

19 July 2018

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## **VISIT TO WHITEHILL AND BORDON**

1. On Tuesday 17th July, at the invitation of Cllr Leslie Webber (Chair), and Cllr Mark Davison (Leader), of Whitehill and Bordon Town Council (WBTC), the Chairs of NLPC and EWPC visited Bordon to identify the lessons learnt by the Town Council during the initial stages of the Bordon development. We were afforded excellent hospitality and the visit was organized and supported by the Clerk, Mrs Angela Mann. We are most grateful to WBTC for their hospitality and invaluable advice.

2. The development of this site is of particular importance to us because the Consultants appointed by Rutland County Council to write the Masterplan are RegenCo (a commercial consultancy arm of East Hampshire District Council (EHDC)). The experience of Whitehill and Bordon Town Council provides some significant learning points for EWPC and NLPC.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

3. The scope of the 2 x projects is remarkably similar, though Bordon can draw upon significantly more infrastructure and heritage buildings than may be available in St George's Barracks (SGB).

4. The scale of the Bordon site has reduced significantly over time; the MoD threat to do their own thing was deployed by the District Council but never materialized. MoD did not significantly influence the final number of properties to be built. Final house numbers were driven in part by a report written by Natural England.

5. Effective and meaningful engagement between District Council and Town Council was considered essential. To achieve that a pro-active stance needed to be taken by the Town Council in making alternative positive proposals. Localism was an important influencing tool, which required continual and detailed engagement with the existing community.

6. Continuity and strong leadership within the Parish Councils were considered essential. The Councils should put additional effort and resources into understanding the requirements for Transport, Health, Jobs, Education, Leisure and Training.

7. Localism is considered an essential tool with input from all key groups. The Advisory Board might propose setting up oversight boards to consider the delivery of the promise in all key areas.

8. The Council should not underestimate the resources and time needed to manage a project of this size and to ensure accountability from the county Council. Once underway the project will proceed very quickly with little opportunity for review. It is essential therefore that the Masterplan is correct and has the support of all players.

9. Once appointed the Parish Councils need to develop close links and oversight of the work being undertaken by developers and be able to identify problems and community reaction quickly.

10. Developer's Insight. This paragraph is worth reading in detail. Many of the issues/concerns raised to date with our development have materialized in Bordon. The availability of appropriately trained house-building staff may drive the overall rate of development. The majority of new buyers had to commute further to work – house sales were driven by house costs in more affluent towns/cities.

11. The provision of on site town sized facilities to meet the needs of the new town is a great attraction to buyers. The development needs to include a wide range of national brand shops and a range of catering outlets. A pub, an 'Express' store and a Pizza Hut will not meet the aspiration of buyers. A wide range of sports facilities, leisure facilities, and environmental/recreational opportunities are vital.

12. The on-going running costs for many of the proposed facilities, including grass cutting and leisure area management are likely to be devolved. This will result in a substantial overhead for Parish Councils.

## **BACKGROUND**

13. Whitehill and Bordon is a town of some 14,000 people within the East Hampshire District Council area of Hampshire (By 2030 the population is anticipated to be 22,000). The area is a sprawling urban area, which has been a Garrison Town since the early 1900s. Redevelopment of the former military town has been planned since the early 2000's when it was initially intended that some 10,000 new homes (New Eco Town) might be built on the MoD site. The development of this site is of particular importance to us because the Consultants appointed by Rutland County Council to write the Masterplan are RegenCo (a commercial consultancy arm of East Hampshire District Council (EHDC)).

## **PROJECT SCOPE / DEVELOPMENT**

14. To quote from the East Hampshire District Council Website:

*"Whitehill & Bordon is being transformed into a prosperous and sustainable green town. After over 100 years as a 'garrison town', the Army left the town in December 2015 and moved to a new base at Lyneham in Wiltshire. This*

*has freed up over 100 hectares, presenting a unique ‘once in a generation’ opportunity to transform the town from ‘garrison town to green town’ by 2030. This is a complex, £1bn, multi-partner, 15-year collaborative and transformational place-making programme which seeks to:*

- *Transform the town from ‘garrison town to green town’ by 2030.*
- *Deliver some 3,350 new homes; 5,500 jobs and create nearly 100,000sqm of new commercial, retail and leisure floor space.*
- *Deliver a new town centre with a high-quality retail offer coupled with new schools, new leisure centre, new health facilities & a new public service hub.*
- *Deliver a new relief road, undertake improvements to the existing A325 and implement a range of modal shift initiatives.*
- *Protect and enhance around 150 hectares of green space through the provision of 2 SANGs (suitable alternative natural green-spaces) at Bordon Inclosure and Hogmoor Inclosure.*
- *Deliver new community facilities and critically support the community through the transformation process including the population increase from 14,000 to 22,000 by 2030.*
- *Deliver Enterprise Zone objectives.*
- *Deliver Healthy New Town objectives.*
- *Deliver Housing Zone objectives.*
- *Ensure all of the above is under-pinned with a clear focus on quality and environmental performance.*

***In 2016, we delivered the following:***

- *Quebec Park: 2-year housing construction programme (100 new homes) commenced. Site cleared; house building underway; show home opened.*
- *Louisburg Barracks: 6-year housing construction programme (500 new homes) commenced. Site cleared; house building underway; show home opened.*
- *Prince Philip Barracks: Initial site clearance commenced. Technical Training Area (meanwhile uses) rental of spaces commenced.*
- *Relief Road: Phase 1 (northern section through Louisburg Barracks) completed. Phase 2 southern section construction commenced.*
- *Whitehill & Bordon awarded Healthy New Town Zone status; 1 of 10 pilot areas nationally.*
- *Bordon Inclosure opened.*

***In 2017, delivery continued at scale and pace:***

- *Quebec Park: house building and sales continued.*
- *Louisburg Barracks: house building and sales continued. A new Business & Enterprise Centre “BASE” and the Future Skills Centre both opened in the autumn.*
- *Prince Philip Barracks: 14-year housing construction programme (2,400 new homes) commenced.*
- *New Town Centre: planning application submitted in the winter.*

- *New Secondary School: construction started.*
- *New Skate Park: opened in the summer.*
- *Relief Road: Phase 2 construction continued.*
- *W&B Community Trust launched in the winter.*

***In 2018, delivery will continue at scale and pace:***

- *Quebec Park: house building and sales continue. A new Community & Enterprise Hub & Café opened in Spring.*
- *Louisburg Barracks: house building and sales continue.*
- *Prince Philip Barracks: 14-year housing construction programme (2,400 new homes) continues; show home opened.*
- *New town centre construction commences.*
- *Mustangs Communal Garden opened in the spring.*
- *Relief Road: Phase 2 construction continues.*
- *A325 improvements works scheduled to commence.”*

## **DISCUSSION**

15. The following key points came out of our discussions:

**a. Strategy**

- It was considered essential that the Town Council engages effectively with the District Council. The redevelopment places a heavy load on existing resources and needs careful management and oversight.
- Localism is key to successful development – this requires continual engagement with the local community.
- Town Council needed to find an appropriate planning expert with a dedicated working group to have oversight of the District Council / Developers.
- Community engagement helped with both design and style including the development of assisted living accommodation.
- The District Council created Policy Advisory Groups, which were open, to all.
- Natural England, CPRE and Heritage England provided essential advice to the Town and District Councils.
- District Council asked the Town Council to assist in the interview process for the appointment of a new Project Director. Town Council had lacked confidence in certain individuals within the RegenCo team.
- The Town Council suggested that PCs should seek the advice of ATLAS (Advisory Team for Large Applications) who had been very helpful in providing planning advice.
- Continuity and strong leadership within the Council was considered essential. Whitehill / Bordon suggested that the 2 x Parish Councils should consider amalgamation giving them clearer ownership of the site and influence in the planning process.

**b. Key to Successful Development:**

The following areas were considered to be key to the development of a successful plan:

- Transport
  - Bus Services – promised but not developed further
  - Danger of creation of rat runs within the site
  - Number of cars and lack of parking – this is a Motor Home (To travel a car is needed and this needs to be realised at the initial stages – clever solutions do not work. (Example – Café built – intentionally no parking spaces provided to reduce short on-site journeys – no one uses café!)
- Health
- Jobs – Promised but to date not evident outwith local construction.
- Education – A development of this size needed localized Primary and Secondary School provision.
- Leisure facilities were needed to attract buyers.
- Training facilities – though to date largely underutilised

**c. Planning Process:**

- The project required considerable management resource (Cllrs and Paid Staff) by the Town Council and at times it was swamped by the sheer scale of the technical planning documents that had to be considered, reviewed and commented upon.
- The Town Council needed to be strong, diligent and effective. It was the view of the Town Council that EWPC and NLPC should continue to work as one with the County Council.
- Continuity of Councillors and strong leadership was an essential element in being effective contributors to District Council negotiations.
- There was a very clear need for the local Town Council to exert its influence upon the project which otherwise was in danger of being railroaded through with insufficient consultation by the District Council. Localism was seen as key and the Town Council pressed hard throughout to ensure that local voices and opinion was heard.
- In the early stages the Town Council tended to object to everything – however this proved counter-productive and the District Council and RegenCo lost confidence in the Council. Their strong advice was that the Parish Council should offer positive alternative proposals and be pro-active in working with the District Council.
- The Army moved very quickly once decisions on the closure of the site were formalised, which put additional pressure on the planning process.
- The original Masterplan, which was opined to have significant similarities to the SGB Masterplan, was published in 2012, Planning approvals were considered in 2014/15 and delivery commenced in 2016.
- Long-term planning assumptions were to build up to 10,000 new homes on the site, which over time reduced to 8,000 then 5,000.

Eventually a Natural England report suggested that a sustainable new town in that area should be around 2,500 new homes.

- Whilst the District Council advised that unless an agreement was made to build at least 5,000 new homes MoD would sell to the highest bidder – this proved to be a false assumption. At no time did MoD apply pressure to increase the number of homes to achieve maximum benefit.

#### **e. Development.**

4 x developers have been engaged on the site:

- Taylor Wimpey a national house-builder are the lead developer, providing 2,600 homes (Not all houses – incl apartment blocks). They have formed Whitehill and Bordon Development Company and are developing the main site “Prince Philip Park”. Further details at: (<https://www.princephilippark.co.uk>)
- Barratt/David Wilson Homes – 500 Homes - A National house builder – David Wilson Homes provide premier homes with the Barratt group.
- Radian Homes – 500 Homes of which 100 will be ‘Social Housing’. On their website Radian homes are described as:
  - Manage and develop homes across the south of England, including general needs housing, supported housing and housing for the over 60s.
  - *We strive to create conditions where our residents, people we support, communities and staff can flourish. We aim for excellence in all of the services that we offer. We are a diverse and vibrant social business, with a strong sense of commercial reality.*
  - *With a turnover in excess of £137m, our financial strength allows us to invest in working with our local authority partners to help them meet their strategic objectives.*
  - *The majority of our stock is general needs housing, but it also includes a significant portfolio of sheltered and supported housing, together with key worker accommodation, shared ownership, market rent and private sale properties.*
- The Town Council has developed close working links with each provider.

#### **f. Developers Insight.**

Speaking to Site Management and Sales Staff the following points were raised:

- The majority of new buyers were from more expensive parts of Hampshire and Surrey seeking more affordable or first time properties. The vast majority intended to continue with their present employment

and commute to Guildford / Portsmouth / Southampton and London. For the majority, this resulted in increased commuting despite the daily 6 mile queue on the A3 to enter Guildford and the remarkably slow and unreliable rail links from local stations (Liphook and Liss) to London.

- It was proving hugely difficult to find appropriate local construction / management staff – majority commute to site from Portsmouth / Southampton.
- Houses prices on the site needed to be lower than the regional norm to attract buyers. As one member of staff put it “I would not live here”.
- Though building was in the early stages there was already a very uneasy relationship between aspiring young professionals buying shared ownership homes and those living in social housing. The biggest problem was a refusal by some to park in allocated spaces and ‘care’ for the environment/community.
- Houses were a mix of 1 and 2 bed apartments in large blocks and 2,3 and 4 bed houses of varying designs. Typical house prices ranged from £310,000 for a 2 bed Semi-Detached to £470,000 for a detached 4 bed house.
- House sizes ranged from 855 Square Feet to 1,350 Square Feet
- Parking is a hugely significant problem albeit with 2 or more parking spaces and a garage for the majority of houses.
- Despite the best efforts of the developer, a sense of community was difficult to instil especially for those commuting to work.
- Promised public transport enhancements had not been delivered and it was deemed not practicable to live / work without 2 cars / family.
- Facilities provided for business set up and training were largely unused.
- House sales were going well but there were concerns that the proposed speed of development may need to be managed carefully to ensure that number of empty properties does not escalate.

## **COMMUNITY FACILITIES**

16. Because of the proximity of local SSIs the Developer was required to provide two x SANG (Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace) which are dedicated areas of green space for community activities. Over 100 hectares of green space is set aside for community activities. 750,000 shrubs and trees are being provided within what is already a well-forested area. The Town Council expressed concern at the cost of long-term maintenance for these and other community facilities that were being delegated from the District Council. A Community Trust has been developed in conjunction with District Council, Town Council and developers to manage and control key community assets including buildings.

17. Deep buffer zones have been provided to try and break up the sheer density of the site. The size of the site is simply overwhelming with row upon row of modern houses spread over a huge area. The style of homes is entirely contemporary, and does not match other local homes.

18. Within the site the following community facilities have been / are being provided, this incorporate a number of heritage buildings on the site:

- Sports Club including pitches and club facilities
- Community Enterprise Hub and Café
- Future Skills Centre
- Business Enterprise Park
- New Secondary School
- Extended Infants and Junior Schools
- Theatre and Arts Centre
- Skate Park
- Church
- Town Centre incorporating new public service hub, health hub, leisure centre and up to 20 x High Street Shops as well as Restaurant, Pub, Cafes

19. The Town Council re-iterated that a new town sized development required new town sized facilities, including a shopping centre.

20. A new Relief Road is being built which will by-pass the current town. However, the relief road has been built within feet of front doors within the development. It will certainly require substantial traffic calming measures.

## **CURRENT LOCAL FACILITIES / SERVICES**

21. Whitehill/Bordon already has a number of significant local facilities including: Shops / Post Office / Take away food outlets / Library / Sports facilities / Community Centre / Citizens Advice / 2 x Major Supermarkets, Garages, Industrial units, a large out of town retail outlet. The Council currently manages 18 green spaces, outdoor area and facilities excl the new development. The current Band D property precept is £88.08

22. Concern was expressed at the lack of additional Police resources for a town of this size.

## **YOUTH ACTIVITIES**

23. Youth activities remain a significant challenge. Vandalism and Crime have increased significantly since the initial area of development (Quebec) was completed. For instance every bus shelter with the Parish boundary has been smashed. The cost of anti-social behavior / vandalism in the past year has been over £8,000.

## **MoD QUARTERS**

There remain substantial numbers of MoD Quarters within the redevelopment area. Many of these are in a very poor state and have become an



embarrassment to both the Town Council and developers. Whole streets of houses stand unoccupied and have become a target for vandalism.

## **SUMMARY**

24. A huge number of tasks and opportunities lie ahead. The Parish Councils need to rise to the opportunity and deliver for their current and future communities. This will require clear oversight of the project at every stage and the ability to influence the decision making cycle. The experience of Bordon is useful, however the two locations have little in common other than the scale of the proposed new towns. Key to success will be 'localism' and driving RCC to ensure that what is delivered is 'Right for Rutland'.

25. Whilst the Bordon development has many similarities to that of the proposed Edith Weston/North Luffenham site, there are also marked differences. The area is ripe for regeneration and without the military, the town has, in part, lost its purpose. Developers report that the need for new homes in the area is high and the development is attractive largely due to its comparatively low prices reflecting its isolation from high cost areas in Hampshire, Surrey and neighbouring counties. A further draw has been its proposed wide-ranging shopping, catering and leisure facilities. The reverse side of this particular coin has resulted in whole-scale commuting from the site and the potential of creating a dormitory town for Guildford, London, Portsmouth and Southampton.

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