

Minutes of Romsey Forum

17 June 2009 held at Romsey Town Hall

Present: David Barker, Dorothy Baverstock, Jane & Roger Brambley, Rod Brayshaw, Mark Cooper, Doug Cramond, Aelred & Sue Derbyshire, Brian Drake, Olwyn Greenwood, Robert Grime, Vic Hemmings, Eunice Hutchison, Julian Jones, Richard Jordan-Baker, Cllr Sally Leach Chris Maidens, John Mason, Phoebe Merrick, Barbara Milburn, Helen Murray, Simon Neate, Brian Palmer, Tessa Parker, John Powell, Roger Prescott, Ian Richards, Gill Roberts, Shirley Rogers, Phil Sands, Ian Tripp, Geoff Uglow, Simon Windsor,

Speaker: Steve Lees TVBC

In the Chair: John Parker **Minutes:** Sandra Smith

Item 1: Apologies:- Sandra Gidley MP, The Mayor of Test Valley, Cllr Ian Hibberd, Ian Bullivant, John Burgess, Jill Gethin, Michael Hedderley, Marion Kerley, Henry Maddick, Carolyn Nixon, Caroline Nokes, Hal Sanchez, Rod Simpson.

Item 2: Minutes of the Romsey Forum 11 March 2009

These had been circulated electronically and in hard copy at the meeting.

It was proposed by B Palmer seconded by S Leach that the minutes be approved. Carried

Item 3: Matters Arising.

Item 4: John Parker introduced the new Romsey Forum Officers: Chairman John Parker, Vice Chair Ian Richards, Joint Secretaries Carolyn Nixon and Sandra Smith.

Item 5: Viv Messenger is organising an audit of the state of the pavements.

D Barker expressed surprise that speed reduction signs cost £3,000 each.

M Cooper informed that this is the cost of the electronic signs.

AOB: Stream clean – three quarters of a ton of rubbish was collected. Thanks to those who came.

Item 4: Steve Lees on the Test Valley Core Strategy.

SL had provided a short paper on the current position after the strategy had been found “unsound” by the inspector.

Where are we now?

The council submitted its core strategy in March 2009 setting out where development required by the SE Plan could be located. (Not including 1,100 homes in Andover in the SE Plan proposed changes.)

The Inspector held an initial meeting with the Council 1 May 2009 to discuss issues or concerns before the full Examination.

The Inspector raised concerns about the form and content focussed on processes used rather than outcomes identified. Concerns included

- Format, including length.
- Too much like old style local plan
- Lack of detail on how strategy would be delivered
- Deferring decisions to other documents and too many other policies
- More certainty needed on windfall housing sites
- The vision is not specific to the area
- Lack of detail on where the change would take place

The Inspector concluded the Strategy was unsound. Having heard the Council’s response her initial concerns remained.

What happens next?

The Council has 3 options

- 1) Continue with the Examination and put a case to the Inspector that the document is sound.
- 2) Defer the process and undertake further technical work.
- 3) Ask the Secretary of State to require the Council to withdraw the Strategy.

In event of deferral or withdrawal the Council will need to:

- Review technical work done so far.
- Review the proposed allocations.
- Carry out any necessary new work.
- Amend the document as necessary.

If there are major changes further public consultation will be carried out. The anticipated cost will be minimal as research is relatively recent and unlikely to be affected by any potential delay.

The Council has met with GOSE and is considering all options and the best way to proceed. A report outlining any proposed approach will go to cabinet next month.

The Current Local Plan will continue to provide the policy framework until it is replaced.

What is the new Planning System all about

The new system, the Local Development framework (LDF) replaces the Borough Local Plan with documents that include the core strategy and a number of area based documents.

Public consultation remains broadly the same. One key change is that the Examination is more informal with the Inspector leading round table discussions on identified issues. A second key change is that Inspectors report is binding. The legislation came into force 5 years ago. Teething problems were expected.

Current position.

We still have a local plan but do not have a 5 year land supply. This leaves TV vulnerable to planning appeals. The consultation process will be broadly the same as before but the inspector's decision will be final. TV has to deliver on the government's agenda for the number of houses. The new guidance wants local authorities to ensure services and infrastructure are there but it is difficult to commit to a long timescale when the other agencies involved do not.

The discussion which followed SL's presentation was complex and detailed. The following points emerged. The inspector wanted more certainty on brownfield sites. The assessment had been done in accordance with Government template. Planners will look at all the evidence again.

The density of new developments will be high. Existing Whitenap and Woodley areas are 9 to the acre. New developments will be higher. MH queried whether Abbotswood would be higher density. SL said outline planning is for 800 houses over 60 acres. MC: Abbotswood site got go ahead in February but as yet no planning applications have been received. SL: Different house builders will put in their own plans shortly. The council will consider each on its own merits. Road usage has been modelled. Highways people will be consulted to see how robust this is.

DB: Diggers have been brought on site at Abbotswood. Developers have found groundwater higher than anticipated.

BP query on brewery site, this is in the middle of town. SL this had been included in the figures but only gives about 80 houses. The landowner is not bringing the land forward. Compulsory purchase may be considered but is costly

MC: SE plan says market towns will not grow over 20,000. SL queried this interpretation.

In reply to a question on Councillors and planning SL commented that a Councillor's job is to raise difficult questions and challenges but he could not think of another council giving such support for planning and strategic thinking.

The chairman thanked Steve Lees then opened up debate on future development in and around Romsey.

Item 5: Romsey in 20 Years Time - Aspirations and Fears

Councillor Perry gave a brief history of planning in South Hampshire to show how the requirement for 3900 houses in the 7 parishes had been arrived at. With no development in The New Forest efforts were needed to maintain the gaps, north, south and east.

Among further contributions made were the following: PM considered Test Valley had given an honest assessment and felt the inspector had not been fair. While regretting the need for additional houses she pointed out that our children and grandchildren needed somewhere to live and if SEEDA are imposing housing totals on us we must work out underlying principles of where the houses should go. We should create or extend communities not build disconnected blocks. Building should represent good modern architecture not a pastiche of historic styles. Strategic gaps are important to avoid being swallowed up. BP supported the inclusion of properly designed flats with underground parking. MC wanted to wait for data from the Office of National Statistics to plan housing requirements. Wanted all potential sites compared objectively. A village at Ashfield was possible. Accepted that the Town will grow but wished the character of a market town to be preserved.

Item 6: Any Other Business

Concern was expressed about Cllr Noakes leaving constituents unrepresented when declaring an interest after receiving a contribution from a builder. There was a wider discussion and other examples were given of Councillors properly declaring an interest and removing themselves from meeting when appropriate. The question of leaving constituents insufficiently represented was not addressed. Several contributors spoke to express confidence in the integrity of both councillors and officers and were thanked by County Councillor Roy Perry.

John Parker noted that the 15th anniversary of the Romsey Forum was approaching. He asked people to let the organising officers know what format they wanted the Forum to take and topics they wanted to cover.

**Next meeting Wed, 16 Sept., 7.30pm, Romsey Town Hall
Followed by 18 November**