

Introduction

Peacock + Smith are instructed on behalf of our client D Morgan PLC to submit representations in response to South Staffordshire District Council's Publication Plan consultation. We are promoting land encompassed by site references: 116 + 131 and adjacent land (hereafter referred to as 'site refs: 116 and 131').

We explain in these representations why we consider the Publication Plan to be unsound and make suggestions as to how the plan could be amended to ensure a 'sound' Plan is prepared.

We wish to appear at the Local Plan Examination to explain and elaborate on the points made.

Our representations should be read with the following:

Appendix 1: Indicative Masterplan showing how site refs: 116 and 131 could be developed on an equivalent basis to Coven or Essington (Policy SA2 and SA3).

Appendix 2: 'Storyboard' document demonstrating how site refs: 116 and 131 comply with national policy NPPF Para 142 (release of Green Belt land): "*Where it has been concluded that it is necessary to release Green Belt land for development, plans should give first consideration to land which has been previously-developed and/or is well-served by public transport*".

Also compliance with NPPF Para 11, 16, 105, 110. NPPF 105 requires development to "*limit the need to travel and offer a genuine choice of transport modes*".

Appendix 3: Structure Plan High Court Judgement (February 2002) with South Staffordshire Council challenging in the High Court the allocation of Essington for housing and winning a High Court Judgement to prevent housing in Essington.

This is the opposite of what South Staffordshire Council are now seeking with the new allocation of 1,200 houses in Essington (an option that is currently being pursued through the Local Plan) making it unsound and in conflict with the High Court Judgement which South Staffordshire Council sought and won in 2002 to prevent new houses in Essington.

There is no justification in the Local Plan to depart from the High Court Judgement, which has informed Planning Policy since 2002 to prevent housing in Essington.

Appendix 4: Bus network within a Travel Zone accessible from site refs 116 and 131, with frequent services in the Catchment Area of Cannock Town Centre / Bus Station within a 10-15 bus journey site refs: 116 and 131.

Appendix 5: Rail services available from Landywood Station, providing a frequent commuter link into the Greater Birmingham Housing Market Area (GBHMA) and into Cannock Town Centre using zero-emission electric trains at the point of travel. This line was electrified in 2019 at a cost to the public purse of £110m.

Appendix 6: With respect to Appendix 5 and the electrification of the Chase Line in 2019, South Staffordshire Council is still using a 2017 baseline position to assess the sustainability of sites. We have consistently raised this as part of our previous consultation responses, and a Freedom of Information

request as recently as 26 January 2022 still confirmed South Staffordshire Council had not considered updating this data, this remains the case to this day. This means the benefits referred to in Appendix 5 and the zero emission electric trains and zero emission commuter journeys into the GBHMA have not been evaluated in the Plan.

Site refs 116 and 131 are adjacent to the Tier 1 settlement of Cheslyn Hay, this is highly relevant because it was agreed in the 2002 High Court Judgement (**Appendix 3**) that Cheslyn Hay / Great Wyrley is a highly sustainable location for growth: *“with public transport links (bus and rail) to the West Midlands conurbation”* (para 8 of the Judgement).

Tier 1 settlements are self-evidently the most sustainable locations as set out by South Staffordshire Council in Policy DS5 to which growth or development should be directed in the Plan.

Policy DS5 is unambiguous: *“An integral part of the Strategy will be to ensure that growth is distributed to the district’s most sustainable locations, avoiding a disproportionate level of growth in the district’s less sustainable settlements...”*. The relevance of the 2019 electrification of the Chase Line upgrade cannot be overstated: 79% of the working population commute out of the District for employment. Access to public transport, including key rail corridors, is therefore paramount to ensure communities are connected to the higher order services and employment they require and there is not a reliance on the private motorcar, as stated in Policy DS5. The Policy goes on to say that Tier 1 settlements *“have access to key rail corridors into the adjacent towns and cities upon which the district relies for its higher order services and employment”*.

Site refs 116 and 131 are well-served by public transport (NPPF Para 142) with a genuine choice of transport modes (NPPF Para 105) including frequent bus services in a Travel Zone in the Catchment Area of Cannock Town Centre accessing Cannock Town Centre / Bus Station within a 10-15 minute bus journey for onward travel within the Travel Zone (**Appendix 4**). Landywood Railway Station on the Chase Line is within 2km walking / cycling distance using existing green infrastructure links from site refs 116 and 131.

It benefitted from £110m electrification scheme in 2019 benefitting existing passengers and providing for growth on this acknowledged commuter line into the GBHMA (**Appendix 5**).

NPPF Para 105 makes it clear *“significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes”* (**Appendix 4-5**).

NPPF Para 142 also states: *“Where it has been concluded that it is necessary to release Green Belt land for development, plans should give first consideration to land which has been previously-developed and/or is well-served by public transport”* (**Appendix 4-5**).

As made clear in the 2002 High Court Judgement The Structure Plan included Cheslyn Hay/Great Wyrley and Essington as potentially sustainable areas for housing. All parties to the legal proceedings agreed Cheslyn Hay/Great Wyrley is a sustainable location *“with public transport links (bus and rail) to the West Midlands conurbation”* (para 8 of the Judgement, **Appendix 3**).

As demonstrated today in our submission, site refs 116 and 131 are in a highly sustainable location for housing growth (the reason the Chase Line was electrified in 2019 to provide for growth, accessing this important commuter line), lying adjacent to the Tier 1 settlement boundary and connected with pedestrian / cycle routes to Landywood Railway Station and to the Tier 1 settlement.

Site refs 116 and 131 are also within the Catchment Area of Cannock Town Centre (**Appendix 4**), a sub-regional shopping centre, with its range of shops, retail parks, leisure outlets and other services and offering significant employment opportunities in the retail and leisure sectors.

Site refs 116 and 131 access Cannock Bus Station for onward journeys within a Travel Zone to a wide range of destinations with further employment opportunities. Not only do our client's sites have access to this extensive Bus network, they also have direct access to an existing traffic-free active travel green infrastructure route which includes the Forest of Mercia Way for walking/cycling which already connects our client's sites to Landywood Station on the Chase Line, a key rail commuter corridor into the Greater Birmingham Housing Market Area (GBHMA).

Since South Staffordshire Council's successfully High Court Judgement in 2002 confirming the sustainability of Cheslyn Hay / Great Wyrley (and not Essington), the investment in the Chase Line mentioned in the Judgement has taken place with a £110m electrification upgrade completed in 2019.

This has not been taken into account in evidence base documents which continue to use a baseline date of 2017 (**Appendix 6**).

Our fundamental concerns with the Publication Plan can be summarised as follows:

- Policy DS5 states: *"An integral part of the Strategy will be to ensure that growth is distributed to the district's most sustainable locations, avoiding a disproportionate level of growth in the district's less sustainable settlements..."*. The Rural Services and Facilities Audit supports this policy, and identifies the most sustainable settlements. Site refs 116 and 131 are located adjacent to Tier 1 Cheslyn Hay, defined as follows:

*"The district's Tier 1 settlements are Penkridge, Codsall/Bilbrook and **Cheslyn Hay/Great Wyrley**. These settlements hold a wider range of services and facilities and have access to key rail corridors into the adjacent towns and cities upon which the district relies for its higher order services and employment. **The sustainable growth of these larger rural settlements will be delivered through appropriate allocations made in the Local Plan**"*.

- Coven and Essington are Tier 3 settlements comprising smaller, rural settlements with a smaller range of services and facilities than Tier 1-2 settlements. They are defined as follows:

*"The district's Tier 3 settlements are **Essington, Coven, Featherstone, Shareshill, Wheaton Aston, Pattingham and Swindon**. These settlements hold a smaller range of services and facilities than Tier 1 and 2 settlements **and as such are given a lesser level of growth. Limited growth in these smaller rural settlements will be delivered** through appropriate allocations made in the Local Plan"*

- In 2002 South Staffordshire Council opposed the Structure Plan's inclusion of Essington for housing and was successful in the High Court (**Appendix 3**). South Staffordshire Council, having established that Essington is not a sustainable location in 2002, is now seeking to allocate 1,200 houses there, despite nothing changing in the intervening period which is confirmed by the Council identifying Essington as a Tier 3 settlement. It has no railway station, is a smaller, rural settlement, with no frequent bus services and not within the Catchment Area of any Town Centre or Travel Zone. Nevertheless, South Staffordshire Council is seeking new allocations of 1,200 homes in Tier 3 Essington but only 154 new homes in Tier 1 Cheslyn Hay/Great Wyrley.

- Coven, whilst not part of South Staffordshire Council’s legal challenge in 2002, also has no railway station, is a smaller, rural settlement, with no frequent bus services and not within the Catchment Area of any Town Centre or Travel Zone. This is why the Council have classified it as a Tier 3 settlement.
- At Coven and Essington, South Staffordshire Council are nevertheless proposing 2,400 houses as part of Policies SA2 and SA3, despite their Tier 3 smaller, rural settlement status. These are settlements in which limited growth is appropriate, owing to their Tier 3 status.
- Site refs: 116 and 131 are adjacent to Cheslyn Hay, a Tier 1 settlement, where large-scale development is appropriate. It was agreed in the 2002 High Court Judgement (**Appendix 3**) that Cheslyn Hay / Great Wyrley is a highly sustainable location for growth: *“with public transport links (bus and rail) to the West Midlands conurbation”* (para 8 of the Judgement).
 Strategic Objective 2 and Policy DS5 applies, as does NPPF Para 142: *“Where it has been concluded that it is necessary to release Green Belt land for development, plans should give first consideration to land which has been previously-developed and/or is well-served by public transport”*.
 NPPF Para 105 also states: *“Significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, **through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes**”*.
 NPPF Paras 11, 16, 110 also support the allocation of site refs 116 and 131, and not Coven and not Essington.
- Tier 1 settlements should be a priority but the proposed Tier 3-5 allocation sites at Coven and Essington (Policy SA2 and SA3) are at remote rural locations, not well-served by public transport with a high-dependency on the private motorcar. As defined by the Rural Services and Facilities Audit, they are not the most sustainable sites and cannot comply with NPPF Paras 105 or 142 as they are not well-served by public transport, have no railway station, with no frequent bus services and not within the Catchment Area of any Town Centre or Travel Zone, offering no choice of transport modes.
 This results in a policy conflict with Strategic Objective 2, Policy DS5 and NPPF Paras 105 and 142, which all make it clear beyond any doubt that if Green Belt sites are to be released, they must be policy compliant with local and national policy and located within the most sustainable locations which on South Staffordshire Council’s evidence are Tier 1 settlements. Policy DS5 requires this: ***“An integral part of the Strategy will be to ensure that growth is distributed to the district’s most sustainable locations, avoiding a disproportionate level of growth in the district’s less sustainable settlements...”***
- Paragraph 142 concerning release of Green Belt land is prescriptive and makes it clear that *“to release Green Belt land for development plans should give first consideration to land which has been previously-developed and/or is well-served by public transport”*. The Council cannot demonstrate this based on the allocations comprising Policy SA2 and SA3, nor have they provided justification for why there should be an exception.
- The 2017 baseline position of the Rural Services and Facilities Audit is out of date. It excludes the 2019 electrification of the Chase Line, at a cost to the public purse of £110m.
 It does not take into account the latest passenger capacity and frequency information made possible by the 2019 electrification upgrade, forming a key rail commuter corridor into the GBHMA.
 The 2017 baseline, which is clearly out of date, prejudices the assessment of site refs: 116 and 131. Despite raising this at previous stages of consultation, the 2017 baseline has still not been updated.

An FOI response from South Staffordshire Council on 26 January 2022 confirmed that Officers had not yet considered updating this data (**Appendix 6**), and this remains the unacceptable position to this day, it is a flaw in the Council's approach.

- Sustainable development should utilise public transport, provide a genuine choice of transport modes and/or limit the need to travel. By definition, Tier 1 sites, and in particular our client's (refs: 116 and 131) achieve and satisfy these policy requirements. In comparison, by definition, neither Tier 3-5 Coven or Essington (Policy SA2 and SA3) achieve this, resulting in a policy conflict that has not been justified. The result is conflict with NPPF paras 11, 16, 105, 110 and 142 – which seek to align growth with infrastructure.
- The allocation of Policy SA4 (Strategic allocation at Penkridge), being on the north side of Penkridge, results in development leapfrogging the Green Belt, being located a significant distance from the GBHMA, where the need arises. This will create long journeys and increase reliance on the private motorcar, conflicting with sustainable development principles in which development should achieve short journeys through limiting the need to travel (NPPF para 105).
- Our client's sites ref: 116 and 131, adjacent to Tier 1 Cheslyn Hay, an agreed sustainable location (2002 High Court Judgement, **Appendix 3**) have not been prioritised in line with the settlement hierarchy. We again evidence and demonstrate in these representations why these sites should be allocated, supporting the 2002 High Court Judgement sought by South Staffordshire Council, and in the attached Storyboard with supporting Indicative Masterplan.

Representation in relation to policies: Policy DS5; Strategic Objective 2; Policy SA2; Policy SA3.

Cheslyn Hay is identified as a Tier 1 settlement in the settlement hierarchy (Policy DS5) owing to its high level of service provision making it one of the most sustainable locations for development in the South Staffordshire District. The hierarchy has been prepared based on the findings of the Rural Services and Facilities Audit, however this document continues to fail to identify the 2019 electrification of the Chase Line, nor does it take account of the most up to date bus timings and service provision. It continues to use a baseline of 2017, approaching five years out of date.

Para 2.8 of the Publication Plan confirms Tier 1 villages are assessed as having the greatest access to services and facilities relative to other settlements, with Tier 4 settlements the lowest.

Policy DS5 defines Tier 1 settlements as follows:

*The district's Tier 1 settlements are Penkridge, Codsall/Bilbrook and **Cheslyn Hay/Great Wyrley**. These settlements hold a wider range of services and facilities and have access to key rail corridors into the adjacent towns and cities upon which the district relies for its higher order services and employment. **The sustainable growth of these larger rural settlements will be delivered through appropriate allocations made in the Local Plan.***

Strategic Objective 2 confirms the Local Plan will:

*Meet the housing needs of the District whilst making a proportionate contribution towards the unmet needs of Greater Birmingham Housing Market Area. New development **will be focused on sustainable locations** within the District, either **within or adjacent to the District's key villages** or through urban extensions **adjacent to neighbouring towns and cities**.*

Despite Strategic Objective 2 stating that new development will be focused on sustainable locations, it is proposed to only allocate a limited amount of growth (154 homes) to Cheslyn Hay/Great Wyrley, despite it being in the Catchment and Travel Zone of Cannock Town Centre. Other Tier 1 settlements are allocated significantly more, as seen in the table below taken from Page 32 of the Publication Plan:

Spatial Housing Strategy 2018 - 2039		Indicative minimum dwelling numbers 2018-2039 ^a		
Location	Total proportion of housing delivery	Existing planning permissions and allocations	Safeguarded land	New allocations
The district's rural area				
Tier 1 villages	40.5%	1228	890	2042
Penkridge	17.8 %	529	88	1209
Codsall/Bilbrook	16.8 %	462	584	679
Cheslyn Hay/Great Wyrley	5.9 %	236	218	154

The approach taken to allocate 2,400 new homes in Tier 3 rural settlements of Coven and Essington entirely discounts the findings of the Rural Services and Facilities Audit and in turn ignores the Settlement Hierarchy. The result is that development is not allocated to the most sustainable locations, and unsustainable settlements lower down the hierarchy are therefore required to take considerable growth to meet the requisite housing target and perversely and without justification Tier 3 settlements of Coven and Essington are allocated more growth (2,400 new homes) than all Tier 1 settlements combined.

Coven and Essington (Policy SA2 and SA3) are the prime examples of this. 1,200 homes are allocated in each rural location (i.e. 2,400 homes in total), despite them being identified as unsuitable locations for significant development in Tiers 3-5, where few services and facilities exist and where there will high dependency on the private motorcar. South Staffordshire Council itself acknowledges that *“public transport in South Staffordshire is generally poor”* (Section 4, page 8 Infrastructure Delivery Plan 2022) and especially *“in more rural parts of the district, bus services are poor, with a greater reliance on publicly resourced bookable bus services, particularly targeting individuals with mobility difficulties and other health issues”*.

Notably, Cheslyn Hay benefits from access to Landywood Station on the Chase Line. The electrification of the line, at a cost of £110m, has led to many benefits since the project was completed in 2019, including: wheelchair access to platforms facilitating rail access to all mobilities, with speed increases; reduced journey times; increased passenger capacity owing to increased frequency and faster, longer trains being accommodated; and zero emissions at the point of travel.

However, the Rural Services and Facilities Audit continues to use a baseline position of 2017 when assessing the accessibility of sites/settlements, not taking into account the above 2019 railway upgrade/electrification and

associated benefits which have now been in place for nearly four years and which we have repeatedly brought to the attention of the Council in our consultation submissions. This results in an unsound and flawed assessment of the rail services available to Cheslyn Hay, providing a frequent commuter link into the GBHMA and into Cannock Town Centre (**Appendix 5**), prejudicing the assessment of site refs: 116 and 131.

Coven and Essington, by definition of their Tier 3-5 status, are not considered by South Staffordshire Council to be the most sustainable locations for development, with no train station, not within the catchment of any Town Centre or Travel Zone, limited rural bus network, and few services and facilities. This was evidenced by South Staffordshire Council in the 2002 High Court Judgement relating to the prevention of housing growth in the Structure Plan at Essington. Since 2002 nothing has changed, there has been no improvement in public transport or community services and facilities at neither Essington nor Coven. On the other hand, Cheslyn Hay has seen the electrification of the Chase Line for commuting into the GBHMA.

By locating significant growth (2,400 new homes) in less sustainable Tier 3 rural locations, South Staffordshire Council are therefore not complying with Policy DS5 and sustainable development is not being achieved. There will be a high dependency on the private motorcar. Those who do not have access to a private motorcar, particularly young people and those who do not wish to drive, will be isolated and disadvantaged.

Although South Staffordshire's own housing need equates to 4,881 dwellings, it will also contribute a further 4,000 dwellings towards meeting the Greater Birmingham Housing Market Area (GBHMA) shortfall.

It is therefore imperative that those from the GBHMA (many with jobs within the GBHMA) who will occupy a house in the South Staffordshire District have a frequent and effective sustainable mode of public transport link back to their extended families and support networks who remain in the GBHMA. This is not offered by the proposed Tier 3-5 sites for allocation at Coven and Essington.

South Staffordshire Council itself acknowledges that *"public transport in South Staffordshire is generally poor"* (Section 4, page 8 Infrastructure Delivery Plan 2022) and especially *"in more rural parts of the district, bus services are poor, with a greater reliance on publicly resourced bookable bus services, particularly targeting individuals with mobility difficulties and other health issues"*.

Essington has previously been considered for growth in the 2001 Staffordshire Structure Plan, prepared by Staffordshire County Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council. However, South Staffordshire Council lodged a legal challenge as it disagreed with the inclusion of Essington for housing growth as it was considered to be an unsustainable location. Nothing has changed between then and now.

The Structure Plan included Cheslyn Hay/Great Wyrley and Essington as potentially sustainable areas for housing. All parties to the legal proceedings agreed Cheslyn Hay/Great Wyrley is a sustainable location *"with public transport links (bus and rail) to the West Midlands conurbation"* (para 8 of the Judgement, **Appendix 3**).

However, despite *"valiant"* attempts made in the evidence produced on behalf of the defendant (Staffordshire County Council) to suggest that Essington is close enough to a railway station to qualify as a sustainable location, the argument was rejected by the Court as *"not altogether impressive"* (para 40 of the Judgement).

South Staffordshire Council succeeded in its challenge to prevent housing in Essington.

The High Court Judgement issued in February 2002 found that Essington is not a sustainable location for housing and it was duly excluded by the Court from the Structure Plan.

Since the February 2002 Judgement, nothing has changed. This is evidenced in Essington's low ranking in the settlement hierarchy as Tier 3. Essington still does not benefit from a railway station, only has one convenience store, and has a limited range of other community facilities and services, hence the definition of a Tier 3 smaller rural settlement:

*"The district's Tier 3 settlements are **Essington, Coven, Featherstone, Shareshill, Wheaton Aston, Pattingham and Swindon**. These settlements hold a smaller range of services and facilities than Tier 1 and 2 settlements and as such **are given a lesser level of growth. Limited growth in these smaller rural settlements** will be delivered through appropriate allocations made in the Local Plan"*

The 1,200 homes proposed at both the smaller rural settlements of Coven and Essington (2,400 homes in total) would not be supported by adequate infrastructure or any rail services and with no access to a network of frequent bus services. The result will be heavy reliance on the private motorcar due to the rural nature of these settlements, poor accessibility to public transport, and the very limited services and facilities available at each. This isolates non-car users, including those who are too young to drive or those who cannot or do not wish to.

We maintain site refs: 116 and 131, adjacent to Tier 1 Cheslyn Hay, should be allocated because they are in a highly sustainable location, as agreed in the 2002 High Court Judgement. They are a viable alternative to the unsustainable sites at Tier 3-5 Coven and Essington and would comply with Policy DS5, along with NPPF Paras 105 and 142.

The approach currently being pursued by South Staffordshire Council will not deliver sustainable development and would not result in a sound Plan. **Appendix 1** shows how site refs: 116 and 131 could be developed on an equivalent basis to Coven or Essington whilst incorporating significant areas of landscaping and tree planting with footpath / cycle links from the site connecting to Champions Wood, Plum Wood, Strawberry Wood, the Forest of Mercia Way and existing footpath / cycle network in Cheslyn Hay including to Landywood Station on the Chase Line.

In the Storyboard (**Appendix 2**), we have set out the sustainability merits of site refs: 116 and 131, and of Tier 1 Cheslyn Hay as a whole. Cheslyn Hay has one of only three Leisure Centres in South Staffordshire. It has two doctors' surgeries and multiple schools for all age-groups.

The Rural Services and Facilities Audit, which identifies Cheslyn Hay as a Tier 1 settlement, lists the services and facilities that serve the settlement, including Landywood Railway Station on the Chase Line, Primary School, Academy and Leisure Centre, convenience stores, pubs/restaurants, 2 GP surgeries, dentist, community centre and library.

The Storyboard shows how site refs: 116 and 131 connect to the Tier 1 settlement, and how these services and facilities can be accessed using existing pedestrian and cycle routes, in addition to a choice of public transport modes, both bus and rail with interconnectivity including accessing a Bus Station in Cannock Town Centre within 10-15 minutes for onward journeys within the Travel Zone. The railway line is a key commuter corridor accessing significant employment opportunities within the GBHMA. Para 3.12 of the Sustainability Appraisal acknowledges that approximately 21% of the District's working population live and work in South Staffordshire, with the majority commuting outside the District. To facilitate movement outside of the District of such a large percentage of the working population (79%), existing transport services, where there is capacity, should be prioritised and utilised. That capacity was increased on the electrified Chase Line for commuters in 2019.

The West Midlands Strategic Employment Study (2015) identified two regional employment sites within 5km of our client's promoted sites - i54 is accessible from the M54 motorway Junction 2 and Hilton Cross is accessible from the M54 Junction 1. Both regional employment sites are accessible within a short 5-10 minute journey from site refs: 116 and 131.

Site refs: 116 and 131 are also within the Catchment Area of Cannock Town Centre, also offering employment opportunities, along with its range of shops, retail parks, leisure outlets and other services including Bus Station for onward journeys to a wide range of destinations within the Travel Zone. Not only do our client's sites have access to this extensive bus network within a Travel Zone, they also have direct access to an existing traffic-free green infrastructure route for walking/cycling which connects our client's sites to Landywood Station on the Chase Line, a key commuter rail corridor into the GBHMA, electrified in 2019. The Chase Line accesses Cannock (3 minutes journey time), Bloxwich (7 minutes), Walsall (13 minutes), Rugeley (14 minutes) and Birmingham New Street (34 minutes) for leisure, shopping and employment.

National policy contained at NPPF Para 142 states:

"...Where it has been concluded that it is necessary to release Green Belt land for development, plans should give first consideration to land which has been previously-developed and/or is well-served by public transport..."

We do not consider that first consideration has been given to sites that are "previously-developed and/or well-served by public transport" as the proposed allocated sites for 2,400 new homes at the smaller rural settlements of Tier 3-5 Coven and Essington (Policy SA2 and SA3) are remote from any railway stations, not within Cannock Town Centre Catchment Area or Travel Zone, and only served by a very limited bus service.

South Staffordshire Council itself acknowledges that "public transport in South Staffordshire is generally poor" (Section 4, page 8 Infrastructure Delivery Plan 2022) and especially "in more rural parts of the district, bus services are poor, with a greater reliance on publicly resourced bookable bus services, particularly targeting individuals with mobility difficulties and other health issues".

Tier 3 Coven and Essington are lower down the settlement hierarchy and yet are allocated 2,400 new homes, exceeding all the Tier 1 settlements combined, evidencing that first consideration to land that is well-served by public transport, for example Cheslyn Hay/Great Wyrley and site refs 116 and 131, has not been given, putting South Staffordshire Council in conflict with NPPF Para 142.

South Staffordshire Council have not provided justification for why these Tier 3 sites in smaller, rural settlements are preferred for 2,400 new homes and are allocated over site refs: 116 and 131, adjoining Tier 1 Cheslyn Hay, which are well-served by public transport (bus and rail) and offer regular services to surrounding areas within the Catchment of Cannock Town Centre, Travel Zone and also into the GBHMA. South Staffordshire Council have not provided justification for departing from its position in 2002 where it sought a High Court Judgement to prevent housing growth in Essington.

Representation in relation to policy: Policy SA4

With South Staffordshire Council agreeing to accommodate an additional 4,000 dwellings to assist in meeting the significant housing need arising in the wider GBHMA, it is imperative that homes are located as close as

possible to the GBHMA to satisfy NPPF Para 105, which states: *“Significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes. This can help to reduce congestion and emissions, and improve air quality and public health”*.

As per our previous representations, we remain concerned that the proposed allocation of Policy SA4 (Strategic allocation at Penkridge) will lead to the ‘leapfrogging’ of the Green Belt, owing to it being on the northern side of the settlement. Paragraphs 2.27 and 2.28 of the Green Belt Study confirm that 80% of the South Staffordshire District is Green Belt and there is a clear risk of ‘leapfrogging’ to sites immediately beyond the Green Belt boundary.

The Study notes that such an approach can result in unsustainable patterns of housing, public services or employment land. It is specifically noted that, *“parts of the settlements of Penkridge and Wheaton Aston lie just outside the northern boundary of the Green Belt, which makes them vulnerable to development pressures”*.

We have measured, using the most direct roads, that Penkridge is 16.1km from Wolverhampton, 20.9km from Walsall and 37km from central Birmingham.

In comparison, Cheslyn Hay is 12.8km from Wolverhampton, 10.4km from Walsall and 30km from central Birmingham.

There therefore appears to be an unjustified, disproportionate amount of growth to the northern periphery of the District. This is at odds with the findings of the Green Belt Study which precisely highlighted this issue; the risk of ‘leapfrogging’ to sites immediately beyond the Green Belt boundary.

Not only would housing delivered in this location be a considerable distance from the GBHMA, where the need arises, but development in these areas would also be a considerable distance from the regional employment areas (West Midlands Strategic Employment Study 2015) at i54 and Hilton Cross, accessed from the M54 motorway at Junctions 1 and 2. This would therefore require an increased use of the private motorcar, increasing CO₂ emissions.

South Staffordshire Council appear to have ignored their commissioned evidence which raised clear concerns with such an approach being taken. Continuing with such a large percentage of growth being directed towards Penkridge would result in housing development to satisfy the Greater Birmingham Housing Market Area (GBHMA) need being a considerable distance away from where the need is derived, creating long journeys and therefore resulting in an unsound allocation and strategy.