



South Staffordshire Local Plan Preferred Options Consultation

Land adjacent to Site Ref 419 A&B, Keepers Lane, Codsall.

Representations on behalf of landowners Jenks and Letts

INTRODUCTION

PlanIT Planning and Development ("PlanIT") are instructed to submit representations on the Preferred Options South Staffordshire Local Plan consultation. Our client is the owner of land immediately to the south of proposed allocated housing site ref 419 A&B, the extent of which is shown on the plan which is attached to these representations.

The subject site is a logical addition to development which will be built on site 419. It has potential to provide a scheme of circa 65 houses and an extensive belt of woodland planting as an extension to the well-established woodland known as Bedford Gorse Plantation; this will create a long-term defensible boundary to the wider Green Belt beyond.

We set out below our response to the questions which are set out at Appendix G of the consultation document where they are relevant to our client's land interests.

Question 1 - Do you agree that the evidence base set out in Appendix A is appropriate to inform the new Local Plan?

Our Response

No. The housing evidence base which underpins the draft Plan's housing strategy is deficient. Paragraphs 4.6 to 4.12 of the Preferred Option consultation draft Plan refer to various evidence base documents that have been used to help identify the quantum of development for South Staffordshire which will assist in accommodating the unmet housing requirements of the conurbation. None of the documents referred to in these paragraphs are referred to in the evidence base in Appendix A of the draft Plan. They have, however, been fundamental in shaping the Plan's housing strategy.

Notwithstanding this omission, as detailed in our response to Question 5, the proposed housing requirement is unsound. It fails to reflect the most recent information which is available on the extent of the housing shortfall arising from the conurbation and, in particular, it fails to acknowledge the important role South Staffordshire must play to support the development needs of the Black Country.

Question 2 - Do you agree that the correct infrastructure to be delivered alongside proposed Site Allocations has been identified in the IDP? Is there any other infrastructure not covered in this consultation document or the IDP that the Local Plan should seek to deliver?

Our Response

The infrastructure requirements included within the IDP are based upon the Preferred Options Plan's housing and employment development targets. As detailed in these Representations it is our view that the emerging Plan makes insufficient provision for housing development. That being the case, the IDP plans for an insufficient level of development. The IDP will need updating in due course if, as we suggest, the housing and employment requirements are increased.

Question 3 - Have the correct visions and strategic objectives been identified? Do you agree that the draft policies and the policy directions will deliver these objectives?

No. The Plan's Vision is inappropriate.

We support the reference to South Staffordshire seeking to strive to protect and enhance its distinctive rural character, communities and landscape. The reference to creating beautiful thriving new places where people can live, work and play is also supported. However, the Vision should be clear that the emerging Plan will deliver the development necessary to support South Staffordshire's growing population, economic objectives. Significantly, it should also recognise the important role South Staffordshire will play in supporting the development needs arising from the conurbation.

The Framework identifies three overarching objectives which constitute sustainable development. The Vision correctly identifies matters that will help to deliver the environmental objective of sustainable development. However, parts of the economic and social objectives are largely ignored by the Vision. For example, the economic objective of sustainable development requires a sufficient quantum of the right type of land to be available to support economic growth. The social objective requires local authorities to ensure that a sufficient number and range of homes are provided to meet the needs of current and future generations.

It is, therefore, our view that the Vision should be amended to introduce additional text to confirm that South Staffordshire will deliver sufficient land, of the right type, to meet the economic and housing growth requirements of South Staffordshire and which will support the growth of the conurbation.

We do not support Strategic Objective 1. It is inevitable that Green Belt land release will be required in order to support the housing and employment land requirements of South Staffordshire and the conurbation. Paragraph 140 of the Framework confirms that once Green Belt boundaries are established, they should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified, through the preparation or updating of Plans. The "exceptional circumstances" test has been met in this instance given that the emerging Plan acknowledges that Green Belt land release is required. Furthermore, paragraph 140 advises that strategic policies should establish the need to change Green Belt boundaries having regard to their intended purpose in the long term, so that they can endure beyond the Plan period. This results in a requirement for "safeguarded" land. Strategic Objective 1, and the Plan as a whole, fail to have any regard to this requirement of the Framework.

Strategic Objectives 3, 4 and 5 are designed to address homes and communities.

However, nowhere within any of these Strategic Objectives for Housing is reference made to providing a sufficient quantum of housing to support the growing number of households within the South Staffordshire, ensuring that a sufficient number of homes are available to accommodate South Staffordshire's working population, or to supporting the growth requirements of the conurbation.

An additional Strategic Objective should therefore be added to require the Plan to provide a sufficient number of houses to meet both South Staffordshire's and the conurbation's growing population.

Strategic Objective 6 - Developing an Economic Strategy, is supported. The Plan should seek to retain existing employment and foster sustainable economic growth, encouraging inward investment and job creation. There must, however, be a sufficient quantum of housing delivered to accommodate South Staffordshire's workforce.

Q4 - Do you support the policy approach in Policy DS1 - Green Belt and Policy DS2 - Open Countryside?

Our Response

In general, we support the approach of Policy DS1 - Green Belt. This is, however, on the basis that the Plan will be amended to remove additional land from the Green Belt to accommodate South Staffordshire's housing and employment needs in accordance with our response to question 5.

The penultimate paragraph of the policy is inappropriate. It says that the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt should be regarded as inappropriate unless it is for one of the four exceptions listed within the National Planning Policy Framework. The policy text goes on to introduce additional guidance, which is more stringent than the guidance within the Framework, and which is not in line with its objectives. For example, the policy seeks to restrict "limited infilling" to schemes of 1 or 2 dwellings and places controls over building heights and the developed proportion of the site. There is no such provision within the Framework. Indeed, the concept of controlling building heights in the way proposed by the draft Plan was abandoned in national planning policy following the revocation of PPG2 in 2012. There is no policy justification or evidence base to support the proposed policy approach.

Furthermore, paragraph 150 of the Framework also identifies other forms of development that are not inappropriate development in the Green Belt, provided they preserve its openness. These are omitted from the draft policy in its entirety.

It is our view that the penultimate paragraph of policy DS1 should be removed, and the policy should refer back to the guidance within the Framework.

Policy DS2 - Open Countryside, identifies forms of development that will be supported in the open countryside. No reference is made to the provision of rural exception sites. Limited affordable housing for local community needs can be an appropriate form of development within the Green Belt (Framework paragraph 149F). Rural exception sites should, therefore, also be recognised as an appropriate form of development within the open countryside.

Question 5 - Do you support the policy approach in Policy DS3 - The Spatial Strategy 2038?

Our Response

The emerging Plan suggests that a total of 8,881 dwellings should be planned for during the course of the Plan period 2018 - 2038. There are two components to the housing requirement, the first is the quantum of housing required to meet South Staffordshire's growth requirements, the second is the additional housing which will contribute towards meeting the unmet needs of the Housing Market Area, particularly Birmingham and the Black Country.

Paragraph 61 of the Framework advises that to determine the **minimum** number of homes needed, strategic policies should be informed by a Local Housing Needs Assessment, conducted using the Standard Method in the National Planning Practice Guidance. That being the case, the Standard Method is the starting point for establishing the scale of the housing requirement to meet South Staffordshire's housing needs. In this case the Preferred Options Plan relies on the minimum annual housing needs figure of 243 dwellings per annum.

The South Staffordshire Housing and Market Assessment (HMA) has been prepared to help inform the Plan's overall housing requirement. It concludes that, using the Standard Method, "Across a 20 year Plan period it is therefore intended that 5,068 new homes will be delivered to address the housing need in South Staffordshire" (paragraph 4.16).

This guidance is not, however, reflected in paragraph 4.13 of the consultation draft Plan. Here it is suggested that the South Staffordshire's housing need for the period 2021 - 2038 is 4,131 dwellings. Completions to date from the start of the Plan period are added to this requirement, regardless of whether the number of completions are sufficient to meet the housing need. As such it is suggested that provision is made for

the development of 4,881 dwellings to support the growth of South Staffordshire. This approach is inappropriate. The emerging Plan should plan for the minimum Standard Method housing requirement from the start of the Plan period as a baseline, which the HMA advises is 5,068 dwellings. Paragraph 4.17 of the HMA is clear that the minimum total housing requirement (assuming that 4,000 dwellings are delivered to meet the growth requirement of the conurbation) is 9,068 dwellings. This is not reflected in paragraph 4.13 of the Plan, and this is a clear omission.

That being said, there is a requirement for a significant uplift to the Standard Method housing requirement in any event, which is demonstrated by the HMA.

As detailed in paragraph 8.5 of the SHMA the PPG advises that it is necessary for local authorities to calculate their total affordable housing need. The total affordable housing need can then be considered in the context of its likely delivery as a proportion of the housing requirement, taking into account the probable percentage of affordable housing to be delivered by eligible market housing-led developments. Therefore, an increase in the overall housing figure included in the Plan may be appropriate where it would help to deliver the required number of affordable homes (PPG paragraph 024).

Paragraph 8.7 of the HMA advises that the total affordable housing needs in South Staffordshire is 128 dpa. It then goes on to advise that this represents 28.2% of the annual housing requirement in the District of 453 dpa. That being the case, the HMA proposes 30% affordable housing provision is proposed. In our submission, this approach is flawed.

South Staffordshire's Standard Method housing requirement is 254 dpa. As a consequence, the affordable housing requirement of 128 dpa is approximately 50% of South Staffordshire's minimum Standard Method housing requirement. The figures in paragraph 8.7 of the HMA are skewed, as the total housing requirement proposed in the Plan is used (9,26 dwellings), including the 4,000 dwellings the Plan proposes to deliver to meet the growth requirements of the conurbation. The 4,000 dwellings proposed to meet the growth requirement of the conurbation cannot be considered a source of affordable housing supply to support affordable housing delivery to meet the needs of South Staffordshire. Any affordable houses provided as part of the delivery of these 4,000 units will be to support affordable housing needs from the conurbation, not South Staffordshire. This is a fundamental flaw of the calculation.

It is, therefore, clear that an uplift is required to the South Staffordshire's housing requirement in order to ensure that the required 128 affordable dwellings per year are delivered. The Plan should include a housing requirement for South Staffordshire, and state what proportion of that housing requirement should be affordable. Separately it should include a housing requirement for meeting the unmet needs of the conurbation, and state what proportion of that requirement should be affordable.

It is also noted that Chapter 2 of the HMA advises that the population of the District is older than the national average, with fewer family households present. Employment levels are lower than the national average and there are more people employed in the most highly skilled roles.

The Plan advises sets out its intention to support economic growth, retaining and creating jobs within the District. However, with an aging population there may well be a “hollowing out” of South Staffordshire’s workforce. This may create a position where additional houses are required in South Staffordshire to increase the size of the labour force to support jobs within the District. Further consideration should therefore be given to increasing the housing requirement to ensure that a sufficient number of houses are available to support the local workforce.

To summarise, there are in our opinion three matters that the Preferred Option Plan fails to address in its assessment of the South Staffordshire’s element of the housing requirement:

- The housing requirement proposed in the consultation draft Plan is below the Standard Method figure that is derived from the Council’s own HMA.
- The HMA fails to correctly factor in affordable housing need and whether an uplift to the South Staffordshire housing requirement is required. The 4,000 dwellings proposed to meet the growth requirements of the conurbation will have its own affordable housing requirement that is separate to that of South Staffordshire.
- No consideration has been given to uplifting the minimum Standard Method housing figure to take account of economic growth aspirations and the fact that the age profile of South Staffordshire is increasing.

Additional Housing to Contribute Towards Meeting the Unmet Needs of the Housing Market Area

In order to support the suggestion that the Plan should deliver 4,000 houses to support the housing needs of the conurbation, the Plan relies upon the conclusions of the GBHMA Strategic Growth Study 2018, and its subsequent update. As a starting point, South Staffordshire District Council should consider whether the conclusions of the Strategic Growth Study and its update are robust for the purposes of its plan making.

As referred to above, the Framework advises at paragraph 61 that the Standard Method should be used as a starting point for establishing the housing requirement. The Strategic Growth Study does not establish housing need using the Standard Method. The Strategic Growth Study concludes that during the period 2011 - 2031 a minimum of 205,000 homes are required, which broadly reflects the 2014 based

sub-national population scenario for the study area. The housing needs figure in the Strategic Growth Study is not fit for plan making purposes. It is based upon out-of-date evidence and does not use the Standard Method.

Furthermore, the Study covers a period that is not commensurate with the South Staffordshire Plan. Its conclusions are not, therefore, directly transferable in any event.

There is more up to date and robust evidence on the potential housing shortfall arising from the conurbation. The principal unmet housing need from the conurbation arises from the Birmingham and Black Country Authorities.

The Birmingham Development Plan was adopted in January 2017. Policy PG1 - Overall Levels of Growth, advises that 89,000 additional dwellings are required during the period 2011 - 2031 to meet the growth requirements of the City. However, only 51,100 additional dwellings can be accommodated within the City's administrative area. This leaves a shortfall of 37,900 homes (including 14,400 affordable homes) that will need to be delivered elsewhere within the HMA.

Since the BDP was adopted Birmingham City Council has suggested that the extent of the housing shortfall has reduced. This suggestion does, however, need to be treated with extreme caution for the following reasons:

- Whilst Birmingham City's most recent SHLAA suggests that the development capacity of the City is greater than previously estimated, not every site in SHLAA will be delivered.
- Policy PG1 retains Development Plan status, there has been no suggestion from Birmingham City Council that it is an out-of-date policy, or the shortfall figure within it should be afforded significant weight.
- If new information on potential source of housing land supply are to be considered, it is also necessary to consider new information on the need for housing within Birmingham City. The Standard Method housing requirement for Birmingham results in a significant uplift to the quantum of housing required. This is driven by the fact that Birmingham City is subject to the large city and urban area 35% housing uplift requirement by the Standard Method. That being the case, whilst the adopted BDP includes a housing requirement of 4,550 dpa (before any redistribution) the uncapped Standard Method figure for Birmingham under the Standard Method requires the delivery of a minimum of 6,750 dwellings per annum.
- The Birmingham Plan period runs to 2031, whereas the South Staffordshire Plan has an end date of 2038. The South Staffordshire Plan does, therefore, need to make an allowance for delivering housing to meet the growth of Birmingham for the period 2031 to 2038.

The emerging Black Country Plan Preferred Options consultation document, that was subject to public consultation between August and October 2021, identified a total housing requirement of 76,076 dwellings. It is, however, only possible to accommodate 47,837 dwellings within the Black Country's administrative area. As a consequence, 28,239 dwellings need to be delivered elsewhere within the HMA.

Drawing the housing shortfall figure from the BDP and the emerging Black Country Plan together, there is a total housing shortfall in the conurbation of 66,139 dwellings. This should be considered an absolute minimum, given that Birmingham City's housing requirement will increase significantly under the Standard Method.

The 4,000 dwellings proposed by the draft South Staffordshire Local Plan represent just 4% of the total shortfall. This is inadequate.

There are 14 authorities within the Black Country HMA. This includes Birmingham and the four Black Country authorities. That means the shortfall needs to be distributed between the 9 remaining authorities. However, Redditch Borough is effectively built up to its boundary. Redditch Borough is relying upon Bromsgrove District delivering significant urban extensions within its administrative area to support its growth. Furthermore, only part of Stratford on Avon district falls within the HMA, reducing development opportunities in Stratford on Avon.. Cannock Chase's capacity is restricted due to environmental constraints such as the Cannock Chase SAC and AONB. However, even if the full extent of the 66,139 dwelling shortfall were distributed evenly amongst the 9 remaining authorities each authority should be providing approximately 7,370 dwellings. In addition, there is clear evidence to suggest that South Staffordshire should be taking a greater proportion of development than other authorities within the HMA given its functional relationship with the Black Country.

The Spatial Strategy for Housing

We support the Plan's recognition that Tier 1 Settlements such as Codsall/Bilbrook are locations which are suitable to make a significant contribution towards the District's housing needs. These two settlements in particular have an excellent range of local services including two rail stations. They are eminently suitable for accommodating additional proportionate development in accordance with the recommendations in the GBHMA Strategic Growth Study for proportionate dispersal of development at locations which are centred around these settlements.

Question 6 – Do you support the policy approach in Policy DS4 – Long Term Growth Aspirations for a New Settlement?

Our Response

We have no particular objection to the emerging plan including a policy that advises that the Council will consider the allocation of a new settlement in the subsequent version of the Local Plan. Indeed, given the lead in times and complex nature of new settlement proposals it is sensible for such schemes to be identified as a concept in the plan making process.

That been said, it is our view that it is more sustainable to extend existing settlements in the first instance. Existing settlements already have key services in place such as shops, schools and employment opportunities. The allocation of urban extensions next to existing settlements is a sustainable and logical way of bringing forward new development.

Question 11 - Do you agree with the proposed policy approach set out in Chapter 6?

We do not support the direction of travel for Policy HC1. It is suggested that 75% of properties should be three bedrooms or less. The size and type of housing required will change during the course of the plan period. The policy should be flexible and able to accommodate change as the plan period progresses.

We object to the suggestion that the Council should refuse schemes with a “disproportionate” amount of large four-bedroom homes. It is not clear what “disproportionate” means in this context. Furthermore, there is demand for executive style housing in South Staffordshire. If South Staffordshire wishes to retain and attract high income households then accommodation should be provided to meet their needs.

Proposed Policy HC11 – Space about Dwellings and Internal Space Standards, suggests that the emerging Plan will require all policies to meet the governments Nationally Described Space Standards. We are not aware of any evidence that supports this approach. Footnote 49 of the Framework advises that policies may make use of the Nationally Described Space Standards “where the need for internal space standard can be justified”. There is no evidence to “justify” the use of Nationally Described Space Standards in South Staffordshire. The form of evidence required to justify the use of the standards are detailed in the PPG. We are not aware of any evidence to suggest that the size of properties in the South Staffordshire is currently insufficient, and a greater proportion of large properties are required to meet the needs of residents.

Appendix A: Development Concept Plan

