

UPPER MEON VALLEY – SEPTEMBER 2024 PARISH UPDATE

Planning

The second draft of the new Winchester District Local Plan was unanimously approved, by a Full Council meeting on 28 August, to be put on immediate public circulation for comment over a statutory 6-week period. Comments received will then be reviewed prior to a further revision being submitted for formal scrutiny by a Planning Inspector in the first half of next year. The documents out for consultation are on the Winchester Local Plan website here:

<https://www.localplan.winchester.gov.uk>

Of course, the vast majority of the Upper Meon Valley ward lies outside the scope of this work as the South National Park Authority (SDNPA) is the Local Planning Authority (LPA) for the area of the Park. The SDNPA is conducting its own Local Plan Review, although it is ‘out of synch’ and some way behind the Winchester work. This is not at all unusual as LPAs do not have to align with any central government timeline. The current SDNPA consultation is for the scope of its Review. It runs until 16 September and can be accessed here:

<https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/planning-policy/south-downs-local-plan-review/>

The Winchester LPR process was stopped during the pre-Election period and, if the District is not to be left ‘in limbo’ without a plan during the new Government’s review of the planning process, there is now some urgency: the LPR has to be moved forward so that its ‘examination in public’ by a Planning Inspector is conducted under the current rules and the extant housing targets. If delayed there would be a risk that the District was left without a current Plan, resulting in ‘Planning by Appeal’ while the new legislative framework and targets were agreed.

The Government is currently consulting on its proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), including changes to the way housing targets are calculated. It is highly likely that the Winchester District target will be significantly increased. It is an inconsistency that the housing target will be placed on the whole of the Winchester District administrative area, rather than just that part, outside the Park boundary, for which it is the LPA. Winchester will be contesting this point in its own response to the Government’s consultation. Moreover, Winchester planners have a legal obligation to cooperate with their neighbouring authorities, some of which may find it impossible to accommodate all of their own target.

Meanwhile, the new Government has confirmed that the status of the National Park as a ‘protected landscape’ under the 1949 National Parks Act will continue to protect the Park from any centrally imposed housing target. The SDNPA does, however, have a statutory duty to deliver sufficient housing to meet the needs of its own population.

There is therefore an inevitable tension between the two LPAs, WCC and the SDNPA, since WCC would, not unnaturally, look to that part of the Park within its administrative boundary to take some of the additional housing load. The SDNPA, by contrast, is working to a “Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment” (HEDNA) (available here: <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/planning-policy/south-downs-local-plan-review/housing-and-economic-development-needs-assessment-2023/>) that has calculated its housing need, *across the whole Park*, as 350 homes per year. This contrasts with the WCC current target of 676 per year.

Parishes will be aware that, in the current SDNPA Local Plan Cheriton, Owslebury, West Meon and Corhampton & Meonstoke all have settlement boundaries within which there is a presumption of consent for new developments; some also have an individual housing target. Some, but not all, of these allocations have already been 'built out'. Outside these settlement boundaries all the remaining area of the UMV Ward within the Park is regarded as 'countryside', in which development is severely restricted. Some additional allocation areas are currently under consideration by the Park planners and these, when agreed by the full Authority, will form part of its own draft plan consultation (known as the Reg 18 consultation in the jargon) early next year. It is unlikely, however, that these allocations will deliver a significantly increased number of new homes, given the Authority's focus will be firmly on the provision of "affordable housing", or that they will have a significant effect on the UMV ward.

WCC have concluded a 'Statement of Common Ground' with the SDNPA over the treatment of any element of the Winchester housing target that it believes could be met within the Park part of its area. This includes an 'agreement to differ' on how this might be resolved. Under the obligation to cooperate there is, of course, a possibility that the Park might wish to ask WCC to accept some of its own HEDNA target. The two planning teams will be taking this work forward bilaterally during the Autumn with a target to achieve agreement prior to the issue of the SDNPA's Reg 18 draft.

There is a further issue that the SDNPA is, in the jargon, a Level 2 LPA and therefore sees itself as having the obligation to consult directly with Parishes (the Level 3 authorities) in the same way as WCC does for its own planning process. It does this through bi-annual workshops for Town and Parish Councils in each of its three counties, the next of which for the Hampshire parishes will be in October 2024. There is an argument put forward by some that WCC should, as a democratically elected authority, be able to take a direct view on whether some of the WCC housing target should be imposed on that area of the District within the Park. This would, of course, require the SDNPA to accept further allocation areas within, or even outside, the villages into its draft Plan.

Finally, we can confirm that there are no housing allocation areas in the WCC Reg 19 plan that fall within that part of the UMV Ward outside the Park boundary.

If you have read this far you will understand that this is a complex, heavily nuanced issue with no simple answers. We are very happy to discuss further in Parish meetings – we are both capable of open-ended discussion on the topic! But we would also strongly encourage all Parishes to engage in the consultation processes as they move forward.

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Winchester City Council Ward Members for Upper Meon Valley