

Forward Planning
Forest of Dean District Council
Council Office
High Street
Coleford
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28 January 2021

To whom it may concern,

Re: Local Plan Preferred Options

The Forest Economic Partnership is a community interest company with the aim of giving those who live, work, play and study in the District a voice on matters arising across the District. The documentation published in relation to Forest of Dean District Council's Local Plan: Preferred Options was provided to our Transport & Infrastructure Sub-Group. This Sub-group has as its aim: The District Plan guides future development that gives us the space to work, live and play. Once those uses are known we can consider the transport routes in the District to enable them to become fit for purpose. What is the practical new vision that defines the Forest we want to be and balances the use of space?" It draws its membership from anyone interested in the Forest prepared to meet monthly to openly discuss issues and opportunities.

That sub-group recognised that:

1. This is an early-stage consultation on potential preferred options to enable the gathering of the widest range of comments to inform the continued development of the Local Plan.
2. This document is preparatory to more formal concrete proposals at a later stage. Further open opportunities for input are planned as it becomes firmer.
3. The Council is highly constrained by the legislative requirements; the numbers of houses that are required to be built by central government apportionment (which is only indicative at this stage and could be far higher); and the need to achieve a balanced solution that works on a district-wide basis.

From reviewing the documentation, we broadly agree that the outlined proposals are the right direction that the District needs to take, given the above constraints; but also to meet the council's own objectives as provided through the political process.

In view of this, we would like to share our feedback on the following points:

Housing

We understand that the Council is especially constrained on housing. This is exacerbated by the number of new builds set centrally and handed down to Councils to implement on a legal basis. In the district previous demands have been accommodated in the four main towns. These are now at or in the foreseeable future will reach capacity thresholds where core services could fail from over-demand. For smaller conurbations, the issues around piecemeal infill cannot match the numbers required. We also understand that the housing numbers for the purposes of the Plan are not yet fixed and may increase.

Transport

It's essential for a successful Local Plan that the needs of the population to travel within and out of the district is taken into consideration in order to access the services they require in an ever-changing world. The current approach to transport is not fit for purpose. Again, this is an area that the Council itself has little direct control over. However, with housing development comes a requirement for publicly accessible transport that may go some way to addressing those issues.

Balanced Approach

Fundamental to the plan is sustainable development in its economic, environmental and social sense. This mirrors FEP's agreed projects around the potential for the designation of the whole or parts of the District as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve as a means to preserve the balance of what we have with what we could be. The work done in the report by members of the Office for National Statistics showed a clear economic case. Work by Foresters Forest, Forestry England and other environmental groups shows the environmental need. Evidence is currently being sought to demonstrate whether there is a social case from the wider population of this approach to zone designation that enables all three aspects to thrive. As this develops we are able to provide feedback during the timescale of the Local Plan development.

Unprecedented change

Among the constraints the Local Plan needs to account for, is a rapidly growing concern that humanity is facing two interlinked crises with unprecedented local and global consequences. The biodiversity that supports the natural functioning of ecosystems on earth is currently undergoing mass extinction. Massive anthropogenic global warming is rapidly changing the climate and disturbing weather patterns with damaging impacts on local communities, their economies and environments.

With these crises in mind, the Local Plan is being developed to facilitate, support and enable changes in the way people live, learn, travel, work and play. In order to understand why these changes are needed, and how they can be implemented, the Council is asked to develop a wider carbon literacy programme to encourage its members/staff and all sectors of local society to understand, engage and participate positively with the behavioural and infrastructure changes proposed in the Local Plan.

For example, one method being used by Cornwall County Council to increase carbon literacy is that of the doughnut economics model created by Kate Raworth. This gives guidance to decision-makers that climate change mitigation should be balanced against the principle of social justice. This would enable more of the population to place the Plan in the right collective context.

Amsterdam recently adopted a similar approach based on the doughnut model for their response to the economic challenges brought about by Covid-19. Like climate change, Covid-19 cannot be treated as a one-off or finite event with a clear beginning or end; we must ensure our decision making helps our residents, businesses and communities to become more resilient in a period of unprecedented change.

We hope this feedback is helpful to your consultation and look forward to reviewing future materials as you move forward with building the Forest of Deans Local Plan.

Kind regards,

Andrew Callard

Andrew Callard

Chair of Transport, Infrastructure, Bridges and Borders Sub-Group
Forest Economic Partnership