

South Warwickshire Local Plan Questions and Answers June 10th 2021

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Housing numbers.

Question: Important that Plan gets household projections right or it will propose too much development. 2021 Census will give up to date info in 2022. The Coventry City population projections are known to be excessive and wrongly-based. They caused WDC's current Plan to be forced to allocate Green Belt land S of Cov, unjustifiably. Will WDC now withdraw from 2015 'Memorandum of Understanding', delete provision for Coventry households that don't exist, and return to policy of 2014 Draft Plan for South of Coventry fringe in Warwick District? Past mistakes need correction. Mark Sullivan CPRE Warwickshire.

Answer:

Clearly the issue of housing numbers and household growth is going to be fundamental in preparing the Local Plan. As many of you know CPRE Warwickshire wrote to the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) with concerns that the UK mid-year population estimates and the population projections for Coventry had been very inflated by the Office for National statistics (ONS) without adequate justification or good reason.

In May 2021 OSR wrote to say that the population estimates for some cities such as Coventry did seem to be inconsistent with local evidence. It instructed ONS to investigate the causes and scale of this issue associated with students and outward migration and then communicate its findings publicly by July 2021.

When WDC prepared the last local plan we were developing housing projections in a different way to the way we are asked to do now. Now Government requires that every local authority preparing a local plan to have a consistent approach to calculating housing numbers; a "Standard Methodology". In the current Local Plan (prepared before we had the Standard Methodology), the housing requirement for Warwick District is c930 homes each year, of which 600 are to meet WDC's own needs and 330 to meet unmet housing needs in Coventry. In the Standard Methodology, the annual figure for the number of homes to meet needs within Warwick District is 627 homes, similar (but slightly above) that in the current Local Plan.

What we don't know until after the ONS investigation is the impact this will have on population projections for Coventry moving forward. What is known is that in preparing the SWLP District Councils will be required to cooperate with surrounding councils, and to reach agreement with them about how to meet unmet need in other council areas. Stratford District will continue to be expected to meet unmet need from Birmingham, and Warwick to meet unmet need from Coventry. Any unmet need may, however, be distributing it over wider South Warwickshire plan area.

The Queen's Speech announced the Government's intention to bring forward legislation on major planning reforms affecting local plans. This may impact on the Local Plan we are now preparing. We are committed to have regard to any legislation that comes forward as we prepare the Local Plan.

Planning for growth is not just about housing need, an important factor is also employment needs.

Question: Is not calling for sites at this stage putting the cart very much in front of the horse?

Answer: It is helpful for the Council to have an idea of what sites are out there, and what different uses landowners are promoting their sites for. Asking for sites does not mean we will allocate them, but gives us an idea of what is potentially available. Land parcels offered might adjoin each other, which could give us positive opportunities. It helps us when looking at spatial options.

Question: Why the emphasis on fresh land (green belt and farmland)? Why not give priority to redevelopment of existing land?

Answer: The emphasis is not on green field sites. The reality is there are not sufficient brown field sites.

The Council does maintain a register of brownfield land, so we can consider any opportunities to bring brownfield sites forward for development. The call for sites includes the opportunity to identify brownfield sites.

Philip Clarke said "Both Councils are concerned about climate change and have declared a climate emergency. I can assure you that having a plan that tries to respond to development pressures and climate change is the key priority. All major decisions will be taken through the prism of climate change."

Question: What are the "needs of the area"? What evidence of need is used? Population growth has been PROVED to be wrong - should the Councils not go back to square 1?

Answer: The Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment (HEDNA) looks at a wealth of evidence, including population, household and economic growth projections. We engage with other local authorities to understand that evidence. We are in the process of commencing that assessment. The standard method is the starting point for housing needs, and we then have a duty to cooperate with neighbouring authorities which leads to further discussions.

Question: With technology, working & shopping habits, transport & mobility changing rapidly year by year, do we have enough information to assess what our needs will be if the local plan is longer than 15 years?

Answer: Having a plan for longer than 15 years is helpful because it provides a longer timescale within which to consider planning essential infrastructure. We do recognise that in planning for a longer period there is a greater element of uncertainty. Even if the plan covers a longer period there is still a requirement for it to be reviewed every 5 years, so if there are changes to people's habits which have a notable impact on the plan there is a chance to adapt it.

Question: Census 2021 – when will the data be available?

Answer: This is a good question. We understand that returns from this area are particularly high. It normally takes 12 to 18 months before useable data is available, which would be Autumn 2022 at the very earliest.

Question: I don't see how you can identify sites without first establishing the criteria for such identification. Does not identification without criteria establish expectations of development which then shape the standards?

Answer: We are using the consultation to help us consider the approach we should take to developing our strategy for the Local Plan and for making land allocations. Just because a site is put forward it doesn't mean it will be allocated. When preparing the current plan we received more sites asking to be considered than we used. It is common practice for local authorities to undertake "call for sites" exercises early in plan preparation, and important so we understand what land is potentially available for development.

Question: The conversion of office and retail premises to residential accommodation is being encouraged. How will that be taken into account in reducing the demand for green field land.

Answer: That's a good question. This is particularly a question in relation to town centres. We don't expect the new local plan to contain as much detail as the present one, for example on detailed town centre policies. We will have to look separately at that level of detail in the future. At the moment, we do not know what impact these changes will have on our town centres, or on the potential supply of additional housing, but we will monitor this. Although such conversions do have the potential to provide additional housing we have to be very careful that in doing so this does not do irreparable damage to our town centres.

Sidney Syson
edited by Philip Clarke and Andrew Cornfoot
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