

## **Representation 2 from Blunsdon Action Group**

**18<sup>th</sup> Feb 2013**

**Policy Reference: SD1**

**Proposals Map Reference: 5**

### **1. Policy ref SD1 – unsound on the basis of justification and effectiveness**

#### **1.1 GDP**

Blunsdon Action Group believes the justifiability of the plan to be unsound on economic grounds.

The economic factors used in the production of the plan are from the height of the UK boom years 2006/7. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is how the UK measures growth. The highest UK GDP average over this period was 1.1% /year.

The plan at this stage of development called for 36,000, houses to be constructed up until 2026.

Due to the economic down turn the figures were reduced to 25,000 by SBC. At this time area 5 was not in the plan. However through consultation this figure was increased to 29,000.

The current GDP is negative 0.3%

The rolling year average to date is -0.75% and is now officially the worst financial recovery in history (ref Bank of England Governor's statements re Inflation Report 13<sup>th</sup> Feb 2013). The housing plan is based upon a growth of 1% per year in Swindon and is unrealistic with at least another two years of austerity. Even the Regeneris Report "Swindon Core Strategy: Economic Testing" published in Sep 2012 (section 4.18) focuses on a "higher growth scenario" largely based on a workshop with the major employers, most of whom have shed jobs since that meeting, therefore making the forecast already out of date and unrealistic.

Comments from business were received at a time when those businesses were expanding and hiring. That has now changed and there is no sign of any increased business activity in Swindon, in fact it is the contrary based on recent news from Honda, STC, TS Tech, JP Morgan, AGI Shorewood, Zurich and Swindon BC.

Blunsdon Action Group estimates the level of proposed housing growth is therefore excessive at over 300% more than the provision required to satisfy local need.

Para 3.23 states that local need is met by one third of the target 22 000 houses. This equates to 6600 houses, 440 per annum over 15 years. Yet the Local Plan seeks to provide 3 times this amount across the whole borough – and coincidentally at area 5 – and can only justify this requirement by over-inflating the economic picture. Therefore the economic basis for the projected development in area

5 and borough-wide is intrinsically false, and there is no evidence that there will be sufficient long term employment to sustain this excessive amount of housing growth.

NB Honda's recent news will remove 1100 jobs in manufacturing and potentially another 5,500 jobs in the local economy (SMMT estimated 1 manufacturing job =7.5 supporting jobs)

### ***1.2 Para 3.24 Development phasing***

There is no indication of how developments across all strategic sites will be phased. It could be that development at Kingsdown, which has previously been identified in the Core Strategy 2008 as less sustainable than Tadpole Farm, is not required if there is proper phasing of developments between strategic sites. This then would remove the risk of green field sites like area 5 being released unnecessarily, especially given the true economic picture of housing targets of 1200 dwellings per year being met only 4 times in the period 1996 to 2012.

### ***1.3 Swindon Borough Council/Wiltshire County Council***

BAG understands that a major disagreement has arisen between these two authorities on the plans to extend the Swindon new housing expansion to the west of Swindon and this has resulted in a shortfall in new housing stock planning for the required 5 year period. Combine that with the partial failure of house sales in the Wichelstowe (formerly Front Garden project 1500 homes per year for 5 to 6 years) and it seems that SBC's housing planning strategy is not sound. Therefore, the Blunsdon Action group totally opposes what seems to be an attempt to rebuild SBC's housing numbers strategy at the expense of Blunsdon, Wiltshire's Best Kept Village being overwhelmed by 1650 houses in NC5. We urge SBC to reduce the scale of housing growth and remove entirely the allocation of housing from Kingsdown (NC5) from the plan and determine how the housing need can be met through better strategic phasing across other more cost efficient sites.

### **Changes required:**

Swindon Borough Council is requested to revise its housing targets to realistic, deliverable and sustainable levels, appropriately taking account of the current local and national economic circumstances, as per attached figures from the Office of National Statistics (ONS).