

# Stockport Local Plan

## Liberal Democrat Group Response

### Introduction

Stockport remains amongst the most attractive and pleasant places to live in Greater Manchester. The challenges of the future include the projected growth of population and the need for increased housing stock, improved and viable employment sites and interconnected public and private transport. Whilst we recognise the need for more housing development within Stockport we have concerns that the present target of 19300 home by 2035 is unsubstantiated and may be too high. Political and economic factors post Brexit and technological change around electric and autonomous vehicles may have a major impact on our future development needs.

The Liberal Democrat Group response to the Stockport Local Plan consultation is based on a number of key principles that aim to maintain and improve the quality of life in Stockport for all residents.

- A commitment to protecting, maintaining, and improving the parks and leisure greenspace within Stockport. We would oppose the use of any parkland for any development.
- A commitment to develop brownfield sites before the consideration of greenfield sites.
- A commitment to make developers with planning approval but sitting on land to either commence building works or risk the planning approval being withdrawn.
- A commitment to ensure long term empty properties are brought back into use with the use of CPO powers and not allowed to blight neighbourhoods.
- A commitment to building new homes around existing and new transport hubs with suitable transport, medical, educational and social infrastructure in place as the development takes place.
- A commitment to developing a broad range of housing allowing people to move as their housing needs change with age. This would include mixes of tenure including affordable and social rent.
- A commitment to use strategic road development, including the M60 – A6 bypass to improve residents' quality of life by redirecting traffic away from residential areas within the borough.
- A commitment to a flexible 2-stage plan with a commitment to no or minimal greenbelt development for at least 10 years. This is to allow for a comprehensive review when the effects of Brexit and technological developments will be clearer.

We must ensure that all brownfield sites are fully developed before any greenspace is released to both protect our greenspace and to avoid the impact of any future economic and technological developments.

## **Response to questions.**

### **Jobs and the Roles of Town and District Centres**

#### **1. What Type of Town Centre do you want to see in Stockport.**

Having been allowed to grow strongly over time, the retail area probably needs to become slightly more compact to reflect the changing economic situation.

The town centre needs to shift further from being retail focused to experience focused, with more food drink and leisure opportunities. Independent shops should be clustered in the "Old Town". A combination of the planning system, financial incentives, proactive intervention and using council-owned properties can help achieve this.

More new homes should be built in the Town Centre, treating the railway station and transport interchange as hubs to cluster apartments around necessitating fewer parking places due to the proximity of other transport options.

#### **2. What mix of shops and services would you like to see in your district and local centres?**

A good mix of retail, cafes, restaurants, pubs and a limited number hot food takeaways. Stricter planning rules should be introduced to allow the council to limit hot food takeaways.

At District level, the good mix of retail should include local food shops and not just convenience stores which the major supermarket chains are now concentrating on. District Centres will only be attractive if they have an interesting mix of retail as well as cafes, pubs, etc. Services such as libraries, health centres, post offices, and banks could share facilities.

More apartments in district and local centres are appropriate in some cases. Examples could include dwellings appropriate for elderly people, thereby freeing up family homes in the area, and dwellings around places with good connectivity and cycle facilities, to reduce the likelihood of car use.

#### **3. What types of jobs should there be in Stockport, where should they be and what should happen to the existing areas where people work?**

We would like to see as wide a range of employment opportunities within Stockport as possible and within all sectors. We should be guided in the first instance by the Independent Economic Review (IER) to prioritise types of jobs in the borough. The council should be bolder about agreeing with our partners which sorts of jobs we will promote in Stockport and then working to attract and expand companies.

We acknowledge that, as the regional capital, Manchester will remain by far the biggest area of employment and we should plan accordingly. We should take a more

flexible approach to areas designated for employment considering the increased demand for housing within the borough.

Central Manchester is likely to become increasingly important as a centre for specialist services such as in the financial sector. Stockport, through high quality education could, produce the skilled people to take career jobs. However, the inequalities in educational attainment are still a major challenge and the development of disruptive technologies may make it even more difficult to provide satisfying careers.

As far as possible, larger employment areas should be easily accessible by public transport.

Cheadle Royal should be reviewed to try to address the traffic and parking problems generated by this development especially in the light of new proposed developments in Cheshire East.

Finally, with the increase in home working and small businesses based around the borough, there is an urgent need for superfast broadband to be rolled out to all areas, including rural areas such as Mellor and Strines.

#### **4. Do you have any other comments about jobs, shops and services in Stockport?**

The town centre could perform better as an employment location if it were a more attractive hub with improved public realm. The council needs to look for imaginative and collaborative ways to improve the appearance of privately-owned buildings, including making use of the GM Mayor's increased CPO powers.

## **Health Culture and Communities**

### **5. What facilities do you think are most important to have in your local areas to support a good quality of life?**

The Lib Dems are committed to ensuring local facilities accessible to all within our local communities. These include good quality secondary and primary schools with sufficient places, GP, district nurse and pharmacy services, local community and meeting facilities, parks and informal recreational areas, sports centres and swimming pools, and well connected local transport.

Increasingly people travel by car to facilities outside their local community. This creates problems for those dependent on public transport, especially young people and the elderly. For example, the last bus from Stepping Hill Hospital to Cheadle Hulme is 6:45 p.m. and there are only couple of through-buses a day to Wythenshawe Hospital and the airport. Some localities such as Brinnington no longer have a local pub.

### **6. How and where do you think those important uses and facilities should be provided?**

The services should be provided within the local community or along established public transport routes when shared between neighbouring communities.

### **7. How can the Local Plan balance the need to ensure land is available for development with the need to create places where people want to live?**

The Lib Dem group believe that the creation of developments without the local facilities as described above would result in blighted, damaged communities. New developments need to be built with appropriate local infrastructure and at a suitable density to ensure local facilities are available.

### **8. Do you have any other comments about the various types of community facilities in Stockport?**

## **Where We Live and the Types of Homes We Live In**

### **9. Where should new housing and places to live be located?**

Any new housing should be built first of all on brownfield sites, around transport hubs, near rail stations and transport interchanges. Any building should start in existing towns and villages. We should be open to repurposing old mills and excess office and retail spaces for residential development. We should consider greenfield sites only when we have run out of previously developed land. Greenbelt should be protected wherever possible.

### **10. What should be the balance of new housing types, sizes, development design and density?**

We should be open to town centre housing being of higher density, more along the lines of European towns and cities. We need to be more imaginative in how we achieve the sort of towns and villages most people want. This is with local shops and cafes to which people can walk or cycle. To do this we need to have enough people living within a short walk and cycle ride to shops and cafes to make them viable.

As a society we are living longer, with an increased incidence of conditions such as obesity, diabetes and dementia. Many of our older residents need support in their later years and we need to plan for appropriate housing to match their needs.

New housing needs to be built to decent minimum standards. Starter homes are a good idea but they need to be priced accordingly so that purchasers are not paying over the odds to get onto the housing ladder. There should be encouragement of new build for rental at reasonable market rents so that dependence on rogue landlords is reduced.

### **11. If you have struggled to find a home in Stockport, what have the problems been and how do you think the planning process can help with these issues in the future?**

People of all ages have difficulty finding suitable accommodation, both in the owner-occupier and private rented sector due to affordability. Many older residents in owner occupied homes have difficulty downsizing due to a lack of suitable smaller properties. Families with children have difficulty finding larger homes again due to older resident's inability to downsize.

Young people have great difficulty becoming independent and leaving parental homes due to the high level of rents, and the unaffordability of purchase coupled with the inability to raise a deposit for purchase. Despite several new developments over the past decade, there continue to be very long waiting lists for all social housing across Stockport.

The housing market in both the rented and owner-occupied sectors is failing to meet the needs of residents. The lack of supply of a range of homes of all tenures and

sizes does not allow enough people to move on when their housing needs change through the course of their life.

The planning system must enable and encourage developers to build a wide range of properties to serve people at different stages of their lives to allow a more efficient use of housing resources. The pressure on developers is to provide large detached houses as they produce the most profit. We need to develop policies to encourage developers to build a wider range of properties.

## **12. Do you have any other comments about housing provision in Stockport.**

The problem with all of this is deliverability. We need to make brown field sites profitable for developers. If developers can't make a profit from it, it won't happen.

We need innovative ways to unlock those sites and make them viable.

One option builds on the approach the Lib Dems took in Brinnington, working with Countryside Living to develop a scheme that worked commercially. It involves looking for construction companies willing to innovate. (Construction has seen the worst increases in productivity of almost any industry). This will involve using the Mayor's CPO powers to deliver the sites we need to develop. It means developing finance vehicles like the £300m rolling GM fund and developing partnerships with builders willing to accept smaller profit margins for an agreed long-term supply of developable sites within Stockport.

We also need a two-stage approach. Population growth may stall post Brexit. Moreover the first self-drive vehicles are likely to be on Stockport's roads in 2018. If they are common by 2030, they could revolutionise the way we use space, freeing up huge amounts of land currently used for car parking and allowing us to build there. It is too early to tell whether this is viable and so a two stage approach is advisable.

This means building in urban areas first and leaving Green Belt until there is no other option, as it may never be needed. Developers will clearly argue for the reverse as Green Belt is often cheaper and easier to develop than brownfield sites, and this needs to be resisted.

We also need to ensure developers with planning permission but just sitting on sites are encouraged to get on with building homes or risk losing their planning permission.

We welcome the appearance and content of the type of houses built for Stockport Homes next to the Cross Keys pub on Adswood Road. These were factory built in sections and transported to the site where the sections were assembled. We welcome and encourage such innovation in housing construction and design.

## **Our Green Spaces and Places**

### **13. What types of open space should we provide for the growing population and how should we make use of the existing spaces?**

Green Spaces are essential to ensure the wellbeing of Stockport residents. We should maintain existing spaces, improve facilities, and ensure our green spaces are accessible to all. Wild meadows are great for dog walkers, but we need more adult exercise equipment, high quality Multi-Use Games Areas, skateboard ramps etc.

### **14. How can the council encourage the redevelopment of brownfield land, rather than green spaces, to help provide enough housing and jobs?**

#### **This is repeated from the Housing question Q 12**

See comments on housing q12 which comprehensively answers this question. It talks about using the Mayor's CPO powers and working with developers to create a dependable pipeline of builds.

We need a realistic approach that doesn't leave us with low-density development covering the greenbelt unnecessarily. That means building in urban areas first and protecting Green Belt until all other options are fully explored.

### **15. If the current supply of land within the urban area is not sufficient to meet need, what land should be used for new homes and places to work? If you don't think that Green Belt should be used, what alternative would you suggest and why?**

We need a two-stage local plan. Stage one (the first ten years) would have no or minimal greenbelt release and focus on brownfield development. Stage two (the second ten years) would depend on what happened. If nothing else changed (e.g. technology, government approach) then there may be no alternative but to release greenbelt land. However, if we had changes such as autonomous cars changing car use patterns, improved CPO powers and funding to make more sites viable, and reduced economic and population growth due to Brexit, greenbelt release may not be needed at all.

We want to avoid a situation where we release the greenbelt, it gets built on first because it's the easy and cheap option, and we look back in 20 years' time at a sprawling, polluted, low-density borough with poor public transport and isolated communities.

### **16. Do you have any other comments about the various types of green space and the Green Belt in Stockport?**

We need to maintain and improve what we have and ensure that Stockport's Green spaces are accessible to all.

## Transport and Infrastructure

**Q17 The SEMMMS Refresh will be looking at all aspects of transport provision in the area. What are the key issues for transport in Stockport and what do you think should be done to improve things across all types of transport use?**

The primary considerations for transport provision should be:

- Ease of movement
- Connectivity
- Environmental impact

Peak period congestion is rightly identified across Stockport, with major routes such as M60, A6, A34, A560 and A626 at risk of becoming unfit for purpose at certain times. Traffic, like water, will always find a way, as such we see increased, displaced traffic on smaller residential roads.

Road improvements such as A6MARR, Poynton Relief Road and M60 Smart Motorway should offer some relief.

A top priority should be the completion of the M60 to A6 bypass. This has been shown by numerous studies to alleviate the traffic congestion on residential roads and major distribution roads around Stockport.

However, ultimately, we need to push for regular, environmentally friendly mass passenger systems. For now, this means train, tram and express bus services. These transport methods offer the best chance to reduce journey times and road congestion.

Given the poor connectivity for some areas of Stockport, there is a clear need to offer bus services that link to existing and future train and trams services

Public transport provision is a major issue. Inter connectivity and through ticketing is needed, as bus/bus or bus/rail or rail/tram interlining can be expensive. Transport Information is poorly provided and mainly designed for existing users. Car sharing needs developing both for work and leisure related travel.

Across the borough, we need to continue to encourage walking and cycling as an alternative for appropriate journeys. To this end, a cycle lending scheme should be considered at hubs throughout the borough.

**Q18 We believe that new developments should contribute towards extra infrastructure to make sure they are safe and sustainable. What are the priorities for your community?**

Any new developments should include a unified TfGM, Stockport Council and developer commitment to travel plans.

As an example, the development at Cheadle Royal Business Park is marred by poor planning for public transport, vehicle connectivity and lack of parking. Such



considerations cannot be repeated elsewhere. All these issues have a wider effect of the local community as well as businesses in the park.

**Q19 How and where should low carbon and renewable energy developments be provided in Stockport?**

Stockport Lib Dems led the development of solar power on social housing stock and municipal buildings to the benefit of Stockport Homes' tenants and the general population. The planning system should encourage suitable diffused microgeneration on suitable sites especially now as unit costs continue to drop.

The local geography lends itself to hydropower generation. Stockport Hydro is the larger of the two current schemes. It is based on the River Goyt at Otterspool and is a community owned social enterprise, demonstrating a model for further development of hydropower in Stockport. Other sites in Stockport could be identified within the planning process.

We must encourage both low carbon and renewable energy. The installation of electric vehicle charging points should be considered as standard when building new homes and parking facilities. We should be encouraging partners and suppliers to consider electric and low carbon vehicles when planning replacement fleets, and we should look to retro-fit charging points at council premises.

Stockport must be actively involved, with our partners, in work to improve the electricity grid for the forecast increased need in coming decades, along with work to exploit innovations around large-scale battery storage, which overcome one of the major challenges of renewable energy at a far lower cost than nuclear power.

**Q20 Do you have any other comments about transport and other types of infrastructure in Stockport?**

For the immediate future, Stockport residents are very likely to consider road transport as their primary means of travelling around the borough.

The environmental impact of this has detrimental effects on their health and it is vital to incorporate best practice to minimise both air and noise pollution to mitigate this. For example, there is a growing understanding of the potential for a green solution, using bushes to trap particulates, improve air quality and mask noise. We need to consider how to encourage their use in future developments.

Plans for new roads and road improvement schemes must indicate the environmental benefits expected for their completion.

The council should press for the development of rail links, specifically recommissioning stations on the line through Cheadle to Manchester Airport and a service from Marple, Romiley and Bredbury to Stockport, all backed by proper business cases.

Greater Manchester is years behind London in terms of a comprehensive, joined-up transport network and ticketing. As a start, the council should encourage Transport for Greater Manchester quickly to implement full smart, contactless ticketing across all rail systems and bus services, similar to that already successfully implemented by Transport for London.

**Q21 Do you have any other comments about the Stockport Local Plan?**

To make the Stockport Local Plan both workable and successful it cannot be divorced from a coherent transport strategy that addresses the needs of any new housing and other developments.

We remain extremely concerned about the viability of a Greater Manchester-wide Spatial Framework and believe that such a strategy is fundamentally flawed. It is our considered view that the Stockport Local Plan must have precedence.

The Liberal Democrats believe that our Local Plan should include firm, costed proposals to deal with the major areas of traffic congestion and pollution in the borough including the A6 and A34 corridors.