

REPORT OF PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

(Special Meetings held 15 and 27 January 1999)

1. NEW FOREST DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN (REPORT A) (MINUTE NO. 99).

The Committee considered in detail the Inspector's report into the deposited New Forest District Local Plan, together with an evaluation of his recommendations and, where appropriate, proposed modifications. The Inspector had been largely supportive of the Council's proposed policies. Many of his recommendations represented updating in the light of changing circumstances, in particular, revised Government guidance from planning policy guidance notes.

The Committee was advised that this Local Plan should be considered within the context of the current Hampshire County Structure Plan. That Plan proposed 7,000 houses for the New Forest District in the period ending 2001. This figure was being re-considered through the County Structure Plan Review, but there was no definitive statement yet from this source. In the light of the current Structure Plan requirement, the Inspector had concluded that the New Forest District Local Plan allocation of land for housing showed a shortfall of 900 houses. The Inspector had formally recommended the allocation of nine new sites within the current Plan. These were set out in paragraph 3.15 of Report A. The Committee was advised that the site at Durley Farm, Hounslow had an area of 6.7 hectares, not 4.6 hectares as in the report. The Inspector had also recommended that five sites should be included in a schedule of sites for further consideration. Four of these were set out in paragraph 3.18 of Report A. The fifth site (Ashley Common Road) had been included in the list for allocation in the current Plan (para 3.15). It was suggested that the sites in paragraph 3.18 should not be allocated at this stage. Three were within the Green Belt, and the fourth, west of Crow Lane, Ringwood, was subject to infrastructure and environmental constraints. It would be more appropriate to progress consideration of these sites through the review of the District Local Plan which would be started shortly. This would leave a shortfall of 345 dwellings against Structure Plan allocation, but this was a small proportion, that could be justified to the Government Office for the South East (GOSE); given the commitment to an early review of the Plan.

The Committee noted the Inspector's proposed changes to the boundary of the New Forest Heritage Area. It was regretted that the constraints imposed by the Local Plan process were imposing changes which were incompatible with the nationally based criteria and objectives which should be applied in the definition of the boundary of a National Park equivalent status area. There was concern about accepting the Inspector's recommendations, when a statement was expected from Government on the designation and protection of the New Forest National Park equivalent status area. This was particularly relevant in respect of land north of Totton. The Inspector had not suggested that the excluded area should be designated for any particular purpose, but it was considered premature to exclude it from the Heritage Area at this stage.

The Committee noted that the recommended allocation of land at Loperwood for housing, (Inspector's report 6.1.15) would require other land to be identified for use as public open space. There were no sites in the vicinity which were not constrained by designations, such as New Forest Heritage Area, if the boundary of the Heritage Area was not amended to follow the Totton Western Bypass.

The Committee agreed proposed modifications to the Plan, to be published for public consultation. The significant differences from the Inspector's recommendations were:-

- (i) Land at Loperwood Lane, Totton will not to be allocated for housing, on the grounds that the land is currently designated to be used as public open space, which is in short supply in the area. There are no suitable alternative sites in the vicinity which are not constrained by designations such as New Forest Heritage Area. It was also considered that the allocation would have an unacceptable impact on the character of the landscape;
- (ii) The viability of town centres will be closely monitored and this information used to form judgements on the basis that only appropriate levels of non-A1 uses will be allowed in primary shopping areas;
- (iii) Land at Yaldhurst Lane, Lymington, north of Milford Road, Lymington, east of Stem Lane, New Milton, and west of Crow Lane, Ringwood will not be included in a schedule of sites for allocation for housing. This will be considered through the review of the New Forest District Local Plan which will commence shortly;
- (iv) Land at Ashley Common Road, New Milton will not be included on a schedule of sites for further consideration but has been allocated for housing within the current Plan period;
- (v) The Local Plan will retain the Fawley Major Hazard Consultation Outer Zone;
- (vi) The boundary of the New Forest Heritage Area will not be amended to follow the western edge of the Totton Western Bypass. The Countryside Commission, who advise Government on National Park issues, have concluded and advised that land to the east of the Totton Western Bypass should remain within the New Forest Heritage Area. On this basis it was considered premature to exclude the land before the Government has made its announcement on measures to designate and give special protection to the New Forest Heritage Area which are equivalent to that of a National Park;
- (vii) Additional land at Sandleheath has not been allocated for industrial use, as this would exacerbate highway safety problems from HCV's passing along Fordingbridge High Street.

2. NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK EQUIVALENT STATUS AND DEFINITION OF NEW FOREST HERITAGE AREA (REPORT B) (MINUTE NO. 101).

The Committee considered the views which should be expressed to Government to inform their consideration of the Countryside Commission's recommendation that the New Forest Heritage Area should be made equivalent of a National Park. Members recalled that this Authority had participated in the original definition of the New Forest Heritage Area boundary, in partnership with the other organisations on the New Forest Committee. The Local Plan process had enforced alterations to the boundary of the Heritage Area contained within the District Local Plan. Members considered that the boundary in the District Local Plan had been constrained by purely planning considerations. This failed to recognise the need to designate the New Forest Heritage Area on wider criteria. The boundary agreed through the New Forest Committee remained more appropriate for the designation of a National Park equivalent status area.

The Government, Countryside Commission and New Forest Committee have, therefore, been informed that this Council:-

- (i) supports the advice given to Government by the Countryside Commission in June 1998 recommending that the Government introduce new legislation as quickly as possible to make the New Forest Heritage Area the equivalent of a National park and to create a tailor-made authority to co-ordinate management rather than a standard National Park Authority; and
- (ii) considers the boundary of the area to be made equivalent of a National Park should be based upon the New Forest Heritage Area approved by the New Forest Committee and incorporated in "A Strategy for the New Forest" (1996); but consideration should be given to including within the designated area further land within and adjacent to the Avon Valley, to the north of Totton, and within the Hampshire Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

**Cllr Mrs J K Vernon-Jackson MBE JP DL
CHAIRMAN**

(ctteemtg/cttee/pc150199/report)