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City Development
Policies and Plans
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Our ref: L:\FPI\Neighbourhood
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Dear Councillor Lamb,

Leeds City Council response to the Pre-Submission Draft Wetherby Neighbourhood Plan

Thank you for consulting the Council on the Pre-Submission Draft Wetherby Neighbourhood Plan. The Wetherby Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and the Town Council have produced a well laid out and professional plan containing a good vision distinctive to Wetherby and useful background information which sets the right tone for the plan.

I hope that these formal comments on the pre-submission plan will assist the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and the Town Council in making changes to the document prior to formal submission for examination. You will be aware that there is no obligation to take these comments on board.

1. **Timing/risks**

- 1.1 As you will be aware, the Pre-Submission Changes to the Site Allocations Plan (SAP) were subject to public consultation during February and March of this year and it is expected that the Site Allocations Plan will be submitted to the Secretary of State for Independent Examination at the end of April. Therefore there is a continued risk that if/when the SAP is adopted after the neighbourhood plan is made, elements of that neighbourhood plan could be superseded.

2. **Basic Conditions**

- 2.1 At examination, a neighbourhood plan will be judged on whether it complies with the Basic Conditions set out in paragraph 8 (2) of Schedule 4B to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. These are:

- a) **Having regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State**
- b) **The making of the order (or neighbourhood plan) contributes to the achievement of sustainable development**
- c) **That making of the order (or neighbourhood plan) is in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the development plan for the area of the authority.**
- d) **The making of the order (or neighbourhood plan) does not breach, and is otherwise compatible with, EU obligations.**

3. **Detailed comments on the introduction and draft planning policies**

Introduction

- 3.1 The inclusion of sustainable forms of energy and transport as an Objective of the Plan is welcomed.

Policy H1: Provide an appropriate mix of housing

- 3.2 Why 10 or more? Specifying a figure is OK in principle but there is a need to provide evidence why this is 10 rather than, say, 9 or 11.
- 3.3 Providing affordable homes either on site or within the neighbourhood area is understandably desirable but it is unlikely that this could be guaranteed through a neighbourhood plan policy. It may be better to make this a more aspirational policy rather than a requirement as written.
- 3.4 Rather than say “will be supported” in clause c) recommend that it is replaced by ‘will be encouraged’. As written, this policy would allow for any housing development as long as it adaptable to older people’s needs.
- 3.5 Policy H1 asks for an appropriate mix of housing in terms of size and affordability which will help to support the specific needs of Wetherby’s residents as identified by the most recent available housing market assessment and/or needs survey. This potentially conflicts with Core Strategy Policy H5 which expects 35% of new dwellings in this area to be affordable and of those, 60% should be affordable for households on lower decile earnings (which will normally be rented housing). The HNA results quoted in the supporting text to Policy H1 refers to 21% of new dwellings being needed as affordable homes for sale / starter homes and only 10% of new dwellings being needed as affordable homes to rent. A further percentage is expected to be dedicated to elderly housing needs, but not necessarily affordable. Whilst the local need assessment would generate close to 35% affordable housing overall, it would expect a much lower percentage of affordable housing for rent. Core Strategy Policy H5 is set for review in the Core Strategy Review which could change things further.

Policy H2: Quality and layout of housing developments

- 3.6 The policy refers to a 'minimum' of 2 spaces for 3 bedroom and 3 spaces for 4 bedroom dwellings. This may be appropriate given that Wetherby is a high car ownership area, although the preceding 'evidence' section does not provide a great deal of evidence in this respect.
- 3.7 Is the wish to see houses with 2 – 3 parking spaces a little incongruous with the competing need to reduce traffic? However, the objective of increased homeworking is welcomed. This requires further thought and is something likely to be raised by the examiner.
- 3.8 Para 3.3.2 suggestion that the third bullet point could mention communal gardens to encourage social interaction which could be echoed by adding a further item to clause i) of policy H2.
- 3.9 Policy H2 k) could include a measure to encourage the inclusion of energy efficient features in new housing developments.
- 3.10 The use of "should" is welcomed, as is the identification of character areas.
- 3.11 Under (i) new verges/avenues/segregated footways could be stated as a must in new schemes. In particular where routes link into other green infrastructure within and without the site boundary

Policy WE1: Town centre development

- 3.12 This is a much-improved policy and the use of "discouraged" is welcomed. However, be aware that the policy may have unintended consequences, for example an application for change of use from a shop to say a restaurant, which could ensure vitality and viability of town centre would be discouraged by this policy. Outside of Protected Shopping Frontages but still within the Town Centre boundary, a proposal to convert a shop to a restaurant, say, would not generally be considered contrary to Core Strategy policy. Town Centre uses are acceptable uses in town Centre locations. However, this policy appears to "discourage" such proposals.
- 3.13 Subsection i. also runs counter to national and local policy as it appears to allow a situation where a town centre shop is shut down and replaced by an out of centre shop, provided that it is "nearby".
- 3.14 Considerations of a new supermarket a little way from the town – has there been consideration of disabled and infirm people being able to access healthy food locally?
- 3.15 Unclear whether discussion about food outlets or consideration of more opportunities to access healthy food, both in takeaways and local shops has been undertaken. This could be useful and would be welcomed. Has there been consideration regarding hot food takeaways and proximity to local schools?

Policy WE2: Sustainable tourism enhancement

- 3.16 May be better to call this 'Sustainable Tourism'.

3.17 This is a much improved policy and the use of “will be encouraged” is welcomed.

3.18 Sustainable Tourism- there is substantial evidence in terms of research into how trees and GI can enhance tourism and retail. Shopper numbers are higher; they stay longer and spend more in shopping areas with lots of trees.

Policy HWL1: Sports and leisure facilities

3.19 This is a much improved policy and the use of “are encouraged and should seek to” is welcomed.

Policy HWL2: Community facilities

3.20 This is a much improved policy, but it is suggested that the policy could read “Proposals for new and/or improved community facilities are encouraged and should endeavor to...”

3.21 Similarly, it is suggested that Clause b) should read “should endeavor to...”

Policy HWL3: Health care facilities

3.22 This is a positive policy but largely aspirational (which is OK). May wish to also refer to the improvement/enhancement of existing health care facilities?

3.23 It appears as if discussions with Clinical Commissioning Groups are productive with regards to new services, this is welcomed.

Policy E1: Wetherby High School Site

3.24 This is a much-improved policy. The issues and evidence section is helpful but this should also make reference to discussions with the High School and Education.

Policy ENV1: Protection and enhancement of local heritage assets

3.25 The policy would benefit from a brief introduction.

3.26 The identification of these is positive and helpful but does not in itself guarantee protection. The policy will highlight to an applicant and to the decision-maker that enhancement and protection are important considerations in any development proposals.

3.27 It would be beneficial to clarify in the policy title that the assets stated are “non-designated heritage assets” as outlined in the preceding text.

Policy ENV2: Local Green Spaces

3.28 Refer to ‘areas’ rather than “sites”.

3.29 Local Green Space boundaries should be plotted on the corresponding map and individual site plans should be provided for each proposal. The Council is happy to assist with these but requires precise boundaries to be able to do so.

Policy ENV3: Green corridors

- 3.30 The policy would benefit from a brief introduction. For example, ‘... as shown on Plan ...’
- 3.31 The GB affords the maximum possible protection and this policy does not add to that. However, the identification of Green Corridors is encouraged but perhaps should be written more positively. Is it only about protection or should it also be about enhancement and providing net gains to Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity?
- 3.32 Suggest looking at Wantage Examiner’s Report reference to Policy ENV3 in particular reference to mapping, the aims of the policy, evidence and biodiversity. There is an opportunity to re-focus the Policy on the delivery of improvements to the existing Green Infrastructure rather than protect – which Green Belt policy already does.
- 3.33 The term Green Infrastructure (GI) is an umbrella term which brings together all links including PROWs, green corridors, new landscape proposals, green space etc. Green corridors could be emphasised on the local level as well as the national strategic level.
- 3.34 There are areas in Wetherby that lack green infrastructure. The Racecourse is one example. Such areas could be identified and become projects for green infrastructure improvements.

Policy D1: The character of the Conservation Area

- 3.35 The policy would benefit from a brief introduction.
- 3.36 Refer to ‘Proposals for development in the Conservation Area...’
- 3.37 Be aware that some examiners do not like neighbourhood plans to include policies for Conservation Areas as these are already covered by policy and under different legislation. Others take a more relaxed view.

Policy D2: Connectivity of new developments

- 3.38 This is an improved policy and the use of “should seek to” is welcomed.
- 3.39 This is generally a positively worded policy but it would be helpful to clarify if the intention is that it should apply to all development? Would it be reasonable to expect a minor extension to a residential dwelling to be covered by this policy?
- 3.40 The inclusion of the intention to improve connections for walkers and cyclists to the town centre is welcomed, although there could be further inclusion of parents with prams and people who use wheelchairs. Does the reference made to narrow back streets, clogged with traffic and that the town centre must be safe for pedestrians also include for wheelchairs and those that are less mobile, etc.? It is unclear whether the disability factor has been considered here.
- 3.41 It would also be helpful to assess the number/opportunities for places to rest where people walk, e.g. benches, particular in terms of connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists.

3.42 Public conveniences – are there any (and are they accessible) from the walking pedestrian paths? This can deter people, particularly the elderly, from taking walks.

4. **Comments on other parts of the plan and general comments**

Projects and Aspirations

4.1 There is an opportunity to prioritise projects and to link some of these with surrounding parishes (on connectivity, for example).

4.2 May wish to refer to other potential sources of funding and to use the neighbourhood plan to bid for funding.

General Comments

4.3 The Plan seems to have been through a thorough process, reflecting the needs of the higher proportion of older people, lower proportion of younger and working people, but with a wish and intention to attract a good mix of residents – this is welcomed. However, the needs of disabled people are not mentioned consistently throughout the Plan. Given the comments on accessibility and the needs of disabled people, the town council may wish to consider conducting an Equalities Impact Assessment of the Neighbourhood Plan. The Council is happy to advise should you wish to explore this further.

4.4 Page 21, para 3.7 suggestion that this section could include policies on sustainable building methods.

Mapping

4.5 It is recommended that the policies maps are re-ordered and are integrated into the text of the Plan. Further information should be provided, e.g. the extent of local green spaces (boundaries in particular), and precise locations of community facilities. The Council is happy to advise and liaise further with the Steering Group regarding maps.

5. **Further Suggestions**

5.1 It is noted that there are a number of areas that have not been included within the draft Neighbourhood Plan which the town council may wish to consider, based on wider experience of neighbourhood planning in Leeds and beyond:

Nature Conservation

5.2 Nature Conservation Designations: the up-to-date boundaries and terminology could be used and maps could show Local Wildlife Sites / Local Geology Sites as per the Leeds Core Strategy Policy G8.

- 5.3 Leeds Habitat Network: the Neighbourhood Plan should also show the Leeds Habitat Network as per Core Strategy Policy G9 – this is available from West Yorkshire Ecology.
- 5.4 Together, the above designations and the Leeds Habitat Network show the most important natural features in the Wetherby area so could be referred to. There could be a commitment to strengthen the Leeds Habitat Network by identifying more locally valuable ecological features such as smaller water courses and significant lines of trees or any other features that may have been overlooked in the Leeds Habitat Network. This could form an objective in the Plan if sufficient expertise is available locally.

Landscape

- 5.5 The policy maps could incorporate information on landscape character assessment and Special Landscape Areas (SLAs). These can influence planning of the area. More detail can accompany these as required such as the policy wording and each landscape character area and SLA has its own description.
- 5.6 The sustrans routes/disused railways are a unique and precious asset. More could be described to protect and enhance these such as buffers and particular viewpoints that could be identified so that they do not become obscured. If there are any aspirational linkages that could connect to widen the catchment then these too could be added to the maps.
- 5.7 WOODLAND MANAGEMENT – woodland areas could be identified as being important to the character of the area. A map could identify which are under private or public ownership and which ones have Woodland Management Plans.
- 5.9 TREE SURVEYS: a survey could identify “positive” trees or groups of trees in the same way as Conservation Area Appraisals identify positive buildings. These trees may be special landmarks; they may have a historic connection or trees that make a strong contribution to the streetscape. 5.11 TREES: Climate Change/Air Quality: Trees offer not just amenity but also have a role to play in climate change and air quality. This could be explored further.

I hope these comments are useful and help the neighbourhood planning group to review the pre-submission draft Wetherby Neighbourhood Plan before it progresses to examination. If you would like to discuss any of these comments in more detail, please contact Ian Mackay to arrange a convenient time.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tim Hill". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the beginning.

Tim Hill

Chief Planning Officer