

Local Plan

Examination in Public – Opening Statement

21st – 23rd January 2020

Current Local Plan 2005

The Council last adopted a Local Plan in 2005.

This was called ‘a **2020 vision**’ and intended to cover up to the year 2020.

The preparation of this 2005 Plan pre-dated the **2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act**, the **2012 Local Planning Regulations** and the **National Planning Policy Framework**.

In short the current Local Plan is **now considered to be out of date** in terms of decision making for the islands.

It’s clear from the **limited development** that has come forward **in the last 5 years** that there needs to be a **change in approach if the islands are to be sustainable into the future**.

Towards a New Local Plan (1)

Since 2015 we have been **progressing a new Local Plan** that seeks to comply with the **statutory requirements** of plan making and **aligns with national policy**.

We have **worked with external consultants** to **understand** complex issues such as **housing needs, viability** and to provide the necessary **Sustainability Appraisal** at each stage of plan preparation.

Officers have **worked closely with the elected members** of the Council, and have sought to **engage with the community, statutory consultees** and **local businesses** and **groups** over the last 5 years.

Towards a New Local Plan (2)

There are elements of underpinning **local plan evidence base** that we have **considered unnecessary**, and to undertake them would be **disproportionate to the scale of the islands, both in terms of time and cost**. In short the **Isles of Scilly**, as the smallest unitary authority in England, **do not fit well into the national growth agenda**. Much **time** has been expended on understanding the needs of the community:

- In 2014, the Islands Future report first highlighted the risks to the islands of depopulation, with associated risks to the working age population and the viability of services.
- The SHMA 2016 confirmed that that risk had actually started to occur, and the official projections typically used to inform the setting of a OAN based housing target showed that there was expected to be further declines in the population, and in particular a shrinking working age population on the island and associated increasingly older share of the population.
- Housing issues particularly with generational businesses such as fishing/farming often going under the radar with some housing needs being of a low standard often without planning permission or building regulations.

The SHMA also highlighted what was anecdotal knowledge that the lack of affordable housing across all tenures was causing working families to leave the islands. In the last 5 years there has been:

- A turnover of Council staff generally particularly to work within our Operational Services, Adult Social Care and the Council's Residential Care Home threatening closure of the only facility on the island;
- A turnover of head teachers and teachers generally, with the school being 'poorly' rated by ofsted
- Difficulties recruiting a Chief Executive for the Council and Senior Management with ongoing issues resulting in the auditors putting the authority into special measures for its finances.
- Difficulties recruiting a dentist, resulting in an emergency-only service.
- Numerous small businesses struggling for accommodation for staff recruitment

The problems of a lack of available homes are extensive.

Towards a New Local Plan (3)

Delivery of homes under the adopted local plan has also stalled in the last 5 years due to **the funding environment** for affordable housing falling away dramatically for places like the Isles of Scilly. Our **Evidence Base** (HTP: EB024) shows that whilst **27 new homes were delivered in the first 10 years of the plan**, there have been **no grant-funded affordable housing schemes in the last 5 years** either proposed or permitted.

The **responses available to the Council** have to be seen in a **different context to mainland authorities**. **There is no significant local house building presence**, and mainland developers have not operated on the islands. The Islands have a **unique ownership**, which means that **potential sites are limited compared to an area with a wider range of landowners**. The islands have **specific environmental, heritage and cultural assets** with associated levels of high protection:

- **38 Scheduled Monuments per square mile** compared to 2.5 per square mile nationally and 13 per square mile in the South West.
- **20 listed buildings per square mile** compared to 7.5 per square mile nationally and 8 per square mile in the South West.
- The entire islands are **designated a Conservation Area, AONB and Heritage Coast**.

Towards a New Local Plan (4)

- We have set out a **strategy** which **allocates a series of housing sites**.
- Developed a **policy framework to ensure that the delivery of these sites taking into account viability and possible funding**. The council is actively pursuing funding to bring several of these sites forward; and
- ensures that the homes delivered, are used for the purpose of living on the islands.

The Council have taken a **pragmatic response** to the unique **circumstances of the islands** and the guidance of firstly NPPF 2012 and the 2018/19 revisions. We are 5 years into the plan period and although work is currently being undertaken, **the sites are in the early stages of pre application viability development**. The pursuit of a different strategy to ensure a range of affordable housing options are available to ensure those in the working population, who wish to stay and contribute to the islands, have that option. Policies seek to ensure that new houses are permanently lived in.

Towards a New Local Plan (5)

The scale of the islands mean there is:

- no external development pressure and because of this, delivering on any scale to meet the identified housing needs is extremely challenging to achieve.

The Council has its own 'recruitment and retention' issues in common with many local businesses and organisations.

We have sought to set out all of the issues that we have considered that have resulted in the plan submitted to the Secretary of State and being considered at this Examination in Public.

We hope that the right balance has been struck between protecting what is special about the Isles of Scilly whilst seeking to enable the delivery of homes that can sustain the population into the future.

Towards a New Local Plan (6)

The Council have sought to ensure that the **unique circumstance** of the Isles of Scilly **are adequately protected** whilst being **responsive to the future needs of the community**. As advised in **National Planning Guidance for calculating Local Housing Need (paragraph 14)** in cases where data is not available, **an alternative approach will have to be used, using a method determined locally**.

I'm sure the Inspector will draw-out during the course of the next few days, and find the Local Plan sound and legally compliant. Creating a sustainable island future underpins the approach of the Local Plan. By seeking to enable the delivery of locally available homes, the plan is not seeking 'growth' in population but ensuring the islands have a long-term future. We believe the strategy is consistent with the spirit of national guidance, but is also responsive to the unique circumstances of the islands.