

Sharpness: A sustainable development option for Stroud

22nd March 2010

Your District, Your Future –
Consultation Response

Core Strategy Consultation – Development at Sharpness

This representation is submitted in response to the Core Strategy consultation opened between the 8 February 2010 and 22 March 2010.

This representation promotes the development of land at Sharpness in preference to the options put forward by the Council.

In consideration of the future housing strategy for the District and in particular, the location for an area for future planned growth, consideration has been given to the national planning policy framework contained in Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs) and Planning Policy Statements (PPSs) as well as the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy and the extant Local Plan (2005).

Background

The Council's Document, "Your District, Your Future" has been published to stimulate responses to the development of the Core Strategy but primarily to seek opinions on the way to accommodate 2,000 new homes and to encourage the generation of new jobs in the District.

However, listed as being important in the future development of the District is how this future growth can be accommodated sustainably and build the District's resilience to climate change and minimise our contribution to it.

Proposition

This representation offers an alternative option for development which has not been identified within the Council's options documents.

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Compliance with National Planning Policy

PPS12 entitled Local Spatial Planning sets out the background to the creation and development of Local Development Frameworks.

The development plan is made up of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) which covers the whole region, and is produced in draft by the Regional Assembly and Development Plan Documents (DPD) produced by local planning authorities within the local development framework. The Core Strategy is the principal DPD.

The Core strategy is essentially a document produced by the local planning authority (LPA) which sets out the overall vision of how the area and the places within it should be developed. This development vision is informed by an analysis of the characteristics of the area and its constituent parts and the key issues and challenges which face them.

The vision should be in general conformity with RSS and should coincide with a sustainable development strategy.

The Core Strategy should make clear the spatial choices about where developments should go in broad terms. Development locations are expected to be consistent with national planning policy and in general conformity with regional spatial strategy.

Core Strategies are also expected to be justified and founded on a robust and credible evidence base as well as being regarded as the most appropriate strategy when considered against reasonable alternatives. Reasonable alternatives should be realistic proposals and not simply invented to support the adoption of a primary option.

Community engagement is considered to be a central theme in the preparation of Core Strategies

as part of a planned and transparent development strategy for the District.

A Core Strategy should also show how the vision of growth will be delivered and by whom and when.

Primary Growth Considerations

The accommodation of 2,000 new homes within the District will present significant problems within a District which is highly constrained by the physical, historic and natural landscape of the area.

The principal towns of the District are Stroud/Stonehouse and Cam/Dursley. Stroud/Stonehouse is where the main services and employment for the District are concentrated and both towns have reasonably good access to the M5 via the A417.

Both Stroud and Stonehouse are however heavily constrained by the AONB landscape to the east where major development would be unacceptable. Development to the north of Stonehouse would also be undesirable as this would lessen the gap between Gloucester and Stonehouse leading to their inevitable coalescence in due course.

This area also has a scattering of smaller close knit villages which would be absorbed into the Stroud/Stonehouse conurbation if development

It is apparent that the infrastructure in this area is also at capacity during peak times which would only be exacerbated by further growth at this location. Within Stroud and the surrounding hinterland, much of the infrastructure has a historical base which would just not be able to cope with additional 'bolt-on' growth.

Cam is comparatively smaller than Stroud and Stonehouse with only a limited range of shops and services. Cam is equally constrained by the AONB to the south and south west, with land rising sharply to the west and east. Strategic development in this location would struggle relate to the established settlement and would fail to provide any sustainable benefits for the District.

Additional housing 'bolt-ons' to Stroud/ Stoundhouse, Eastington or Cam would fail to have any physical or cultural relationship to the settlements upon which they were attached and equally would be placing development which, whilst physically joined to the settlement would be distant to the main services that the existing settlements provide.

These locations are therefore considered to be inappropriate options for the future development of Stroud District.

AONB Considerations

It is noted that some of the proposed development options comprise of significant numbers of new housing within the Cotswold AONB, especially in the Ruscombe, Randwick and Painswick areas.

The Cotswold AONB is a nationally designated landscape area which is afforded the highest level of protection by both national and local planning policy. Any strategic development advanced within these areas within the Core Strategy would

PPS3: Housing – Providing housing in suitable locations

In support of its objective of creating mixed and sustainable communities, the Government's policy is to ensure that housing is developed in suitable locations which offer a range of community facilities and with good access to jobs, key services and infrastructure. This should be achieved by making effective use of land, existing infrastructure and available public and private investment.

PPS3 sets out that the priority for development should be on previously developed land, in particular vacant and derelict sites and buildings.

Paragraph 37 of PPS3 sets out that RSS should identify broad locations for growth so that the demand for housing can be addressed in a way that reflects sustainable development principles.

In this paragraph it is accepted that circumstances across the region or sub-regional housing market may be different and where demand is high, it will be necessary for RSS and LDFs to explore a range of options for distributing housing including the consideration of a growth area or even a new free-standing settlement.

PPS1: Eco Towns

It is considered that the only viable option for the allocation of housing in the District would be the concentration of development into one growth location. It is considered that all the other options proposed are tantamount to dispersal where no major sustainable benefits would be achieved and accordingly should be dismissed.

The concentration of 2,000 dwellings in one location has considerable merit and provides a mass of development that could deliver significant

community and infrastructure benefits. This option should also be utilised to ensure that further sympathetic growth could be added to this development in the future to ensure that Stroud District has an identified and appropriate growth centre where subsequent growth, post 2026 can be focused and planned accordingly.

The Government's initiative for Eco-Towns set out in PPS1: Eco-Towns, July 2009 seeks to achieve new development which are exemplars of good practice and provide a showcase for sustainable living which allow communities to develop greener, low carbon living.

Paragraph 1 of this PPS sets out that these policies should be taken into account by local planning authorities in the preparation of local development documents.

Paragraph ET4 of this PPS states:

“Eco-Towns are one of a range of options local planning authorities should consider when determining how to meet their current or emerging housing requirements set out in the RSS. Eco-towns should be allocated as a strategic development option within the Core Strategy, but may also be considered as part of an Area Action Plan or Allocations DPD where the Core Strategy has already been adopted.” (our emphasis)

Regional Spatial Strategy

The Regional Spatial Strategy looks to concentrate most of Gloucestershire's growth towards the Gloucester and Cheltenham HMAs. Policy A of the RSS addresses this growth and prioritises major growth in the Strategically Significant Cities and Towns (SSCTs).

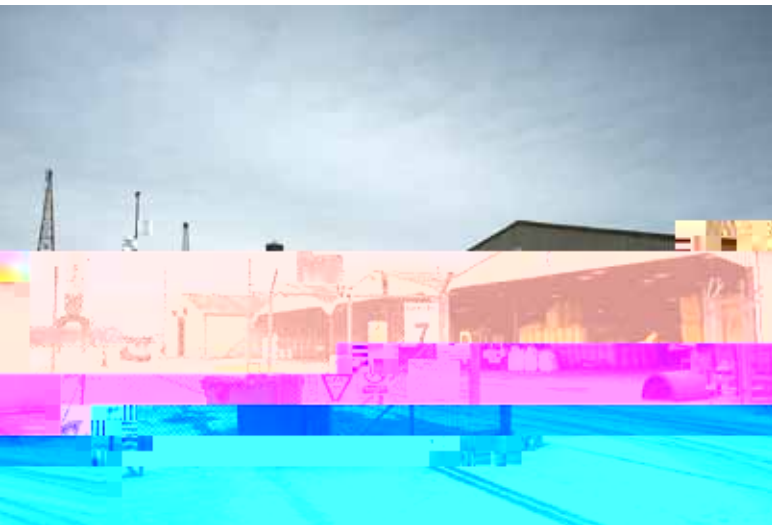
Outside these areas, Policy B deals with growth at smaller towns. In some districts there may be few or no towns which meet all the criteria of Development Policy B, and in these cases districts should take account of the functional role of settlements beyond their boundaries as well as identifying those settlements with the potential to play a more strategic role locally and allocate development accordingly. Policy B seeks to ensure that growth in smaller towns occurs where there is an existing concentration of employment and business in existence and where this can realistically be expanded and enhanced.

Whilst it is accepted that most of the development for Gloucestershire will be concentrated in and around Gloucester and Cheltenham there is clearly additional growth that will need to be accommodated in Stroud District.

The RSS does recognise that characteristics of each district will vary and that there may be opportunities (in conjunction with the Eco Towns PPS) to explore the role of an expanded or new settlement option.

Development at Sharpness

Both national and development plan policy therefore supports the concentration and expansion of Sharpness to assist in the future development of the District and accordingly the local planning authority has the ability to chose this location for a concentrated centre for planned future growth. The concentration of growth could be achieved by the creation of the elementary phases of an Eco-Town which can be expanded upon post 2026.



The proposed Eco-Town should be designed to be a sustainable community that is resilient to and appropriate for the climate change now accepted as inevitable. It should be planned to minimise future vulnerability in changing climate, and with both mitigation and adaptation in mind.

The proposed homes in the Eco-Town should be in accordance with paragraph ET9 of PPS1. In summary they should be:

1. Built to Code Level 4 and above;
2. Meet life time homes standards;
3. Have real time energy monitoring systems;
4. Have real time public transport information;
5. Access to high speed broadband;
6. Provide for an element of affordable housing;

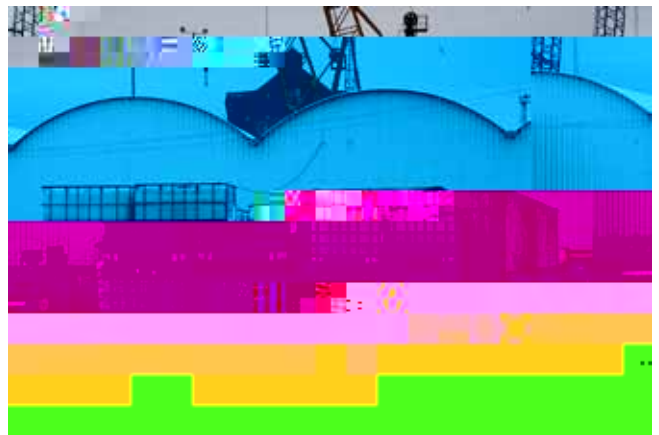
7. Demonstrate high levels of efficiency in the fabric of the building; and
8. Achieve carbon reductions of at least 70% relative to the current Building Regulations.

The proposal should also be a genuinely mixed community with approximately one employment opportunity per new dwelling. Transport options should prioritise public transport as well as walking and cycling and other sustainable means of travel.

Development at Sharpness would provide:

1. The regeneration of significant areas of brownfield land;
2. The re-provision of a rail connection to the Bristol-Birmingham rail line;
3. Assist in providing housing next to existing employment;
4. Allow for the creation of new sustainable employment opportunities;
5. Allow for the provision of community based energy supplies;
6. Provide for sustainable modes of transport by rail and water;
7. Provide development on flat, unconstrained land; and
8. Provide areas for future planned growth.

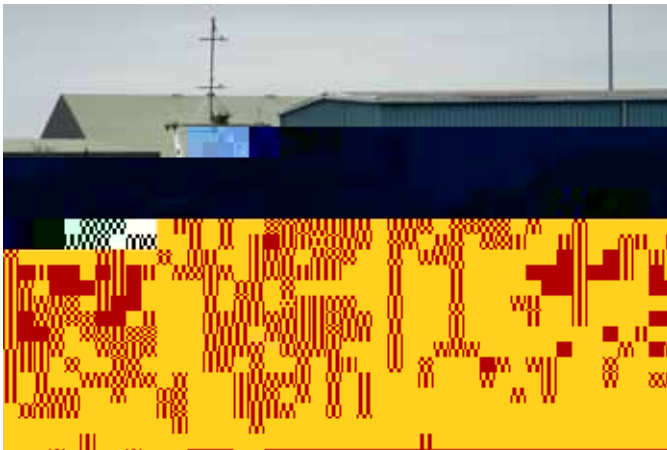
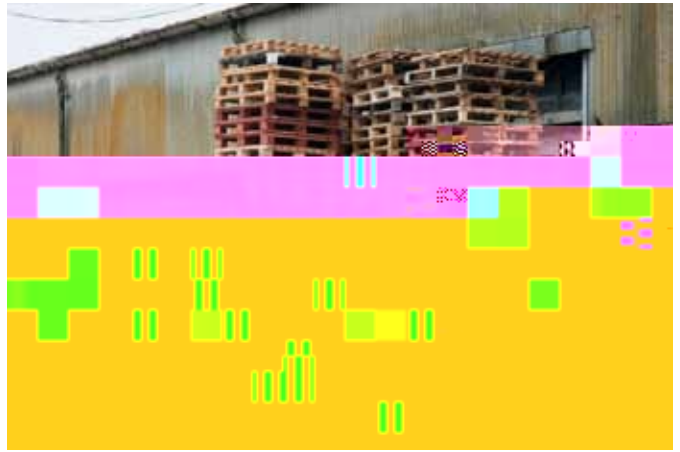
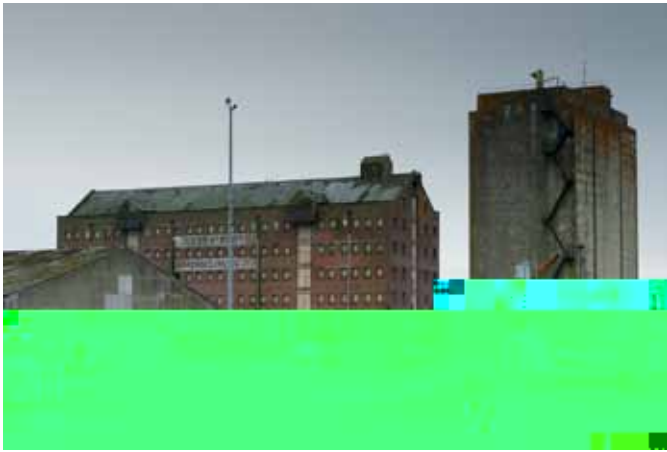
In providing a growth spot for the future, unacceptable development pressures would be removed from more sensitive parts of the District and would ensure that uncharacteristic 'bolt-ons' are avoided.



The un-wanted expansion of smaller settlements, such as Eastington would also be avoided and the character of our existing towns and villages would be maintained.

The threat of development in the Cotswold AONB would also be removed.

Sympathetic organic growth in the District's towns and villages could continue to provide for local need but the main strategic growth for the District



Sharpness – background

Sharpness is Stroud District's largest operating dock. The site currently benefits from an allocation of approximately 18 hectares of employment with additional employment land currently being sought by Howard Tenens to accommodate their future growth.

The employment allocations at Sharpness are one of the largest in the District and have struggled to be developed successfully since the 1980s. British Waterways, who are one of the major landowners in the area are committed to providing employment in this area and have continued to rigorously market the site for new employment development. However, the take up of employment land in this area has failed to be successful as there is a limited amount of housing in the immediate vicinity to support the employment growth. The framework to achieve a balanced community can only be achieved through addressing the planning policy situation relating to Sharpness and ensuring that there is a balancing supply of housing to support the employment growth.

The proposal for Sharpness therefore seeks to further promote the employment use of Sharpness by creating new housing development to the south of the docks as well as create new employment opportunities. This provision of housing will need to be carefully phased to enable a community to develop and the employment to grow. However, the provision of housing alone is not considered to be sufficient to create a balanced community in which people can both live and work. It is recognised that all new development will need to be carefully integrated into the existing settlement at Newtown and Sharpness. Although there is an existing level of shops and services in these settlements, it is considered that a new local centre will be created with the Eco-Town proposal to support the expanded growth of the settlement.

Transport and Highways

An Eco-Town at Sharpness will provide the opportunity to develop a transport infrastructure that will serve a balanced community that will be largely self-contained, thereby reducing the need to travel, especially by car. New housing will be built close to areas of employment, local shops, recreation and leisure facilities. As the main day to day facilities will be provided within the settlement, there will be a reduced need to travel outside the immediate area which will help contain the number and length of vehicular journeys.

The settlement will be planned from the outset to enable as many journeys as possible to be made on foot or by cycle. With the provision of improved public transport facilities, the proposals will result in a settlement that is not dependant on the private car and will support a transport infrastructure which will achieve sustainable development principles. The provision of an expanded settlement at Sharpness would therefore compliment the transport objectives of the County.

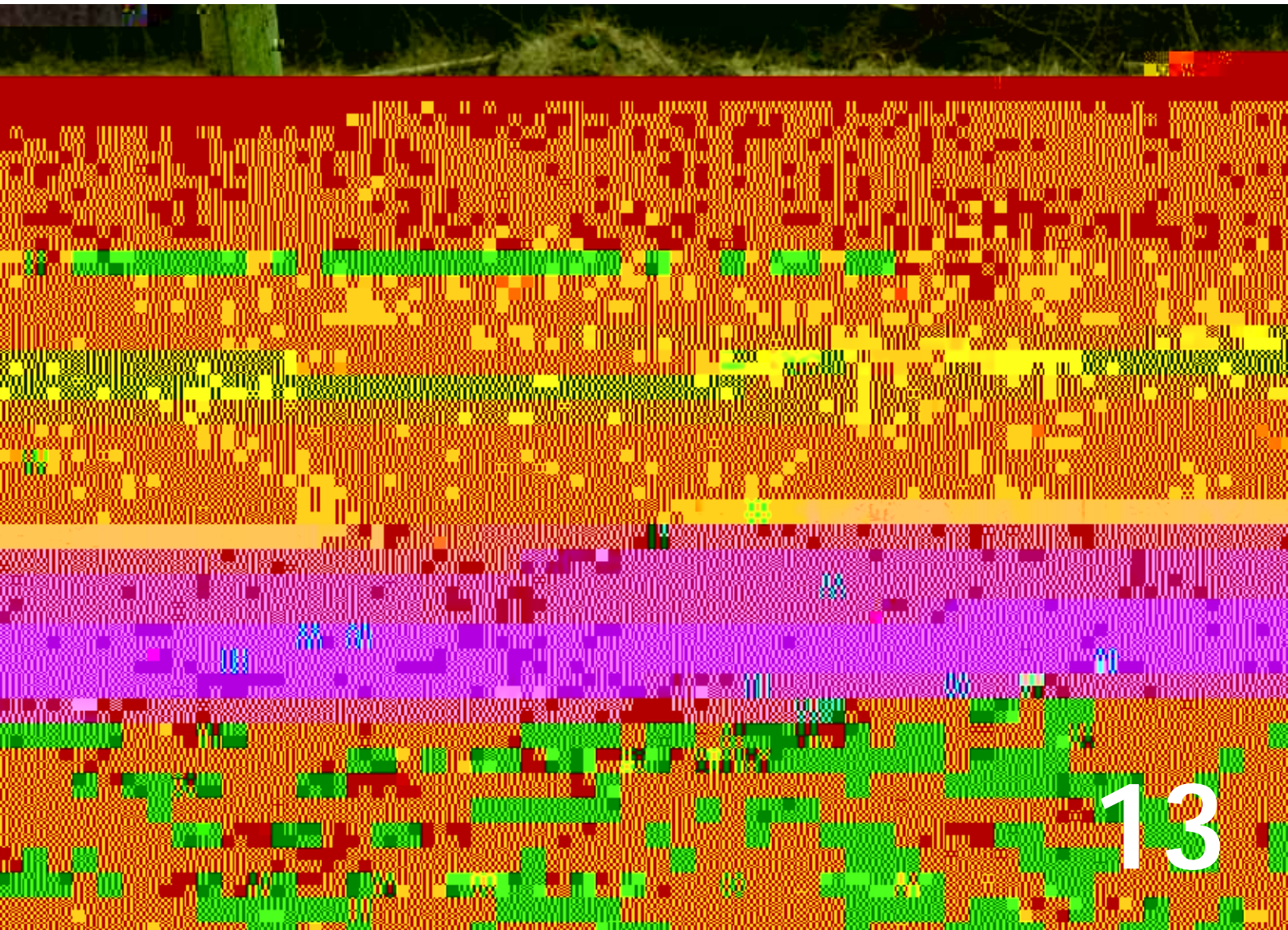
The County Council have previously identified proposals for providing a new route to replace the un-modernised 1.7km long section of the B4066 between the A38 and the roundabout at Mobley. This new route would comprise a 1.5km section of road between Heathfield on the A38 and the roundabout at Mobley. A new roundabout would be provided on the A38. Although the route has previously been safeguarded, there are no funding proposals identified to complete the by-pass in the foreseeable future. The proposed Eco-Town at Sharpness would help fund the completion of the by pass and allow it to be introduced at an early stage.

Alternative Modes of Transport

In developing a land use strategy, the settlement will be designed to encourage walking, cycling and public transport use, so that there will be a genuine choice of travel other than the private car. The development will be based on the principle of sustainability by reducing the need to travel and thereby reducing resource consumption and environmental impact and increasing safety and accessibility for all. Measures will be introduced to provide safe and convenient conditions for pedestrians and cyclists. Route networks will link residential areas with the areas of employment, shopping, education and leisure.

Bus

The provision of the fiM8ciM3



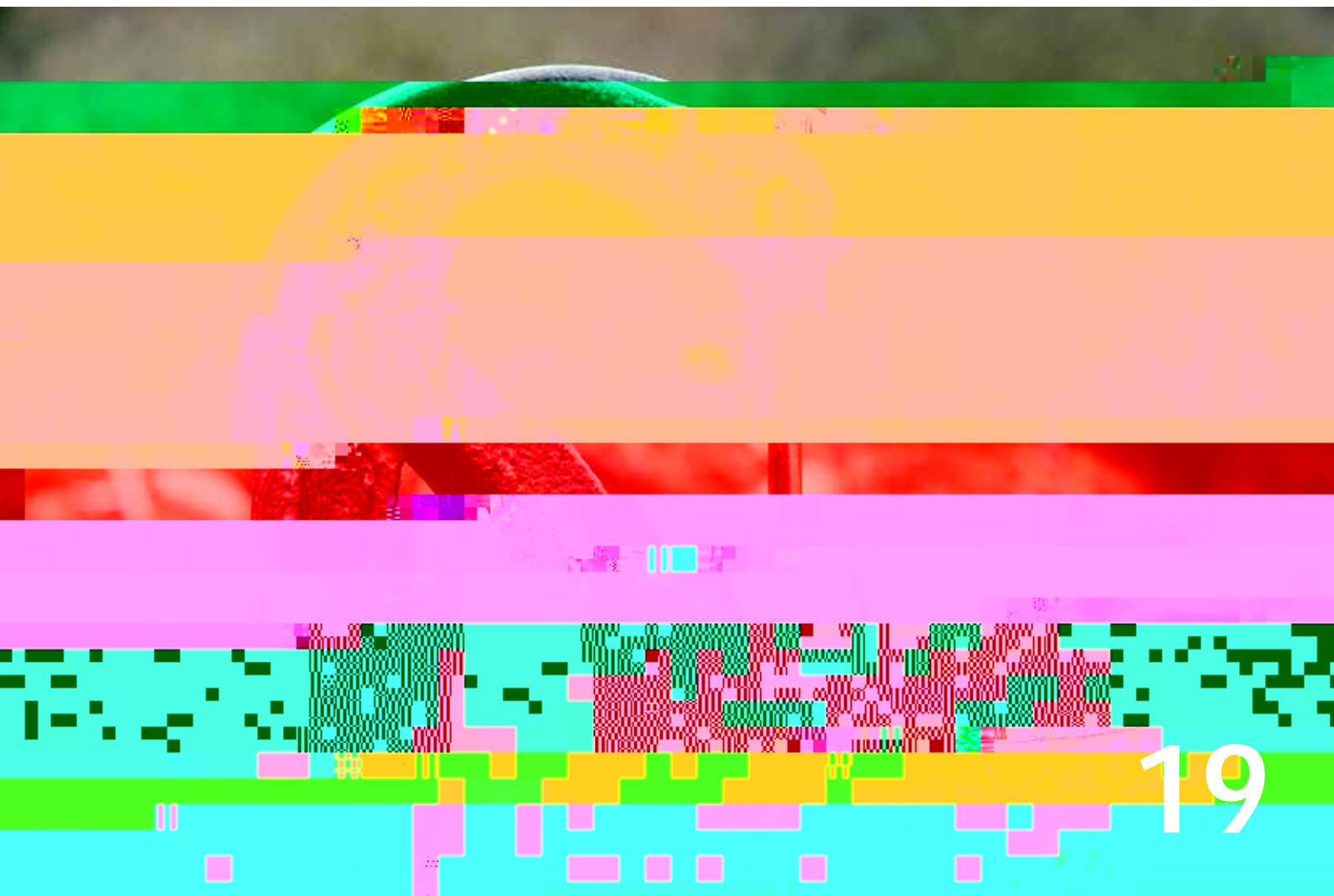
Energy Options

A major goal for the designers of Sharpness will be to provide a development that will not rely on fossil fuels for its power. This allied to high standards in energy efficient design and construction, will ensure that the new settlement can become established as a leading example of sustainable development.

It is unlikely that it will be possible to achieve complete independence of supply and connection to the local power grid will remain essential to ensure continuity of supply in all eventualities. However, if it is possible to build and operate a generation facility within the scheme that provides a total annual output in terms of units of







Beyond 2026

It is an unrealistic prospect to consider that Stroud's existing settlements will be able to absorb further bolt on developments now or beyond 2026 and it has previously been recognised that Stroud District may need to accommodate a new settlement.

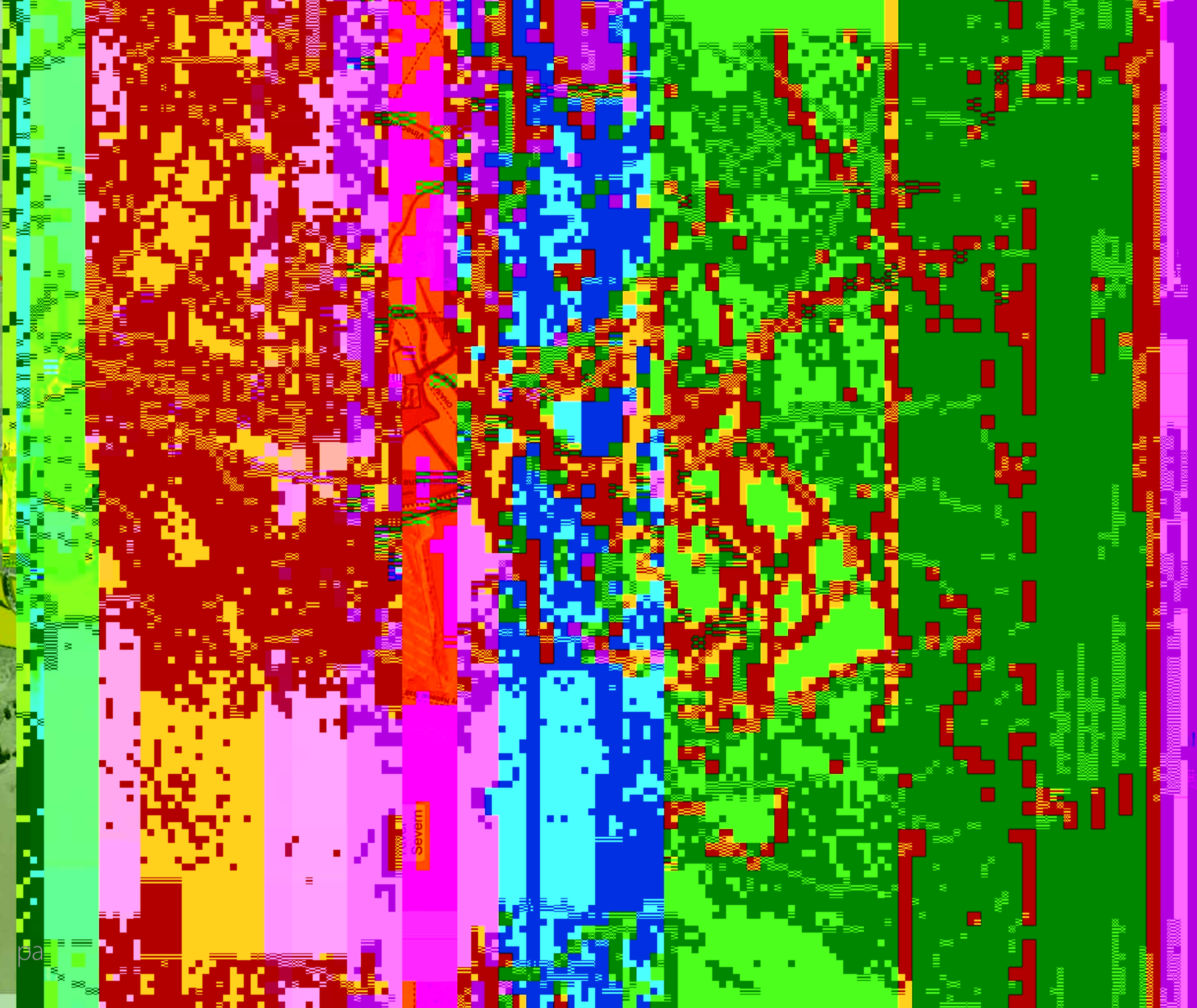
If the dispersal strategy continues, urban sprawl will encroach further into sensitive countryside locations which will destroy the character of our landscape and settlements. The dispersal strategy will also erode the spaces between settlements which will lead to further coalescence. As a consequence of this strategy, settlements will lose their individual identity and there will be further congestion on the existing infrastructure.

An opportunity now exists to provide a framework for an Eco-Town at Sharpness which will have the capacity to provide for the District's future growth up to and beyond 2026 in a planned and managed way that will deliver many sustainable benefits for the District.

Sharpness is relatively free from environmental and physical constraints and is more able to accommodate the District's growth over and above



Hinton



Severn

pa

