need for an urban development such as this, but was wholly unconvinced by the statistical and theoretical arguments, lack of real evidence for pursuing the development, and the supposed environmental safeguards advanced by the MDDC officials and development experts in response to my questions and those of other members of the public. In summary, I am now firmly convinced that this development is both conceptually inappropriate and unjustified in terms of any realistic perception of actual need. I am genuinely baffled that it has not only survived but has also been permitted to move on to its present stage over the last few years.

Nevertheless, it is clear that MDDC now intends to proceed with this large-scale urbanization of the agricultural land east of Tiverton irrespective of any more general comment upon the overall need for it in the first place, or on its potentially significant adverse consequences for Tiverton and the population, environment and heritage of the area directly affected by the MDDC intentions. Consequently, my comments that follow are necessarily constrained by an albeit unsatisfactory assumption that this development will go ahead irrespective of any such comments by me or by others, and therefore I would simply urge that any remedial and mitigating action to reduce its overall scale to an absolute minimum should be implemented from the outset.

MASTER PLAN QUESTIONNAIRE-BASED RESPONSE

BOX 1 – Balance between employment and housing development

The greatest negative impact upon the affected area will inevitably be caused by the massive population increase envisaged in the MDDC plan, therefore (if the plan's argument about increasing employment opportunities for Tiverton is to be justified) the amount of employment land should be significantly increased, with that allocated for housing very substantially reduced. Self-evidently, an appropriately non-polluting and sympathetically developed single-storey light industry unit or units would have significantly less visual and environmentally negative impact upon the area than the construction and occupation of up to a further 2,000 households. Given suitable direct access from the A361, employment development would also have a less adverse effect on the road system to the east of Post Hill than would new residential housing.

BOX 2 – Vision

As already indicated, I believe that the MDDC vision set out in the Options Report and its earlier Eastern Urban Extension proposals is fundamentally flawed and high risk in terms of future need, location, social justification and overall concept, both in respect of its initial implementation and its short, medium and long-term impact. The vision appears to reflect elements of a politically-driven development quota requirement that today well pre-dates the housing development policies put in place by today's central government.

BOX 3 – Environmental aspects

The environmental integrity, nature, heritage and associated facilities of the Grand Western Canal should be safeguarded as a matter of the highest priority. The Grand Western Canal is one of Tiverton's greatest heritage and tourism assets.

The wildlife, especially hedgerows, trees and the birds, flora and fauna throughout the affected area should also be safeguarded, encouraged and enhanced as far as possible. The suggested creation of alternative habitats provides a poor offset or compensation for the destruction of wildlife (which is already widely in decline due to urbanization) within a rural area that has existed for centuries but would now be irrevocably destroyed.

BOX 4 – Energy needs

I accept the inevitable need for an energy centre and heating scheme generated by an installation sited within such an extensive urban development area. However, this energy generation should in no circumstances be achieved by any form of incineration. Any such installation should probably be sited to the north of the development, close to an A361 road access.

BOX 5 – Traffic issues

I have noted the proposed changes to the Blundell's Road area, with the by-pass roads to reduce traffic through Blundell's School. While possibly mitigating the traffic problem for Blundell's School area and acknowledging the intention to create the A361 Purple Junction road access point, this solution still retains an east-west traffic flow to and from Halberton, Sampford Peverell and Willand on those minor roads. It therefore does nothing to mitigate the traffic problems that the development would create to its east. The creation of a form of 'Blundell's School urban by-pass' could also actually exacerbate the traffic problem to the east, if the new road becomes part of a favoured route or 'rat-run' both for existing and for new Tiverton commuters to and from Willand and Cullompton via Halberton.

While the proposed new A361 Purple Junction road access point might possibly reduce the number of Taunton-bound and Barnstaple-bound vehicle journeys on other routes, it will undoubtedly increase significantly the traffic flow on to and through the M5 Junction 27 roundabout and the A361 Bolham road/Hartnoll roundabout.

The potentially very significant traffic problems and traffic-related environmental and road-user public safety issues that the Eastern Urban Development would undoubtedly create to its east is effectively the 'elephant in the room' for this whole development. Accordingly, the current declared inability of the MDDC officials or development planners to resolve it, or to suggest anything other than 'traffic calming measures' to deal with it, is at present an irrefutable reason for this intended development not to proceed at all.

At the very least, therefore, there should now be an absolute commitment by MDDC and the developers to:

- a. Complete the A361 Purple Junction road access point and to develop and install roadway enhancements and traffic controls at the M25 Junction 27 roundabout and Bolham Road/Hartnoll roundabout before any other development work proceeds.
- b. Replace completely the existing traffic calming measures in Halberton by two-way traffic lights at the west end of Halberton village and by three-way traffic lights at the east end of Halberton village (to take full account of the visibility problem at and traffic access from Orpington Court). A permanent road safety camera should also be installed on Halberton High Street legally to enforce the existing 20 miles per hour speed restriction by the automatic fining of offenders.

BOX 6 – The residential element

The overall scale and scope of the residential element should be minimized, with single-storey housing constructed as far as possible. Plots should maximize areas of lawn, with legally enforceable requirements included in the house deeds to prevent or restrict any subsequent changes by the occupier/owner from grass to gravel, concrete, tarmac or paving.

Vehicle parking and car ports – but ideally full garaging – should be provided for not less than two – but ideally three – vehicles per plot. Restrictions on the street parking of cars and parking of camper-vans, boats and caravans should also be regulated and restricted by law (and reflected in the house deeds).

The amount of so-called affordable housing in the development should be minimized. I would also suggest that the intended provision of a number of traveller pitches within this development is entirely unjustified and would detract significantly from the MDDC vision for a development of this type and in this location.

BOX 7 – The employment element

The employment types should be non-polluting, visually and environmentally-friendly and housed within single-storey buildings designed to match the surrounding rural environment. Light industry, communications, offices, light storage, technological companies etc. could probably be appropriate. Transportation companies of any sort would probably be inappropriate.

Sufficient vehicle parking should be provided, together with large areas laid to lawn, water features and ready access to public transport.

A condition of use for employers should be the provision (in addition to any existing public transport) of a regular shuttle-bus to and from Tiverton Parkway station, funded by the area employer(s) for their staff. Any buildings should include solar panels fitted to the roofing from the outset.

BOX 8 – Green areas and recreational space

The scope and specific nature of green areas and recreational space would necessarily be driven by the actual size of any new population within the development. However, as a matter of principle, the creation of green areas with numerous groups of trees and associated water features (lakes, streams or ponds) should be maximized.

A suitably landscaped area and a lake (ideally one fed by an existing stream), should provide a central focal point for any main residential area. Any formal playing field(s) should probably be linked to the proposed primary school rather than a separate or stand-alone facility, although public access to and use of such playing fields should be made available out of school hours. Hard

tennis courts should be provided, with their construction and markings enabling other games (5-a-side football, basketball, netball etc.) capable of being played on the same surface as required. A multi-purpose facility of this sort could foster the development of community sporting groups and clubs within a development area.

BOX 9 – Other facilities

Shopping facilities should be limited to a small supermarket with an internal post office (similar in type and scale to that of the Spar at Sampford Peverell), in order not to penalize in-town Tiverton traders and negate the MDDC aspiration to boost the retail economy in Tiverton town.

Any requirement for other facilities would depend yet again on the final scale of a development. No doubt some sort of childcare facility would be welcome, but the creation of new youth centres and any similar community facilities could risk running directly contrary to any intention to make the Eastern Urban Extension a proper part of Tiverton. Such facilities could undermine the validity and future viability of existing leisure facilities and organizations within the town.

BOX 10 – Emerging development options

While I am now convinced that the plan is fatally flawed and unjustified by any supposed future requirement for an Eastern Urban Extension, in a hypothetical situation in which the plan were eventually to be implemented I would probably favour Option 1. However, unless the potential traffic issues to the east of the intended Eastern Urban Extension have been resolved I believe that neither option is acceptable, viable in practical terms, or in the interests of the settled community and wider public in the area now or in the future.

BOX 11 – Scope and content

For the various reasons already stated, I am bound to state that I cannot now agree with the proposed scope and content of the development set out in the master plan document.

BOX 11 – Final comments

Having reviewed carefully aspects of the MDDC intentions for the Eastern Urban Extension at various times over the last few years, and now in its most recent form in the current master plan, I must now register my opposition to the development as a whole.

I am now unconvinced that any legitimate requirement exists for this development – but especially the huge residential element as currently envisaged – and that this plan should therefore probably have been abandoned once the planning policies and house-building quotas of the previous government were set aside and replaced by those of the current central government. Furthermore, even if all other aspects of the plan were acceptable, I believe that the current lack of any viable plan to resolve the impending traffic flow and traffic management issues highlighted at Box 5 means that the development plan is currently non-viable. This particular aspect of the development plan and intentions is, in my view, a major 'crisis in waiting' and unless or until it is resolved effectively it should be acknowledged as a potentially absolute 'show-stopper'.

ITEM 12 – Personal details (as required by the questionnaire)

- Member of the public.
- Halberton resident.
- David Stone.
- 7 Orpington Court, Halberton, Tiverton, Devon EX16 7DD.

Thank you for providing an opportunity for me to consider and comment on this matter. I do hope that at least some of the foregoing observations may prove useful during the coming weeks and months.

Yours sincerely,