WINCHESTER CITY COUNCIL – UPPER MEON VALLEY WARD

Updated, Parish update for Sept 2025

Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation update.

The initial public consultations on Hampshire County Council and East Hampshire District Council's preferred reorganisation options has now closed as of the 17th August and likewise, the 3 proposals put forward by a group consisting of Winchester City Council along with 13 other district councils and the existing unitary authorities closed on the 27th July. These consultations will inform the final proposals to be submitted to government this autumn, and residents will be consulted again on the chosen model before it is implemented.
Interestingly, the government has previously asserted that the merger of 21 areas into single authorities would save a significant amount of money. This week the BBC reported that the government based its cost estimates on a 2020 report by the County Council Network (CCN) and PwC that said that £2.9bn could be saved over five years if all two-tier areas were replaced by single authorities. The CCN in an updated analysis this year have said that the reorganisation could cost £850m over five years based on a minimum unitary population of 300,000 in all 21 two-tier areas.
Clearly, the government will face considerable financial pressure to create new councils of the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks. Given this analysis there will be increased pressure to form 'Mega Councils' of greater than 500,000 unitary populations.

Nutrient Neutrality

Resent casework has drawn our attention to just how thorny the issue of nutrient neutrality mitigation can be.
Natural England along with Defra and DLUHC as it was then, issued guidelines back in '22, updated in '23 and '24, regarding requirements to mitigate certain nutrient pollution in designated 'Habitats Sites' such as the Solent catchment area in particular, and the chalk streams such as the Itchen and the Meon rivers in our ward.
In particular, mitigation of Nitrates in the Meon catchment and both Phosphates and Nitrates in the Itchen catchment, is required for any development that increases levels of nutrients that could contribute to increased plant and algal blooms that then starve the waters of oxygen and lead to habitat loss. The sources of excess nutrients are largely from industrial and agricultural sources, approx. 80%, and sewage treatment works and septic tanks approx. 20%.
Any new development must therefore ensure that action is taken to prevent nutrient pollution impacting the site, or that offsite nutrient reduction measures are taken to offset this affecting the site overall. These offsite measures such as the creation of new wetlands, woodlands or grasslands etc. or even improvements to existing sewage treatment works within the catchment area, have in some cases been packaged into products and then traded are known as Nitrate or Phosphate credits.

The requirements of the regulations are for the relevant LPA (in this case the SDNPA) to ensure that the mitigation can be delivered in perpetuity. This is taken by the SDNPA to be 125 years in the case of residential uses. Any mitigation must be subject to a monitoring regime for the whole 125 year period and on a full cost recovery basis the SDNPA have recently quoted £28,000 to cover the costs. In addition to this there would be legal expenses associated with the S106 order required to document the agreement between the developer and the SDNPA.
As your ward councillors we are lobbying the relevant LPA for a more pragmatic and cost-effective approach particularly on smaller developments. The SDNPA are aware of this issue and are keen to see if there are ways of reducing these costs, but as it stands the quoted costs are reflective of the expense that they would be bound to incur over that period.
At the moment, the more cost-effective solution for applicants is to purchase nutrients credits to offset their scheme, and this is also a common solution for developments in Winchester and all the other affected LPAs outside of the SDNP. This is more straightforward in the Meon catchment as it is only nitrate credits that need to be purchased rather than phosphate credits, which are more difficult to secure and are also more expensive. Nitrates credits do still cost a lot of money, but this would be less than the cost of on-site mitigation with its attendant monitoring costs. As the number of credits required is calculated on the nutrients output of the development, the costs are also directly proportionate to the scale of the development. Where an applicant is able to demonstrate that credits have been reserved for purchase, then there is no need for a S106 agreement, which again would reduce costs.

We can all acknowledge the benefits of on-site mitigation compared to the purchase of off-site credits, but if an applicant is (understandably) driven by the comparative costs, then they should investigate credit purchase as an option.

The attached pdf is a list of Potential nutrient mitigation schemes, courtesy of Partnership for South Hampshire

Further information can also about be found in the following link:
https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/planning-applications/general-enquiries/nutrient-neutrality/

Kind Regards

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