

Planning and Transport Policy Sub-Committee – 14 February 2024 – Public Questions

Annexe A – Public Questions	
Name of person submitting	Question
<p>Cllr Ian Hasell</p>	<p>Chair of Norton St Philip Parish Council Attended online. Raised the following points:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thanked the Sub-Committee for the opportunity to speak. • Errors had been made by the planning inspector when Mendip went through hearing for LPP1. • Highlighted site dwelling allocations. • Proposals that went against Mendip LPP1. • Gave an update from the Judicial Review process and that the inspector misinterpreted the result from LPP1. • Five years lost and delays caused. • The Parish Council has submitted a formal complaint to the planning inspector. • Report brings forward what should have been done five years ago. • He understands the magnitude and scope of project ahead. • Officers have carried out a vast amount of work to be in line with the Order. • He commends the officers for the work and strongly supports the report.
<p>John Winstone</p>	<p>Wells Neighbourhood Plan Why Wellensians and All who love Wells should vote against the Referendum The history of the base document, Wells Design Guide, is a sorry one. Many attempts were made over the last seven years to achieve a properly considered Design Guide through to a viable Neighbourhood Development Plan. The advices were disregarded. As it stands, part of a suite of six planning documents, the Design Guide purports to provide criteria for what should pass as acceptable in the development of Wells and presumptuously asks other independent bodies to adopt its recommendations, as the standard position. The omissions are such that it should not have passed Examination. The Design Guide is of metropolitan, not local authorship and the document itself fails to map any revisions where it may have revised. The Guide was believed to have</p>

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been deemed acceptable to the former Mendip DC before the process of adoption. The Design Guide text does not even mention the Wells designated Conservation Area or show its boundaries on any map. For that one must refer to the Neighbourhood Development Plan.

There are substantial omissions not picked up by the Independent Examiner appointed by Somerset County Council to judge the Neighbourhood Development Plan. The Plan omits any reference to the extent of the former deer park, its open fields today or the historic Park Wood in St Cuthbert Out parish. That parish's request, denied by the Examiner to be enjoined as referendum-participant in the setting area of Wells City parish and further outward development, showed a lack of appreciation of heritage issues.

The Wells Conservation Area Assessment of 2011 failed to address setting areas to the Conservation Area, although of all cities Wells should have designated setting areas, and the District Council were criticised for this omission in briefing their consultant. The tenant of farmland on the south side of the city objected to a boundary review and the district council acquiesced.

Four Advisory minutes critical of the first neighbourhood plan were made in 2017. Although 50% of planning authorities nationally now hold what are called Local lists of historic buildings (or Heritage Assets), Mendip DC had no such policy despite great public pressure to do so, starting in 2007. No less than 38 separate monthly Advisory minutes were issued between 2011 and 2017, when the policy was formally abandoned by the District. Volunteers nevertheless proceeded with two separate surveys. The City Council's preferred

list is the shorter and compares less favourably with a longer list prepared by a better resourced team of local experts. With policy abandonment neither list has been out to consultation. The Examiner made changes to the methodology of the local list process, but was uncritical of the list that is referred to in the Design Guide, but not included. Without the coupling of conservation area and local listings, the Design Guide is flawed. At the very least it should be caveated that it cannot be the stand-alone document as it purposes to be. National guidance (the NPPF) requires both aspects to be considered. Historic England were advised; what comments did they make?

The principal shortcoming of the Design Guide and the Neighbourhood Development Plan is that the 'portrait' of Wells does not describe the genesis of the city and how those qualities remain significant markers for today. A starting premise might be that Wells appears to be an idealised medieval city set in its own heavenly landscape. Without such an understanding, value

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	<p>judgements posed will have no secure foundations. In the Design Guide the proposed cones of view intended to offer protection to setting are not accurately drawn in terms of the meritorious landscapes.</p> <p>Wells City Council sits in a curious and uncomfortable position. Since 1997 the planning committee has followed a policy of accepting all recommendations from district level, and simply follows their advice without offering opinion. This has had serious consequences for inappropriate development in the city. Only very occasionally has it been possible to show that an application is so unacceptable that the applicant chooses to voluntarily withdraw an approved scheme.</p> <p>Another of the five documents lying behind the Neighbourhood Development Plan, the Housing Needs Assessment, is also flawed. Wells and Glastonbury are in fact towns constrained by their landscapes and this has not been challenged. The proposal to address housing needs in Mendip area <i>sustainably</i> was put to the 2014 Local Plan Examination in public: that a new town should be built as near as possible to the mainline station in the south of the district to provide further housing need and sustainable journeys to work outside the district. This was not supported by the district council and was thrown out by the Local Plan Inspector without serious consideration.</p> <p>John Winstone 25 January 2024 Retired conservation architect</p>
Response	<p><i>Neighbourhood Plan Regs mean that the Council is legally obliged to “make the plan within 8 weeks of the date on which the referendum was held if the majority of those voting have voted in favour of the plan unless it considered that the making of the Plan would breach or otherwise be incompatible with any EU obligation or any of the Convention rights within the meaning of the Human Rights Act 1998. If the Council fails to do so, then it would be in breach of its statutory obligations.</i></p> <p><i>In relation to the specific comments made;</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>Wells Design guide was prepared for the City Council by AECOM and published in 2022. It appears as Appendix 1 to the Neighbourhood Plan. The Design Guide is referenced by Policy HBE1. It includes a discussion of the historic development of the City and current heritage designations, including Listed Buildings and the Conservation Area. The Conservation Area is mapped on page 15. It goes on to consider landscape designations, open spaces, views and settings.</i>

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- *The Neighbourhood Plan only covers the Plan Area, which is Wells civil parish. This is the agreed designated plan area, designated in 2014.*
- *The Wells Conservation Area Assessment pre-dates the Neighbourhood Plan, dating from 2011 and is a material consideration in decision making on planning applications. It is not within the Neighbourhood Plan's remit to amend the Conservation Area Assessment, but the Neighbourhood Plan appropriately references the document.*
- *The Design Guide suggests 54 buildings which might be included on a local list of heritage interest. The Neighbourhood Plan sets out an intention to create a Local List, as set out in as Community Project 2. The City Council is currently considering all the community projects and work to take them forward will commence soon.*
- *Historic England comments at both Reg 14 and Reg 16 consultation. At Regulation 14 consultation in Sept 2022, they commented that “ Overall we applaud the Plan's content for the protection and enhancement of its distinctive historic environment, in the form of policies or community aspirations such as the proposed settlement setting study and local list. It is pleasing to register the impressive suite of local studies which have been produced and drawn upon to ensure that proposals are robustly evidenced and grounded in an informed understanding of the area's special architectural and historic qualities.”*
- *The Design Guide and the Neighbourhood Plan provide information on the historic development of the City and it's character today.*
- *An amendment to one of the view cones was made as a result of the Examiners recommendations. This has been incorporated into the final Plan.*
- *The Housing Needs Assessment focuses on unmet housing need in the City, particularly focussing on affordable housing and housing for older people. It would not be appropriate for it to consider the distribution of development across a wider*

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	<p><i>area. The Neighbourhood Plan must be in general conformity with the Local Plan, which considers development across a wider area (the former Mendip District).</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>• The Neighbourhood Plan Examiner is very well qualified to carry out the Examination as was sourced via the national NPIERS system, run independently by RICS.</i>
Roy Bulgin	<p>Ruishton and Thornfalcon Parish Council. Attended in the room. Raised the following points:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thanked the Sub-Committee for the opportunity to speak.• Been on Parish Council for a long time and this task has been a challenge for all of those involved.• He has got planning experience from sitting on Neighbourhood and Planning Steering Group and Committees of the Parish Council.• On behalf of the Parish Council, he thanked Somerset Council for expediting the referendum last Thursday.• This is the end of a very long journey.• Thanked officers for all their help throughout.• He looks forward to advising the PC that the Plan has been made after today's meeting.