



1st November 2016

Dear Penelope

Re: Local District Plan and Town Plan for Risborough - Economic Sustainability

Further to my previous letter of 17th October 2016 on behalf of the Risborough Area Residents Association (RARA), I would like to elaborate on our main concerns regarding the lack of economic opportunities to support your housing proposals.

RARA is concerned about the credibility of your Local Plan in terms of your industrial policy. For any Local Plan to be effective there must be foundations laid for the growth of economic opportunities to provide business development and employment, a crucial catalyst determining the social success of a community. Your Local Plan, which features the Town Plan for Princes Risborough, as its cornerstone, is deficient in providing such foundations for economic sustainability.

It is a fact that Aylesbury Vale Districts' original Local Plan was rejected as it failed to provide a coherent and integrated industrial policy. This was considered to be as problematic as its insufficient cooperation with surrounding councils. The NPPF is clear about sustainability. Planning should not only be about housing numbers and targets but represent an integrated approach which looks at how communities can grow and the economic provision required to support this.

Economic gap

RARA believes there is a wide disconnect between your housing and economic policies which would question its sustainability. This 'gap' can be illustrated as follows:

You have proposed an increase in the industrial base of between 7-14% over the next twenty years to meet the needs of the district despite a 20-25% increase in houses/population proposed (near doubling in Princes Risborough). The district's economic base fell by 7% at a time of robust national growth which most observers have said will be weaker in the future.

Q) How do you plan this major turnaround in a tougher economic climate?

Even with these very ambitious aims, it is clear from your proposals that many new residents will be expected to commute to jobs outside of the area or be unemployed.

Economic Disconnect

RARA found your Sustainability Report on the economy limited because it concentrates on overall numbers and not specific locations and type of industrial bases provided. In simple terms there is a

disconnect between location of the majority of houses in the north and jobs in the south of the district. Furthermore, it appears that industrial development will be over reliant on land hungry industries like warehousing, which need to be located in the M4/M40 corridor, characterised by a serious shortage of land for any new housing which you have also acknowledged. This land hungry proposal is inconsistent with a district which has a shortage of land for any new housing.

Q) Why have you opted for land hungry industry in an area characterised by land shortage?

Q) You have stated that the lack of transport links makes the Risborough area unable to attract this type of industrial development, but equally why should 15,000 current and 10,000 new residents to the Risborough area accept this situation?

It is clear that when you look at your industrial policy in conjunction with the local needs of the Risborough area, there is nothing to attract any new investment or develop the existing economy. This makes the Local Plan, in relation to this area economically unsustainable.

Risborough's Industrial Losses

Over the last ten years, a community well served with many high tier employers has lost two thirds of them, and is now reliant on just two. Ironically your plan makes the presence of one of those questionable thus rendering the local economy reliant on just one employer. Your proposals for the Princes Estate do not compensate for all the employment lost over the last ten years, and is very limited. Also, your plan proposes further losses of three existing employers Hypnos, Sumitomo Hard Metals and Anderson Carbide due to the misguided policy of providing an inappropriate relief road.

The threat to Hypnos is worrying. The potential loss of an internationally respected company which has a long and enriching association with the Risborough area would leave a big void and would erode the community spirit of the town. There is also a loss of two smaller employees in Sumatomo Hard Metals and Anderson Carbide. The loss of three employers and your plans to double the size of the town, are counterproductive and raise serious questions about sustainability.

Q) How can this decrease in employment opportunities be reconciled with a large increase in population in a well thought out plan? 'Not an ideal world' a response provided by Strategic Planning Manager at a recent Q&A, is not an acceptable answer.

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Multiplier Effect

The knock on effect of the above can only have a detrimental effect on the whole economy. Historically, this effect has been witnessed in towns and villages in South Wales. In the Risborough the lack of industry and employment will produce hidden effects on smaller enterprises which will be fatal. As the studies of the effect of the Buncefield explosion ten years ago illustrated, the organisations directly affected who had business distribution insurance coverage recovered but the industries who supplied and supported them didn't. A similar effect will likely be seen in Risborough which will reduce revenue to the town and increase the costs of Wycombe District council.

An inappropriate solution for the Risborough area

Your industrial policy appears to concentrate on attracting a limited type and size of enterprise. The UK economy is now 85% service led and the majority not distribution led, so less reliant on good transport links. Most of the companies are classified as small, i.e. less than 50 employees, and can be more easily attracted if a more innovative approach to industrial planning was in place. It is disturbing to see that in your Town Plan, you have only tried to expand an industrial park, that you have admitted is not well located and is inaccessible, with all approaches to it guarded by a series of narrow roads and low bridges. Historically, the economy of Risborough was able to thrive via a variety of industrial locations across the town, and the decline has coincided with the arrival of the Princess Estate.

Q) Why are you persisting with this failing policy?

Need for smaller mixed business parks

As outlined above, the solution to lack of investment in the area is through a more be-spoke set of solutions and not a 'one size fits all' approach. We do not see in your plan any enterprise parks that encourage smaller ambitious businesses that want to work in a relaxed pleasant atmosphere or give any indication that you understand the wants of innovators and try to meet them.

Q) Why doesn't your plan have a more flexible approach to industry?

Building on Tourism and Leisure Industry

Princes Risborough is ideally suited to take advantage of the Chiltern tourist market which is predicted to at least double in the next ten years. It is currently underserved, with the lack of overnight accommodation in the area, but based less than three quarters of an hour from London, it has the ability to attract people from there. Based near national walkways like the Ridgeway, but with shorter trails like the Phoenix, and renowned viewing points, of which the unobtrusiveness of the town is a key feature, its attraction to so many will be destroyed by your narrow view of Princes Risborough as a convenient place to build houses. A plan which recognises this rich tourist market would support a leisure industry and create a multiplying effect/cycle of not just hotels but linked retail and local food outlets.

Q) Why is your Town plan not focusing on the very essence of Risborough and its setting near AONB as a centre of tourism to develop industry and employment?

Developing the Town Centre

As recognised in the 'Fit for a Prince' review in 2006 the High Street suffers in comparison with rival centres such as Wendover and Thame. This was supported by 'The Grocer' study a few years later, which showed residents in the town's hinterland do not regard Risborough as their first shopping centre of choice. Retail is a key part of the economy and we recognise the High Street needs to be made more

attractive. Developing enterprise parks might attract businesses from the town centre so freeing up space in the centre.

Government recommendations, as set out by High Street minister Marcus Jones in 2015, note that free car parking is essential to reviving the High Street.

Q) Why is this recommendation not being followed by Wycombe District council?

We look forward to your reply and receiving your responses to these questions.

On behalf of the RARA committee and membership

Yours sincerely

Linda

Linda Cannon Clegg

Chairman RARA

Copied to:

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