

**SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE LOCAL PLAN  
PUBLICATION PLAN NOVEMBER 2022  
REGULATION 19 CONSULTATION**

**LAND ADJACENT TO STATION ROAD**

**REPRESENTATION PREPARED ON BEHALF OF**

**RICHBOROUGH ESTATES**

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## Document Management.

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V1	December 22	ELH	DO	-
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# 1. Introduction

- 1.1. This representation responds to the South Staffordshire District Council's ('SSDC') Local Plan Review 'Publication Plan' ('the Plan') consultation held under Regulation 19 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. Representations are made with regard to the Plan itself and to the accompanying published evidence, having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework ('NPPF').
- 1.2. This representation is made by Pegasus Group on behalf of Richborough Estates who have a specific land interest in the proposed housing allocation, identified at Policy SA5 as 'Site Ref No. 224 Land Adjacent to Station Road' with a minimum capacity of 85 dwellings ('the Site').
- 1.3. Richborough Estates has previously submitted details of the Site through the Regulation 18 Preferred Options Plan.
- 1.4. The site extends to approximately 4 hectares and is within a highly sustainable location of Codsall, a Tier 1 settlement. The site adjoins the south-western edge of the urban area of Codsall, immediately south of the Birmingham to Shrewsbury railway line and west of the Station Road. The site is well contained and includes an area of agricultural land and woodland.
- 1.5. The representations are framed in the context of the requirements of the Local Plan to be legally compliant and sound. The tests of soundness are set out in the NPPF, paragraph 35. For a Plan to be sound it must be:
  - a) **Positively prepared** – providing a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet the area's objectively assessed needs; and is informed by agreements with other authorities, so that unmet need from neighbouring areas is accommodated where it is practical to do so and is consistent with achieving sustainable development;
  - b) **Justified** – an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence;
  - c) **Effective** – deliverable over the plan period, and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters that have been dealt with rather than deferred, as



evidenced by the statement of common ground; and

- d) **Consistent with national policy** – enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in this Framework.

- 1.6. The representations also address the legal and procedural requirements associated with the plan-making process.

## 2. Planning Policy Context

- 2.1. Richborough Estates supports SSDC's review of the adopted South Staffordshire District Development Plan as required by Policy SAD1 of the Site Allocations Document ('SAD') 2018. This provides the opportunity for the Council to comprehensively review the Vision, Strategic Objectives, development requirements, spatial development strategy and policies shaping detailed development proposals.
- 2.2. The Plan review also provides the opportunity for the Council to not only review its own objectively assessed housing need, but also the role of the District in meeting unmet cross boundary needs from the wider Greater Birmingham and Black Country Housing Market Area ('GBBCHMA').

### **National Requirements for Plan-Making**

- 2.3. The existing Core Strategy for South Staffordshire was adopted in 2012, and as such a holistic review of the Plan is overdue and this is also committed to within the Site Allocations Document 2018. This Local Plan Review will therefore ensure that an up-to-date Local Plan for South Staffordshire will be in place to support growth and meet future development needs.
- 2.4. The Proposed Publication Plan consultation follows previous consultations on the Local Plan 'Preferred Options' review which identified a spatial strategy for housing and employment delivery, whilst also identifying strategic objectives and priorities through numerous policies, including affordable housing. The current consultation document represents SSDC's final version of the Plan and is in accordance with Regulation 19 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended), having considered representations previously made to the Plan, as well as further evidence.
- 2.5. NPPF para 24 also confirms that local planning authorities '...are under a duty to cooperate with each other, and with other prescribed bodies, on strategic matters that cross administrative boundaries.' In the context of South Staffordshire, strategic matters include housing, employment, infrastructure, and the Green Belt.



- 2.6. Richborough Estates supports SSDC's proactive approach in continuing with a review of the Local Plan, to ensure that an up-to-date policy framework exists within the District to guide growth to 2039 and to ensure that development is genuinely plan-led but would like to make some representations on the soundness of some parts of the Plan.

### **3. Vision, Strategic Objectives and Priorities**

- 3.1. The Publication Plan (Regulation 19) identifies a number of 'Issues and Challenges' surrounding homes and communities, economic prosperity and the natural and built environment. The Document goes on to present a 'Vision' based upon these issues and challenges, and a number of 'Strategic Objectives' by which the Vision can be achieved.
- 3.2. It is noted that the Vision remains broadly the same as that presented in the adopted Core Strategy with regard to the aspirations to protect and enhance the District's rural character, communities, and landscape.
- 3.3. However, the Plan's objectives should be amended to reflect the need to meet both the present and future housing requirements, including those pressures arising through the Duty to Cooperate with neighbouring authorities. In this instance the well-known unmet housing needs of the Greater Birmingham and Black Country Housing Market Area (GBBCHMA) should be clearly considered. This is considered further, later in these representations.
- 3.4. The Local Plan lacks clarity at Strategic Objective 1 and does not define exceptional circumstances for release of Green Belt land as part of its strategy. It should be made clear that the need to identify land for growth and development over the Plan period, and beyond, means that there are exceptional circumstances arising which have required a full and detailed Green Belt boundary review, with a view to identifying land that it is proposed to be released from the Green Belt to meet the District's growth requirements.
- 3.5. In relation to Strategic Objective 2, reference is made to meeting the housing and employment needs of the District. It is considered this could be strengthened to refer to meeting the needs of both existing and new residents of the District, but the overarching thrust that new housing should be focussed on sustainable locations in the District, including the key villages and the edge of conurbation of the Black Country, is supported.



## 4. Development Strategy

### Green Belt – Policies DS1 and DS2

- 4.1. Draft Policy DS1 is broadly in line with the relevant paragraphs of the NPPF relating to development within the Green Belt and is therefore supported. However, it should be noted that Richborough Estates do not accept the Council's proposition that the Green Belt 'contributes towards rural character'. Green Belt is a development restraint policy set out at Chapter 13 of the NPPF and is not a landscape or character policy. The NPPF outlines '*the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence*'. Therefore, the Council should amend the text within Policy DS1 and its supporting text to represent national policy.
- 4.2. The 2018 Greater Birmingham and Black Country Housing Market Area (GBBCHMA) Strategic Growth Study presented a strategic review of the Green Belt across the 'joint authorities' area. This review was undertaken in the light of the shortfall in housing need identified across the area. It was acknowledged that as a significant proportion of land within the Housing Market Area is covered by Green Belt, 'exceptional circumstances' through Local Plan reviews would be required to alter the Green Belt boundaries.
- 4.3. The supporting text to Policy DS1 identifies that exceptional circumstances exist for Green Belt release within the South Staffordshire District. This is supported, as is the Council's commitment to release some land from the Green Belt for development to meet identified need.
- 4.4. However, to be sound, and accord with national policy the Plan must include a consideration of Green Belt boundaries that will endure beyond the end of the Plan period in 2039. Para 140 of the NPPF states that "strategic policies should establish the need for any changes to Green Belt boundaries, having regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so they can endure beyond the Plan period."
- 4.5. The Plan should therefore identify opportunities for safeguarded land so that anticipated housing and development needs beyond 2039 are considered as part of the current Local Plan Review and, in particular, are done so in the context of the current reconsideration of



Green Belt boundaries. Safeguarding of land will ensure such needs can be addressed without the need to undertake a further Green Belt boundary review, ensuring the amended boundaries endure beyond the Plan period.

- 4.6. The currently adopted Local Plan at Policy GB2 sets out safeguarded land for the longer term needs of the District. Richborough Estates believes the proposed Local Plan would highly benefit from an introduction of a similar policy within the emerging Local Plan, especially in light of the recent collapse of the Black Country Plan which has led to greater instability of housing supply across the GBBCHMA. The introduction of safeguarded land would allow the Council to assess sites suitable for development and fully maximise the District's capability to greater assist the GBBCHMA growing unmet housing need.
- 4.7. Relevant Green Belt boundary amendments, including the identification of safeguarded land should therefore be considered in the current LP review.
- 4.8. Policy DS2 (Green Belt Compensatory Improvements) is a new policy included within the Regulation 19 Publication Plan. The Policy provides additional detail on expected compensatory improvements for Green Belt (GB) released sites when compared to the Preferred Options Document. Richborough Estates supports the inclusion of a policy setting out the need for Green Belt compensation in relation to sites being removed from the Green Belt. However, the policy still leaves elements of ambiguity and its practical application unclear. Whilst it is appreciated that the SSSC have outlined that 'applicants must demonstrate proportionate compensatory improvements', this does not provide a clear requirement for Green Belt compensation and a revised policy approach is preferred as outlined below.
- 4.9. Policy DS2 also sets out the following hierarchy for Green Belt compensation.
  - a) *Compensatory improvements to remaining Green Belt land adjacent to, or in close proximity to the development site;*
  - b) *Compensatory improvements to remaining Green Belt land within the wider locality accommodating the development;*
  - c) *Compensatory improvements to remaining Green Belt land in an area identified through the council's latest Nature Recovery Network mapping or Open Space Strategy.*

*In the event that it is robustly demonstrated that none of the above options can be satisfied (e.g., as land is demonstrably not available) then the council will accept a commuted sum that it will use to undertake compensatory improvements.*

- 4.10. The hierarchical approach to the GB compensation policy as drafted is not supported. Neither the NPPF nor the PPG refer to a hierarchy of preferred methods of GB compensation. Furthermore, when assessing the policy, it is not at all clear that the preferred methods of GB compensation would deliver a greater benefit than the approaches lower down the hierarchy.
- 4.11. In the first instance, it would appear that all of the potential methods (items a-c plus the penultimate paragraph) require some method of actually delivering the compensation. In practical terms this is likely to be via a S106 agreement associated with a planning permission to develop the allocation (former GB) site and which either delivers contributions towards compensatory improvements or requires the delivery of the identified improvements.
- 4.12. Whilst it is accepted that having the GB compensation located close to the allocation could be advantageous and should be pursued, ultimately it is the overall value of that GB improvement which is of greatest significance. There is also a suggestion within criteria a) and b) of the proposed policy that the preferred approach is reliant on the developer of the allocation owning additional land in the vicinity. This may not always be the case and so care must be taken to ensure that the application of the policy does not result in ransom type scenario. Similarly, a further issue relates to the potential for the lowest ranked element of the compensation hierarchy (the penultimate paragraph involving paying a commuted sum) resulting in the same, or greater, benefit than compensation associated with the highest element in the hierarchy; especially if it results in significant improvements to an existing resource. This could be as a result of the contributions secured in a commuted sum being spent on public land next to the development site.
- 4.13. Therefore, other benefits associated with particular GB compensation schemes which may be more significant than just proximity to the development site need to be explored further. For instance, the compensation could deliver enhancements to give greater public access to a recreation route such as a Canalside walk or deliver improvements to a degraded nature conservation site. Such GB compensation may deliver wider benefits than merely enhancing land in the immediate vicinity of the site.

4.14. In view of the above it is suggested that the policy is amended to delete reference to the hierarchy and instead state that GB compensation is required in conjunction with development of sites removed from the GB which could include improvements to green infrastructure, woodland planting, landscape and visual enhancements, biodiversity improvements, new or enhanced cycle or walking routes and improved access to new, enhanced, or existing recreational and outdoor sports provision. The policy could indicate that this could be delivered through direct improvements to land or via S106 contributions and the Council will seek the optimum public benefits in proportion to the scale of the site being removed from the GB.

#### **Housing- Policy DS4**

4.15. Richborough Estates broadly supports Part a of Policy DS4 which sets a housing target of 9,089 homes over the Plan period whilst providing additional homes to ensure plan flexibility. Upon review of the Local Plan evidence base, though, it is unclear how the Council have concluded that the 'flexibility allowance' should be 13% additional homes. This figure is not evidenced throughout the Evidence Base and Richborough Estates requests the Council provide clarification on this figure.

4.16. The principle of the proposed 4,000 houses to support the GBBCHMA shortfall is broadly supported by Richborough Estates. However, the GBBCHMA Housing Need and Housing Land Supply Position Statement (July 2020) identified the housing shortfall of the GBBCHMA as 67,160 dwellings. Further, the 'Mind the Gap' Barton Willmore Paper dated March 2021 and 'Falling Short – Taking Stock of Unmet Needs across GBBCHMA' paper by Turley in August 2021, both commissioned by HBF Members concluded that the significant unmet needs in the GBBCHMA exist now and will continue to exist in the future. Most recently, the now revoked Draft Black Country Plan 2018–2039 (showed a shortfall of circa 28,000 homes in the Black Country alone and Birmingham City Council have recently suggested a potential shortfall of over 78,000 dwellings in their Development Plan review Issues and Options consultation.

4.17. It is important to stress that the shortfall figures in the GBBCHMA July 2020 paper did not take into consideration the 35% uplift applied to Birmingham or Wolverhampton that were subsequently introduced. The latest Black Country Plan and Birmingham Issues and Options figures therefore show the true extent of the shortfall, which is higher than that which South

Staffordshire have taken into account in preparing their Plan. As set out in the HBF representations to the Publication Plan, the Council should confirm that they could proportionately increase their contribution to unmet need based on the latest figures. The Council's commitment to meeting that unmet need should be set out in a Joint Statement of Common Ground with the other GBBCHMA authorities.

- 4.18. As a result of the overwhelming shortfall in both the Black Country and Birmingham and despite South Staffordshire allocating 4,000 homes, Richborough Estates believes there is scope for an uplift of this figure.
- 4.19. In regard to SSDC own housing needs allocation (5,330 dwellings across the plan period), the Council have allocated the minimum figure of housing required by the Standard methodology and as such, Richborough Estates raises concerns regarding a potential insufficient housing to meet the District's housing needs.
- 4.20. The starting point for the identification of housing requirements is the 2014-based sub-national household forecasts as set out in National Planning Policy Guidance ('PPG') and the utilisation of the standard method of calculation. PPG is also clear that the figure produced by the Standard Method represents a minimum figure, rather than a requirement.
- 4.21. PPG provides a non-exhaustive list of examples whereby additional growth beyond the minimum requirement may be appropriate, including relevant growth strategies for the area, strategic infrastructure improvements or accommodating unmet need from neighbouring authorities.
- 4.22. As part of the Publication Plan, the 2021 Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) was updated, with the South Staffordshire Housing Market Assessment Update published in October 2022. The 2022 SHMA presents further depth of analysis compared to the 2021 assessment and supersedes the 2021 SHMA.
- 4.23. The updated Housing Market assessment at paragraph 4.17 indicates the revised standard method in 2022 is 241 dwellings per year resulting in a minimum of 5,330 new additional homes to be planned for in South Staffordshire to cover the local need across the Plan period 2018–2039. The assessment considers the proposed target of 9,089 homes (5,089 local need and 4,000 home contribution to meet the unmet GBBCHMA need) to be greater than

the need for the District as a result of the 2021 Census data which indicated the growth within South Staffordshire to be lower than predicted in 2020.

4.24. However, there are a number of potential flaws in the 2021 Census figures, which took place during the Covid-19 pandemic. In a Paper commissioned by the Land Promoters & Developers Federation October 2022, Quod<sup>1</sup> advised that the 2021 Census figures should be considered with caution. Reasons for such caution are identified in the Paper as:

- Internal Migration – many people spent lockdown somewhere different, for example leaving town to stay with parents whilst working remotely. While the Census record ‘usual residents’ this is open to definition and interpretation by people themselves and for many temporary arrangements would have been deemed to be their ‘usual residence’.
- Students – who were disrupted and learning online for a large proportion of time up to and including March 2021 at the time of the Census.

4.25. The report goes on to note that whilst there has been a general, expected slowdown in population growth, the country has not been building more homes than are needed. As an example, household formation has been artificially low, likely suppressed by unaffordability matters.

4.26. Richborough Estates considers a larger housing contribution would have benefits in reducing the likely shortfall within the GBBCHMA such as improving affordability and choice and providing a more reliable source of supply.

4.27. Richborough Estates object to Policy DS4 as not being justified based on proportionate evidence nor positively prepared in the context of the shortfall in housing across the Greater Birmingham Housing Market Area.

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<sup>1</sup> Census 2021: What Does it Mean for Housing? Quod for LPDF, October 2022



## **Economic Uplift and Housing Figures**

- 4.28. The South Staffordshire Housing Market Assessment 2021 (HMA) sets out the broad economic consequences of the projected growth in Chapter 5. However, the HMA fails to consider the impact of committed development at the HS2 West Midlands Interchange ('WMI'), which is projected to create around 8,500 new jobs and up to 8,100 indirect jobs off-site, well in excess of the increase in the working age population between 2018 and 2038 identified by the HMA (6,618 people). The updated HMA 2022 also does not consider the impact of the committed WMI. In addition, both the 2021 and updated 2022 HMA do not consider that significant job growth will be provided through committed strategic employment developments planned at i54 and ROF Featherstone.
- 4.29. Richborough Estates has raised concerns about the Economic Development Needs Assessment 2020–2040 (June 2022) (EDNA) in other representations. The EDNA was prepared by DLP Planning on behalf of South Staffordshire District Council and it sought to identify future employment needs across the South Staffordshire area for the period 2020–2040. The EDNA outlines that the approved WMI has the potential to employ 16,600 both on and off site.
- 4.30. The EDNA also identifies the i54 development as a key 'employment corridor' and at paragraph 4.22 states that the facility 'could lead to a profound effect on the local and sub-regional property market as demand for engineering/manufacturing space increases'.
- 4.31. The updated HMA at paragraph 5.10 identifies that the projections profiling the change in population indicate that the working age population in South Staffordshire will grow by 6,618 people between 2020 and 2040. This is notably in excess of the growth of 4,824 jobs indicated by the EDNA, albeit Richborough consider the EDNA underestimates job growth. The updated HMA at paragraph 5.13 suggests that the housing requirement of 9,089 homes over the Plan period is sufficient to address the projected economic growth for the District. However, Richborough Estates, as raised above, have concerns regarding the proposed housing figures due to the large shortfall of housing across the GBBCHMA, which has been exasperated by the rising instability of the Black Country.

## **Spatial Strategy**



- 4.32. SSDC previously consulted on a Spatial Housing Strategy and Infrastructure Delivery (SHSID) document in October 2019. This looked at how the proposed housing target could be distributed between different settlements and other broad locations within the District.
- 4.33. Richborough Estates does not support the Local Plans strategy of limiting allocations in Perton to only the land safeguarded through the adopted SAD. Further comment on this matter is provided within a representation relevant to Perton, prepared by Pegasus Group on behalf of Richborough Estates.
- 4.34. Furthermore, whilst Featherstone is identified as a Tier 3 Settlement within the Settlement Hierarchy, it is located less than a mile away from the strategic mixed-use allocation at Cross Green (ref: 646a and 646b). It is submitted that Featherstone can play a similar role in supporting the existing and planned employment opportunities in the area, whilst also supporting the creation of additional services and facilities, to the betterment of the overall sustainability of the settlement. Further comment on this matter is provided within a representation relevant to Featherstone, prepared by Pegasus Group on behalf of Richborough Estates.

#### **Longer Term Growth Aspirations for a new settlement- Policy DS6**

- 4.35. Policy DS6 sets out an aspiration for SSDC to deliver a new settlement beyond the plan period. A broad location comprising the transport corridor formed by the A449 and West Coast Mainline between Wolverhampton and Stafford has been identified as a potential area of search for such proposals.
- 4.36. Richborough Estates made representations to the Preferred Options Plan and continues to support Policy DS6 which recognises the importance and suitability of the identified potential growth corridor. Richborough Estates also supports the objectives for the new settlement as set out within the Policy.
- 4.37. To this end, Richborough Estates is promoting Land North of the A5, Gailey, which falls within this corridor. A separate representation has been prepared by Pegasus Group on behalf of Richborough Estates which further promotes this land for allocation in a future Local Plan.



## 5. Site Allocations- Policy SA5 and Sustainability Appraisal Comments

- 5.1. Following the Preferred Options (Regulation 18) Plan the Council have made a number of additional amendments to certain specific sites, including identification of three additional small brownfield sites and removal of sites where the council suggested the sites were unsuitable.

### Housing Allocations- Policy SA5

- 5.2. South Staffordshire District Council at Strategic Objective 2 identify that housing growth will be located at the Districts most sustainable locations to facilitate growth and assist in meeting the wider unmet housing needs. It is considered that Land adjacent to Station Road is a highly sustainable site, capable of supporting housing growth to meet the housing need.
- 5.3. Land adjacent to Station Road is adjoins the Tier 1 settlement of Codsall. Policy DS5 indicates that Tier 1 settlements hold a wider range of services and facilities and have access to rail corridors into the adjacent towns and cities upon which the District relies for its higher order services and employment.
- 5.4. The site is ideally located adjoining Codsall Railway Station which provides regular services between Birmingham New Street and Shrewsbury. The site benefits from Codsall's range of services available including shops (including Costa Coffee, barbers, florist and take away restaurants), primary and secondary schools, convenience stores, community facilities and health care facilities.
- 5.5. The Housing Site Selection Paper (2022) sets out detailed commentary on the Proposed Housing Site Allocations set out at Policy SA5. The paper concludes that the site is on land considered to be of 'moderate-high 'harm to the Green Belt, which is lower than most other Green Belt sites around the settlements.
- 5.6. The paper continues stating:  
*'The site's allocation would offer numerous benefits that are not present at many other site suggestions. The site is the closest in the settlement to Codsall train station and is a very*

*short distance from the village centre, offering walkable neighbourhood and public transport benefits. It is in a lower category of Green Belt harm around Codsall/Bilbrook (moderate-high) when compared with the majority of other land around the village.*

*The site is also the best placed of all site options to deliver the car parking for Codsall station identified in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan, due to its proximity to the station.'*

- 5.7. Richborough Estates supports the allocation of Land adjacent to Station Road and as set out in the information above it is clear the site is sustainably located and should remain an allocation within the Local Plan.
- 5.8. Richborough Estates supports for the overall strategy of the Plan, however there is concern over the lack of safeguarded land as outline at paragraph 4.6 of this representation. As discussed previously, the GBBCHMA has a large unmet housing need and is likely to be significantly greater than that previously published. The collapse of the Black Country Plan has also led to further instability across the Black Country and wider area and Richborough Estates considers the South Staffordshire's lack of safeguarded land is misguided. The Council is encouraged to safeguard land of a variety of sizes and locations as to ensure sustainable housing growth can be achieved during the plan period.

## 6. Development Management Policies

### Policy HC1- Housing Mix

- 6.1. Housing mix should be guided by market signals as reflected in the most up to date assessment needs. Such assessments will need to be updated over the course of the plan period.
- 6.2. The requirement that 70% of properties comprise of 3 bedrooms or less is restrictive and does not afford the flexibility expected by NPPF para 62 in order to meet the need to provide for a range of size, type, and tenure for different groups.
- 6.3. The use of the phrase 'disproportionate' in the penultimate paragraph, when describing the quantum of 4+ bedroom houses, lacks the precision and clarity needed for a Plan policy.
- 6.4. The policy should recognise that needs and demand will vary from area to area and site to site and identify that its requirements could be subject to a viability assessment, thus allowing for flexibility in its application.
- 6.5. Clarification should also be made defining 'major' development. It is noted that the Publication Plan has removed footnote 11 from the Issues and Options Plan which defined major development in accordance with the NPPF definition stating major development is "*development where 10 or more homes will be provided, or the site has an area of 0.5 hectares or more*". Whilst a definition is contained within the NPPF, the statutory definition is actually contained within the Town and Country Planning Development Management Procedure Order, which defines major development as where:
- (Ci) the number of dwellinghouses to be provided is 10 or more; or*
- (Cii) the development is to be carried out on a site having an area of 0.5 hectares or more and it is not known whether the development falls within sub-paragraph (c)(i)*
- 6.6. The text emphasised above is an important qualifier when considering whether or not a proposal constitutes major development. This qualifying text has not been carried through into the definition contained within the NPPF. Richborough Estates suggest a definition of

major development should be reintroduced into the Plan, with the DMPO definition referred to for the avoidance of doubt.

- 6.7. In light of the above, the policy is considered unsound, as it is neither justified nor consistent with national policy for the reasons set out above.

### **Policy HC2- Housing Density**

- 6.8. Policy HC2 sets out an aim to achieve a minimum net density of 35 dwellings per net developable hectare in developments 'within or adjoining Tier 1 settlements, in infill locations within the development boundaries of other settlements in the district or in urban extensions to neighbouring towns and cities'.

- 6.9. Richborough Estates welcome the addition to the policy (set out below) which recognises that a blanket approach to density is unlikely to be effective stating:

*'Where it would help to support the delivery of local services and facilities, sites will be encouraged to exceed this minimum density standard where this could be done in a manner consistent with other development plan policies, particularly those relevant to the character of the surrounding area.'*

*The net density on a site may go below the minimum density standard set above if to do otherwise would result in significant adverse impacts to the surrounding area's historic environment, settlement pattern or landscape character.'*

- 6.10. It is also acknowledged that the Council have updated the wording of Policy HC2 to include a direction for settlements within Tiers 2-5 of the Settlement Hierarchy.

### **Policy HC3- Affordable Housing**

- 6.11. Policy HC3 requires proposal for major residential development to provide 30% of all dwellings as affordable housing. The use of the term 'major residential development' in this context requires a definition to save confusion as to what size of development affordable housing becomes a requirement, it is presumed to be the same as that within the NPPF Glossary. The policy also needs to ensure that evidence is provided when considering viability, especially when looking at brownfield sites.

- 6.12. The requirement for 30% affordable housing appears to be supported by the Viability Study Stage 2 Report 2022 (VA) which confirms at paragraph 3.2.7 that the proposed affordable housing figure can be appropriate for South Staffordshire, but it does highlight the challenges in delivering such a requirement and the need for higher site values to be achieved to deliver this across the board.
- 6.13. The NPPF is clear that the derivation of affordable housing policies should take account not only of need but also have regards to viability and deliverability and a differentiated policy approach should be used to the provision of affordable housing, as set out in the Viability Study.
- 6.14. The Council's position to continue with the established approach of using Section 106 planning obligations to secure the necessary infrastructure to support and mitigate the effects of new development is supported.
- 6.15. The requirement to 'pepper pot' affordable housing in clusters across the development is generally supported. However, the policy should recognise that for management purposes, Registered Providers do require a degree of clustering of affordable housing within a development and this will inform site layouts.
- 6.16. Richborough Estates supports the removal of the suggestion that grant funding for homes to be provided under the requirements of the Policy as requested within the Regulation 18 Representation.
- 6.17. The frequent reference to further guidance being provided by the Affordable Housing SPD is noted. The SPD should do no more than clarify the Local Plan policy and it is suggested that if the requirements for implementing the policy are known to need explanation now then these should either be included within the Plan now or set out within the explanatory text. The SPD is not the appropriate approach for setting new policy and or burdens on delivery, and the Plan should provide clarity at the point of adoption as to what it requires.

#### **Policy HC4- Homes for older people and others with special housing requirements**

- 6.18. Policy HC4 notes major development should:

*'...clearly contributes to meeting the needs of older and disabled people.'*

- 6.19. The above policy wording does not define 'older people', so it is unclear as to exactly who this Policy is targeting or who would be eligible to occupy such dwellings.
- 6.20. It stipulates that all major development should provide bungalows, age restricted single storey accommodation, sheltered/retirement living and extra care housing. The Council do not define what ages will be restricted for single storey development and as such, the policy requires clarification on this matter.
- 6.21. Such specialist housing, especially that related to extra care and retirement living, often need a minimum critical mass to be viable (for example, extra care units typically require 60+ bedrooms to be viable) and therefore the Council needs to determine, through evidence the minimum size of site which should be able to viably support the provision of such accommodation.
- 6.22. The policy then needs to provide much greater clarity on when such housing will be required as part of a major development, and to make clear that some housing types may be required on any given site.
- 6.23. It is further noted that since the Preferred Options consultation, the Plan has moved from expecting 30% all homes to be Building Regulation M4(2) compliant, it now requires 100% of all housing to be M4(2) compliant. This may bring with it issues of affordability, in a context where the access and affordability of housing is an area of wider concern.
- 6.24. The Council's Viability Study, Stage 2 (2022) acknowledges that at present Part M of the Building Regulations requires all dwellings to be built to a minimum of M4(1) with further enhanced requirements to M4(2) and M4(3) required through policy, subject to evidence of need as well as viability.
- 6.25. Currently, the requirement for M4(2) properties is optional within Building Regulations and are described as making "reasonable provision for most people to access the dwelling and incorporate features that make it potentially suitable for a wide range of occupants, including older people, those with reduced mobility and some wheelchair users". It is recognised that the older person population is likely to increase over the plan period, however an ageing population affects the whole country and is not an issue specific to South Staffordshire. If the Government had intended that evidence of an ageing population alone justify adoption

of optional standards, then such standards would have been incorporated as mandatory in the Building Regulations, which is not the case.

- 6.26. Furthermore, the HMA identifies a need for 1,783 accessible and adaptable general homes for those over 65 years and 1,235 for those under 65 years, across the Plan Period. This equates to less than 30% of the overall housing requirement to be delivered by this Plan. The updated SHMA 2022 at paragraph 8.14 concludes that it is calculated that adapted housing M4(2) will be required for 3,978 households by 2040 in South Staffordshire. It is therefore not clear how the 100% requirement within the Policy has been arrived at or how this is justified.
- 6.27. Having highlighted the above, it is also noted that the Council's Viability Study 2022 simply refers to a Government consultation<sup>2</sup> which indicates that M4(2) standards may become mandatory for all new housing.
- 6.28. That consultation was undertaken in 2020 and in July 2022 the Government published their response. This indicates that M4(2) dwellings may indeed become mandatory. This will necessitate a change to Building Regulations and statutory guidance, on which the Government will consult further in due course.
- 6.29. At the present time, though, the requirement for M4(2) dwellings is not mandatory and if the Council wish to pursue a policy requirement of 100% M4(2) dwellings then this needs to be justified, with reference to both need and cost.
- 6.30. As drafted, Policy HC4 is not sound as it is not justified.

#### **Policy HC8 – Self-build and Custom Housebuilding**

- 6.31. Policy HC8 requires sites for major residential development to "... have regard to the need on the council's self-build register and make provision of self and custom build plots to reflect this". The policy should be clear that in having regard to the Council's self-build register, it is only part 1 of the register which needs to be considered. The policy should also recognise,

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<sup>2</sup> [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk): Raising accessibility standards for new homes: summary of consultation responses and government responses (July 2022)

that delivery of self-build housing on new residential sites, successfully occurs when there is a distinct phasing or grouping of plots, secured for such delivery.

6.32. Whilst Richborough Estates generally supports the concept of self-build/custom housing, they do not consider providing them as part of a larger housing development is the most appropriate solution because self/custom builders are more likely to want a more bespoke location/setting. Smaller dedicated self/custom sites are therefore a more appropriate answer.

6.33. Richborough Estates supports the position that should a proposed custom self-build plot not be sold after 12 months following active marketing, then the developer will be permitted to build out the plan as a standard property type.

#### **Policy HC10- Design Requirements**

6.34. The introduction of a new set of requirements to ensure high quality design and the creation of beautiful places in line with Government guidance is supported. However, a number of specific comments are made on the policy as drafted:

- The provision of tree lined streets (item c) should be subject to highway authority agreement, and where appropriate, their adoption. In Richborough Estates' experience, local highway authorities do not want trees in immediate proximity of the street due to management concerns or liabilities.
- The point on house types and tenures (item l) is repetition of policy material set out at Policy HC1 and is therefore unnecessary.

#### **Policy HC12- Space About Dwellings and Internal Space**

6.35. The continuity of existing external space and dwelling standards is generally supported although there should be a recognition that certain house types, for example Part M4(2) dwellings, should have smaller, more manageable gardens.

6.36. Richborough Estates suggests that some flexibility must be allowed in the application of the Nationally Described Space Standards (NDSS) as occasionally non-compliance with NDSS



may be appropriate for sound urban design reasons and the Policy should therefore build in some flexibility.

6.37. If the NDSS requirement is to be pursued, then the Council need to provide additional evidence for the Local Plan Examination to demonstrate that the policy is sound. National Planning Guidance Housing: optional technical standards (paragraph O20) clearly state that *“Where a need for internal space standards is identified, local planning authorities should provide justification for requiring internal space policies. Local planning authorities should take account of the following areas:*

- *Need – evidence should be provided in the size and type of dwellings currently being built in the area, to ensure the impacts of adopting space standards can be properly assessed, for example, to consider any potential impact on meeting demand for starter homes.*
- *Viability – the impact of adopting the space standard should be considered as part of a plan’s viability assessment with account taken of the impact of potentially larger dwellings on land supply. Local planning authorities will also need to consider impacts on affordability where a space standard is to be adopted.*
- *Timing – there may need to be a reasonable transition period following adoption of a new policy on space standards to enable developers to factor the cost of space standards into future land acquisitions.”*

6.38. It is clear that the introduction of the NDSS requires a Local Plan policy which has been fully evidenced, justified and viability tested. The South Staffordshire Housing Market Assessment Update 2022 (HMA) refers to the NDSS (paragraph 7.32) only in the context of assessing the need for accessible and adaptable homes. The HMA does not provide any justification or evidence for requiring NDSS in the District.

#### **Policy HC14- Health Infrastructure**

6.39. This policy refers to proposed developments causing ‘unacceptable impact’ on existing health care facilities but fails to define what level of impact is deemed unacceptable or how

that is to be measured. The policy should also acknowledge that not all residents of a development will be new to a catchment area and may indeed already be registered by the local health care provider, thereby not creating a net additional burden.

- 6.40. Careful analysis is required therefore with regard to the capacity of existing infrastructure to accommodate new patients, before reaching a conclusion as to what any CIL Regulation 122 compliant financial request might be. The requirement for CIL Reg compliance of any request should be clearly specified within policy.
- 6.41. The policy is considered unsound, as it is neither *justified* nor *consistent with national policy* for the reasons set out above.

#### **Policy HC15- Education**

- 6.42. Richborough Estates broadly supports the policies' objective for the improvement or construction of schools to meet the demand generated by children in new development. However, as currently written, the policy makes a blanket assumption that new education infrastructure will be required from all new development.
- 6.43. The Policy text requires further clarification as any such provision to be delivered by a S106 agreement, must have regard to the tests of CIL Regulation 122. The policy should make this explicit. In this regard, the policy should also recognise new infrastructure will be required from new development, only where it can be demonstrated that existing capacity to accommodate growth does not currently exist.
- 6.44. The policy is considered unsound, as it is neither *justified* nor *consistent with national policy* for the reasons set out above.

#### **Policy HC17- Open Space**

- 6.45. Whilst there is no in principle objection to the requirements of the policy or the provision of open space within developments, some clarifications are required in order to ensure that the Policy is sound.
- 6.46. The policy requirement for on-site equipped play provision as default is not supported as it will not be appropriate for every site, for example where there is already high-quality

equipped play provision in the locality it would not make sense to duplicate this provision. In addition, it is not appropriate to require open space to be centrally located on all sites as this does not take into consideration differences in development sites opportunities and constraints. It is requested that the Council amend the policy to allow policy a more flexible approach to achieve the right design solution for each site.

- 6.47. The focus of Green Infrastructure provision should be based on quality rather than quantity or 'useability' and the exclusion of small incidental green infrastructure (GI) without a clear recreational purpose from on-site open space provision is not supported. The policy text cites landscape buffers as an example of incidental GI which may be excluded. This is not appropriate as landscape buffers can be of a significant size and clearly contribute towards open space provision on a site. They should therefore be included in these calculations. Planning Practice Guidance acknowledges that '*Green infrastructure can embrace a range of spaces and assets that provide environmental and wider benefits. It can, for example, include parks, playing fields, other areas of open space, woodland, allotments, private gardens, sustainable drainage features, green roofs and walls, street trees and 'blue infrastructure' such as streams, ponds, canals, and other water bodies*' (Paragraph 004 - ref ID: 8-004-20190721).
- 6.48. The policy should therefore be revisited and clarified, with clear reference to national guidance ensure that open space and green infrastructure is properly and clearly defined and to recognise the contribution that a range of spaces and uses will bring to a development.
- 6.49. The policy as drafted is unsound as it is *inconsistent with national policy* and is *unjustified* for the reasons set out above.

#### **Policy HC18- Sports facilities and playing pitches**

- 6.50. Policy HC18 is informed by the playing pitch and sport facilities assessments produced by KKP in 2020 and is broadly supported.
- 6.51. It is noted that further guidance on the procedure for determining provision required from new development will be set out in an Open Space, Sport, and Recreation SPD. However, the policy requires all new major residential development to contribute towards sports facilities and playing pitches, but no further quantitative details are provided to set out the detail of what will be expected within the Publication Plan.

- 6.52. The requirements for playing pitches are set out in the Future Housing Growth and Playing Pitch Requirements Topic Paper (November 2022). The requirements in regard to the Land north of Station Road are considered broadly appropriate and is supported. It would be more appropriate for SSDC to define standards expected from development as part of policy (as per the open space standard defined by Policy HC17, for example). This approach provides greater certainty in respect of the infrastructure delivery requirements expected from sites, which ultimately impacts upon their viability. The level of provision expected, and the associated viability implications should be considered within both the Infrastructure Delivery Plan and Viability Assessment.
- 6.53. The requirements of delivering sports facilities and playing pitches through on-site provision or S106 contributions is only one element of the package and things sites will need to provide and the Council must ensure the delivery of all potential obligations are taken into account for both on and off-site provision to support the soundness of the Plan at examination.

#### **Policy EC3- Inclusive Growth**

- 6.54. The requirement for an Employment and Skills Plan to be prepared for all developments of 100 or more residential dwellings is not supported. Whilst the benefits of such plans are acknowledged, it is considered more appropriate to implement them on a site-by-site basis, dependent on local circumstances and the labour market and such a requirement can be sourced by condition. This is especially important in the context of modular methods of construction inevitably increasing in the coming years, probably sourced from outside South Staffordshire.
- 6.55. If the Policy is to be found sound it should be amended to incorporate flexibility and allow for Employment and Skills Plans to be requested on a site-by-site basis, where appropriate. In so doing the relevant criterion for requesting such policies must be clearly defined and set out within the policy in order to ensure the policy is justified.

#### **Policy EC11- Infrastructure**

- 6.56. Policy EC11 commits SSDC to work with and support infrastructure providers and also offer support for the delivery of infrastructure. This is broadly supported, but any assessment of

cumulative impact and mitigation requested must be proportionate and CIL Regulation 122 compliant. The policy should be explicit that this is the case.

- 6.57. The policy is considered unsound, as it is neither *justified* nor *consistent with national policy* for the reasons set out above.

#### **Policy NB2- Biodiversity**

- 6.58. Richborough Estates are supportive of the need to address net losses to Biodiversity, through the provision of enhancement to deliver an overall net gain. The Council's policy requirement to deliver 10% Biodiversity Net Gain, reflects that of the Environment Act and is not objected to. Indeed, it reflects one of the core principles of the NPPF to conserve and enhance the natural environment.

- 6.59. In delivering net gain, however, the policy needs to provide as much flexibility as possible. The key test of policy is whether the 10% BNG is being delivered, not necessarily the specific method by which it is delivered. It is important that the way in which these 'net gains' are calculated is given careful consideration and that a pragmatic view is taken in terms of biodiversity enhancements, where there are clear landscape and habitat improvements, rather than being wholly reliant on the output of rigid calculator, in particular where this would impede the delivery of much needed housing.

- 6.60. In this regard, certain aspects of the policy would benefit from clarification. Subsection a) for example, discusses 'maintaining and enhance existing habitats' on development sites as a priority. It has to be questioned, however, that where sites are allocated for delivery, whether such a goal is achievable. Certainly, it is good practice to retain where possible, hedgerows, mature trees, and other key ecological assets. However, for the policy to indicate that habitat protection on site is a priority, over matters such as high-quality urban design, or delivery of any of a raft of other local plan policies, gives this specific element of policy delivery an undue prominence.

- 6.61. The policy would benefit from some limited re-wording (replace 'as a priority' with 'where possible' for example) to provide a more balanced and practical response to achieving the necessary 10% BNG delivery.

#### **Policy NB4- Landscape Character**

6.62. Policy NB4, would benefit to an amendment in the text, which reflects the comments made on Policy NB2 above. As drafted, the second paragraph states:

*"All trees, woodland, and hedgerows should be protected and retained"*

6.63. Whilst it is appreciated that the following sentence identified that should a loss be required, appropriate mitigation measure must be delivered by the developer, the above sentence should be amended to the following:

*"All trees, woodland and hedgerows should be protected and retained wherever possible"*

#### **Policy NB6– Sustainable Construction**

6.64. Given that the Environment Act 2021 has recently been made into law, it needs to be made clear that this policy reflects the Act and its purpose and that it repeats the laws written within it.

6.65. Concern is raised with some of the technical detail raised in Policy NB6. Clause 3 regarding embodied carbon, includes the statement:

6.66. 'Developers must ensure that a recognised monitoring regime is put in place to allow the assessment of energy use, indoor air quality, and overheating risk for 10% of the proposed dwellings (of the council's choosing) for the first five years of their occupancy and ensure that the information recovered is provided to the applicable occupiers and the planning authority.'

6.67. Whilst Richborough Estates fully appreciate the value of Whole Life-Cycle Carbon assessments and the need for some form of post construction, pre-occupation assessment, there is concern raised about this policy. Firstly, once sold the properties will be owned by the purchasers and their mortgagees. There are issues of data protection and consent surrounding the recording and sharing of energy use, air quality and overheating risk data with a third party, in respect of properties that the developer will not own.

6.68. Secondly, with the above in mind, it must be noted that whilst it may be possible to introduce some form of data gathering within the homes, once sold and the responsibility of a third



party, it may become difficult to ensure that all of the devices installed for monitoring will remain active for the entire period.

- 6.69. There is no evidence to suggest that the Council have considered or addressed the GDPR implications of this requirement, its effect on 'mortgage-ability', or indeed its effect on sales values. Presumably properties which are wired to share private individual's lifestyle data, would be less attractive in the marketplace, and that would be reflected in reduced sales values. This element of the possible is not practical to be delivered in the form proposed, and is therefore considered unsound, on the grounds of being neither justified nor consistent with national policy for the reasons set out above.
- 6.70. Further, the requirement of the policy for developments to demonstrate a minimum 63% reduction in carbon emissions, with each dwellings achieving at least a 10% improvement on the Building Regulations Part L 2021 Target for Fabric Energy Efficiency, plus post development requirements to achieve as least zero regulated carbon across the scheme is unnecessary. with the improved Part L Building Regulations and emerging Future Homes Standards we do feel that this may be an unnecessary early step however would support the introduction of early improvements once further details are available within the market to achieve these high standards of construction, without unintended consequence of increased air tightness/efficiency is known. We don't feel that the Council does not need to set local energy efficiency standards to achieve the shared net zero goal.
- 6.71. Having worked in areas of water stress and the emerging requirement for water efficiency playing a bigger part in other areas of construction, we would support the 110l/p/d target.,

## 7. Sustainability Appraisal

7.1. The Publication Plan is supported by a Sustainability Appraisal ('the SA'), prepared by Lepus Consulting<sup>3</sup>. The purpose of the SA is stated as being to appraise the sustainability performance of all potential site allocations for development. The potential sites are assessed in relation to each of the stated objectives in the SA Framework as follows:

- **SA Objective 1. Climate change mitigation:** Minimise the Plan area's contribution to climate change.
- **SA Objective 2. Climate change adaptation:** Plan for the anticipated impacts of climate change.
- **SA Objective 3. Biodiversity and geodiversity:** Protect, enhance, and manage the flora, fauna, biodiversity, and geodiversity assets of the district.
- **SA Objective 4. Landscape and townscape:** Conserve, enhance and manage the character and appearance of the landscape and townscape, maintaining and strengthening their distinctiveness.
- **SA Objective 5. Pollution and waste:** Reduce waste generation, increase the reuse of, and recycling of, materials whilst minimizing the extent and impacts of water, air, and noise pollution.
- **SA Objective 6. Natural resources:** Protect, enhance, and ensure the efficient use of the district's land, soils, and water.
- **SA Objective 7. Housing:** Provide a range of housing to meet the needs of the community.

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<sup>3</sup> Sustainability Appraisal of the South Staffordshire Local Plan Review – Regulation 19 SA Report Volume 1 to 3, October 2022





- **SA Objective 8. Health and wellbeing:** Safeguard and improve the physical and mental health of residents.
- **SA Objective 9. Cultural heritage:** Conserve, enhance and manage sites, features, and areas of historic and cultural importance.
- **SA Objective 10. Transport and accessibility:** Improve the efficiency of transport networks by increasing the proportion of travel by sustainable modes and by promoting policies which reduce the need to travel.
- **SA Objective 11. Education:** Improve education, skills, and qualifications in the district. Raise educational attainment and develop and maintain a skilled workforce to support long-term competitiveness.
- **SA Objective 12. Economy and employment:** To support a strong, diverse, vibrant, and sustainable local economy to foster balanced economic growth.
- **SA Objective 13. Equality:** Reduce poverty, crime and social deprivation and secure economic inclusion.

7.2. The SA also appraises the draft development management policies and their likely outcomes.

7.3. The significance of effects is scored as follows:

Significance	Definition (Not Necessarily Exhaustive)
Major Negative --	<p>The size, nature and location of a development proposal would be likely to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Permanently degrade, diminish, or destroy the integrity of a quality receptor, such as a feature of international, national, or regional importance;</li><li>• Cause a very high-quality receptor to be permanently diminished;</li><li>• Be unable to be entirely mitigated;</li><li>• Be discordant with the existing setting; and/or</li></ul>

•	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contribute to a cumulative significant effect.</li> </ul>
Minor Negative -	<p>The size, nature and location of development proposals would be likely to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not quite fit into the existing location or with existing receptor qualities; and/or</li> <li>Affect undesignated yet recognised local receptors.</li> </ul>
Negligible 0	<p>Either no impacts are anticipated, or any impacts are anticipated to be negligible</p>
Uncertain +/-	<p>It is entirely uncertain whether impacts would be positive or adverse</p>
Minor Positive +	<p>The size, nature and location of a development proposal would be likely to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve undesignated yet recognised receptor qualities at the local scale;</li> <li>Fit into, or with, the existing location and existing receptor qualities; and/or</li> <li>Enable the restoration of valued characteristic features.</li> </ul>
Major Positive ++	<p>The size, nature and location of a development proposal would be likely to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhance and redefine the location in a positive manner, making a contribution at a national or international scale;</li> <li>Restore valued receptors which were degraded through previous uses; and/or</li> <li>Improve one or more key elements/features/characteristics of a receptor with recognised quality such as a specific international, national, or regional designation.</li> </ul>

**Table 7.1 Guide to scoring significance of effects**

7.4. The SA represents an update to previous iterations of the SA which have supported previous consultation versions of the LPR.

**Land Adjacent to Station Road: Site Ref: 224**

7.5. Land Adjacent to Station Road is assessed within the SA as 'Land adjacent to 44 Station Road' under site reference: 224. This includes an assessment of the nature and magnitude of the impact of the development both pre- and post-mitigation.

7.6. This assessment is reproduced in Figures 7.1 and 7.2 below.

Site Reference	1 Climate Change Mitigation	2 Climate Change Adaptation	3 Biodiversity & Geodiversity	4 Landscape & Townscape	5 Pollution & Waste	6 Natural Resources	7 Housing	8 Health & Wellbeing	9 Cultural Heritage	10 Transport & Accessibility	11 Education	12 Economy & Employment
224	+/-	--	+/-	--	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	+

**Figure 7.1 Significance of effects pre-mitigation, Site Ref: 224**

Site Reference	1 Climate Change Mitigation	2 Climate Change Adaptation	3 Biodiversity & Geodiversity	4 Landscape & Townscape	5 Pollution & Waste	6 Natural Resources	7 Housing	8 Health & Wellbeing	9 Cultural Heritage	10 Transport & Accessibility	11 Education	12 Economy & Employment
224	+/-	+	+/-	--	0	-	+	-	0	-	-	+

**Figure 7.2: Significance of effects post-mitigation, Site Ref: 224**

7.7. These assessments are broadly supported, although Richborough Estates does not agree with the finding that the development of the Site would result in a Major Negative impact upon landscape and townscape.

7.8. The SA states that this Major Negative impact is considered to arise due to the site needing to be released from the Green Belt. However, the SA also sets out that site is only considered to result in a 'moderate-high' harm to the Green Belt (as opposed to a potential 'high' or 'very high' level of harm), as concluded by the Green Belt Study which supports the LPR.

7.9. The finding that the site would have a Major Negative impact upon landscape and townscape accordingly appears to be based upon the finding that the site could result in an unsustainable pattern of development. Richborough Estates opposes this view given the assessment later states that the site is considered to perform better than other sites options and could deliver the Council's preferred spatial strategy.

## 8. Land Adjacent to Station Road

### Site Description

- 8.1. Richborough Estates has current land interests in Land Adjacent to Station Road, as shown on the Site Location Plan appended to this representation (see Appendix 1).
- 8.2. The site adjoins the south-western edge of the urban area of Codsall, immediately south of the Birmingham to Shrewsbury railway line and west of the Station Road. The site is well contained and includes an area of agricultural land and woodland.
- 8.3. The parcels of land are subdivided by existing tree/hedgerow boundaries associated with the agricultural use of the land. The site is identified as Grade 3b quality agricultural land and therefore does not represent best and most versatile land (BMV).
- 8.4. The site lies within the West Midlands Green Belt but is adjacent to the current development boundary of Codsall. The site is located in Flood Zone 1; land having less than 1 in 1,000 probability of annual flooding. The site is also flat and not constrained topographically. The site represents a sustainable location, close to the village centre and opposite Codsall railway station.
- 8.5. The site has no other environmental or historical designations.

### Proposed Development

- 8.6. An Illustrative Masterplan is included at Appendix 2 to this representation, which demonstrates how the site is capable of accommodating 85 new dwellings, as well as associated public open space, drainage, play areas and landscaping.

### Green Belt

- 8.7. In August 2022, SSSDC published the South Staffordshire Green Belt Study Addendum. The reports are an addendum to the South Staffordshire Green Belt Study (2019) and provides

additional sub-parcel assessment and amended maps and plans to reflect the addition of a sub-parcel.

- 8.8. The South Staffordshire Green Belt Study was published in July 2019, alongside a study employing the same methodology for the Black Country authorities. The study forms an important piece of evidence for the review of the South Staffordshire Local Plan.
- 8.9. The Green Belt Study comprised of two parts; the first was to assess 'strategic variations' between the contribution of land to the five purposes of the Green Belt, whilst the second includes a more focused assessment of the potential 'harm' of removing land from the Green Belt.
- 8.10. Alongside the Green Belt Study, a Stage 3 assessment involved undertaking a landscape sensitivity assessment in order to assess the sensitivity of land within the South Staffordshire to housing and employment development. Whilst there is a relationship between landscape sensitivity and Green Belt contribution/harm in that physical elements which play a role in determining landscape character, there are fundamental distinctions in the purposes of the two assessments. As such, the findings of the Stage 3 landscape sensitivity assessment for South Staffordshire and the Black Country are presented in a separate document (Landscape Study 2019) and is considered later in this representation.

### **Green Belt Purposes**

- 8.11. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2021) states that the Green Belt should serve the five following purposes:
- To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
  - To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
  - To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
  - To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
  - To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other

urban land.

**Land Adjacent to Station Road, Codsall; Contributions to Green Belt Purposes**

8.12. The Green Belt Study 2019 shows Land off Station Road, Codsall, as falling within Green Belt Sub-Parcel Ref S53H – ‘West of Codsall’, which is identified as making the following contribution to the five purposes of the Green Belt:

GB Purpose	Assessment	Rating
P1: Checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	Land contains no or very limited urban development and has strong openness. It is close enough to the large built-up area to have some association with it, but also retains some distinction.	Moderate
P2: Preventing the merging of neighbouring towns	Land plays no significant role due to the distance between the West Midlands conurbation and the nearest neighbouring towns.	Weak / No contribution
P3: Safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	Land contains the characteristics of open countryside (i.e., an absence of built or otherwise urbanising uses in Green Belt terms) and does not have a stronger relationship with the urban area than with the wider countryside.	Strong
P4: Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns	Land does not contribute to the setting or special character of a historic town	Weak / No contribution
P5: Assist urban regeneration, by encouraging recycling of derelict and other urban land	All parcels are considered to make an equal contribution to this purpose.	Strong

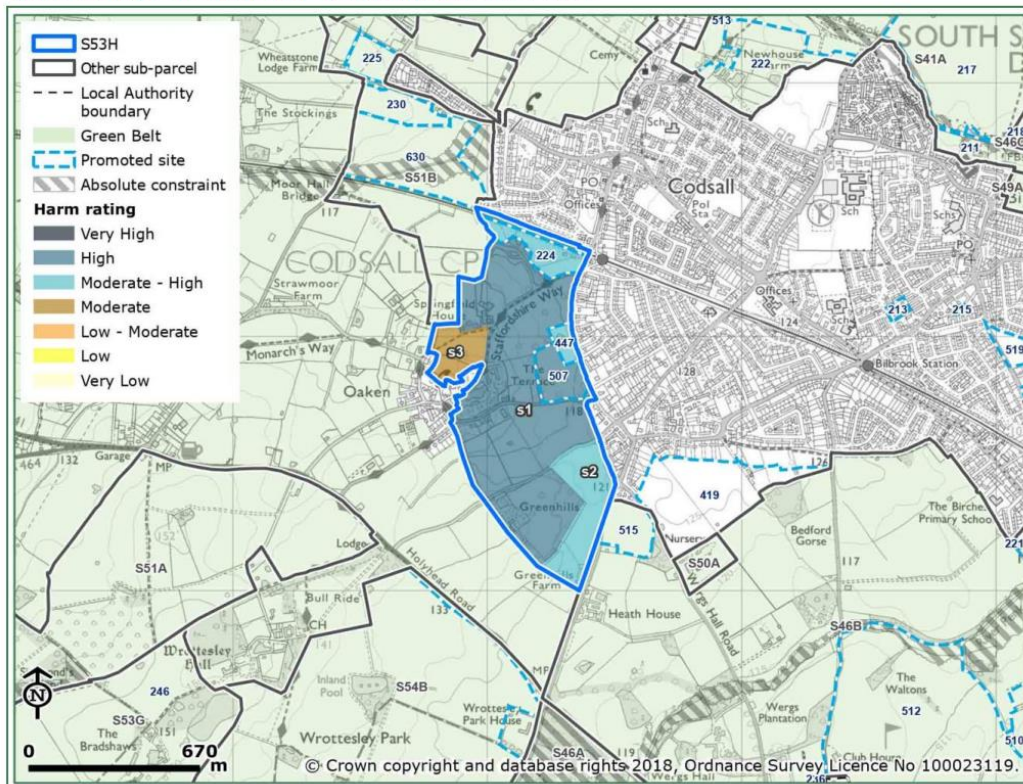
**Table 8.1: Land Parcel S53H Contribution Towards Green Belt Purposes**

8.13. The Study at Appendix 3 goes on to identify that, should Green Belt Sub-Parcel ref: S53Hs2 (within which Land off Station Road falls) be released for development, the resulting harm would be ‘moderate-high’, stating:

*‘The sub-parcel makes a strong contribution to preventing encroachment on*

*the countryside and a moderate contribution to preventing the sprawl of the West Midlands conurbation. Although these parts of the sub-parcel are separated from the edge of the adjoining inset settlement of Codsall by Oaken Lanes and a railway line, they are well contained by tree cover, as well as the existing house and grounds in the south of the sub-parcel to the east of the stream. These parts of the sub-parcel are also more strongly separated from the inset settlement of Oaken to the west. Release of this land would constitute a limited weakening of the Green Belt.'*

Harm Ratings Overview Map of Land within Sub-Parcel



**Figure 8.1: Harm Ratings for Land Parcel S53H**

8.14. Whilst the conclusions of the above assessment are noted, it remains that Land off Station Road serves a reduced function against the five purposes of the Green Belt, as assessed below.

**To Check the Unrestricted Sprawl of Large Built-Up Areas**

8.15. The harm assessment for Green Belt sub-parcel S53Hs2 indicates that the parcel makes a 'moderate' contribution to preventing the sprawl of the West Midlands conurbation. However,

as set out above, paragraph 3.15 of the Green Belt indicates that Codsall/Billbrook is not considered to form part of the West Midlands conurbation. It is therefore not understood how the Green Belt parcel can make a moderate contribution in preventing its sprawl, particularly when the parcel is located on the western side of Codsall i.e., the side furthest away from the conurbation.

- 8.16. Development of the site would not lead to unrestricted sprawl of the built-up area as the site will remain enclosed along its southern and western boundaries by green infrastructure and its eastern and northern boundaries by the existing settlement edge of Codsall. Furthermore, the site would represent a relatively small-scale addition on the south-western edge of Codsall which would not extend further west or south than the existing settlement pattern, or the existing settlement limit set by properties on Canford Crescent/Fairfield Drive to the north. In addition, due to the significant wooded boundary, the site is visually self-contained.
- 8.17. It is therefore considered that the parcel makes a 'weak/no' contribution to the checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas, rather than the 'moderate' contribution identified within the Green Belt Study.

#### **To Prevent Neighbouring Towns from Merging into One Another**

- 8.18. The removal of the site from the Green Belt would amount to a negligible reduction to the separation distances between the built-up area of Codsall/Billbrook and the nearest neighbouring town.
- 8.19. Richborough Estates therefore agrees with the conclusions of the Green Belt Study, that the site makes a 'weak/no' contribution to preventing neighbouring towns from merging into one another.

#### **To Assist in Safeguarding the Countryside from Encroachment**

- 8.20. Whilst the site contains some characteristics of open countryside, such as an absence of built development, it remains that the site has durable defensible boundaries, particularly to the south-west, that are afforded clear physical enclosure from the wider Green Belt. Furthermore, due to the existing uses that surround the site, its development would prevent further encroachment into the countryside.



- 8.21. It is therefore considered that the site makes a 'moderate' contribution to assisting in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment, rather than the 'strong' contribution identified within the Green Belt Study

#### **To Preserve the Setting and Special Character of Historic Towns**

- 8.22. The site lies outside of Codsall Conservation area and, whilst it is located within the Conservation Area 'buffer zone', the existing vegetation along Oaken Drive and Oaken Lane serves to limit the visual relationship between the site and the Conservation Area. The character of the site is one of an 'ordinary' agricultural field enclosure defined by mature vegetation, an exposed railway embankment and consisting in part of built form: this is in contrast to the 'parkland' character of the Conservation Area. As such the removal of the site from the Green Belt would not affect the purpose of preserving the setting and special character of a historic town.
- 8.23. Richborough Estates therefore agrees with the conclusions of the Green Belt Study, that the site makes a 'weak/no' contribution to preserving the setting and special character of historic towns.

#### **To Assist in Urban Regeneration, by Encouraging the Recycling of Derelict and other Urban Land**

- 8.24. Whilst it is acknowledged that all Green Belt land makes a contribution towards encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land, the site and immediate area does not contain significant areas of brownfield land and would therefore not prejudice the redevelopment of urban land in this area. The release of the site from the Green Belt and allocation for residential development would therefore not significantly prevent the recycling of derelict land and other urban land.
- 8.25. It is therefore considered that the site makes a 'moderate' contribution to this purpose of the Green Belt, rather than the 'strong' contribution identified within the Green Belt Study.

#### **Summary of Green Belt Purposes**

8.26. Overall, it is therefore considered that Land Adjacent to Station Road, makes a reduced contribution to the five purposes of the Green Belt than that identified within the Green Belt for Green Belt Sub-Parcel ref: S53H This contribution is summarised in the table below:

GB Purpose	Previous Rating	Revised Rating
P1: Checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	Moderate	Weak / No contribution
P2: Preventing the merging of neighbouring towns	Weak / No contribution	Weak / No contribution
P3: Safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	Strong	Moderate
P4: Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns	Weak / No contribution	Weak / No contribution
P5: Assist urban regeneration, by encouraging recycling of derelict and other urban land	Strong	Moderate

**Table 8.2: Land adjacent to Station Road, Green Belt Assessment**

### **Green Belt Harm**

8.27. Given the reduced impact upon the five purposes of the Green Belt set out above, is contented that the Green Belt harm identified within the Study should be reduced from ‘moderate-high to ‘low-moderate’.

8.28. It is the view of Richborough Estates that the site makes a weak/no contribution to preventing sprawl of the West Midlands conurbation and preventing encroachment on the countryside. The site would form a logical location for the expansion of the settlement edge, with the existing site boundaries representing strong defensible boundaries for the Green Belt edge in the future.

8.29. Therefore, release of this site would constitute a limited weakening of the Green Belt.

### **Landscape Sensitivity**

8.30. South Staffordshire District Council has produced a Landscape Study (2019) which forms part of the Local Plan Review evidence base. Land adjacent to Station Road falls within Landscape Parcel Reference: SL36S1, which falls within the 'Ancient Clay Farmlands' Landscape Character Type. The area is located northwest of Wolverhampton, on the western outskirts of Codsall and extends to the village of Oaken

8.31. An extract of the Council's Appraisal of Landscape Sensitivity is included below:

Characteristic / Attribute	Lower Sensitivity to Development	Moderate Sensitivity to Development	Higher Sensitivity to Development
<b>Scale</b>		Fields to the north of the railway are larger in scale.	Generally small pastoral fields well defined by hedgerows, with frequent mature field and hedgerow trees which increase the sense of intimacy.
<b>Landform</b>		Landform to the north of the railway line is more gently undulating.	Sloping landform which rises sharply from the edge of Codsall at 115m AOD, to the village of Oaken at 140m AOD.
<b>Landscape pattern and time depth</b>			The landscape south of the railway line is characterised by 19th century parkland associated with country houses built for local industrialists and small pastoral fields (identified as post-1880s replanned enclosure). Larger 18th/19th century planned enclosure are found north of the railway line and a small area of irregular post-medieval enclosure either side of Wood Lane. The landscape pattern has remained largely unchanged from the 1880s edition OS, resulting in strong time depth.
<b>'Natural' character</b>		Areas of semi-natural habitats include Priority Habitat deciduous woodland on the edge of Oaken and along stream	

		corridors. Valued natural features include the predominance of mature parkland trees, intact hedgerows, and hedgerow trees.	
<b>Built character</b>	Two overhead electricity routes cut through the north western corner and the railway line runs east-west through the centre of the area.	Built features within the landscape area include residential properties on the settlement edge of Oaken and Codsall and a few farms.	The parkland landscape to the south of the railway line within the Codsall Billbrook and Oaken Conservation Area is associated with two unlisted 19th century country houses, The Terrace at Oaken and Springfield House.
<b>Recreational character</b>	The north of the area is not publicly accessible.		The parkland to the south has open access and is crossed by the Staffordshire Way Long Distance Recreational Route.
<b>Perceptual aspects</b>	Two overhead electricity routes introduce an urbanising element, whilst noise from passing trains may also detract from the perceptual qualities of the area.		The area has a strong rural character, extending from the parkland to the south to the working agricultural landscape to the north.
<b>Settlement setting</b>		Although ribbon development along Wood Road and Moatbrook Lane present a weaker edge to the settlement, strong hedgerows, and woodland belts along these roads and around Moatbrook Playing Fields provide a strong barrier feature.	The area provides a rural setting for Codstall and Oaken, particularly within the Codsall Billbrook and Oaken Conservation Area, which provides an important rural gap between the two settlements.
<b>Visual prominence</b>			The slopes surrounding Oaken are visually prominent within the local landscape.
<b>Inter-visibility with adjacent designated landscapes or promoted viewpoints</b>	There is no inter-visibility with adjacent sensitive landscapes or marked viewpoints.		

<b>Landscape Sensitivity Judgement (SL36 S1)</b>	The landscape area has an overall high sensitivity to residential development due to its small scale, time depth, recreational value, and visual prominence.	High
--------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------

8.32. The Study concludes that Landscape Parcel SL36S1 (which encompasses the Land Adjacent to Station Road) is considered to have a 'high overall sensitivity to residential development, as identified on Figure 8.2 below.

Landscape Sensitivity Rating

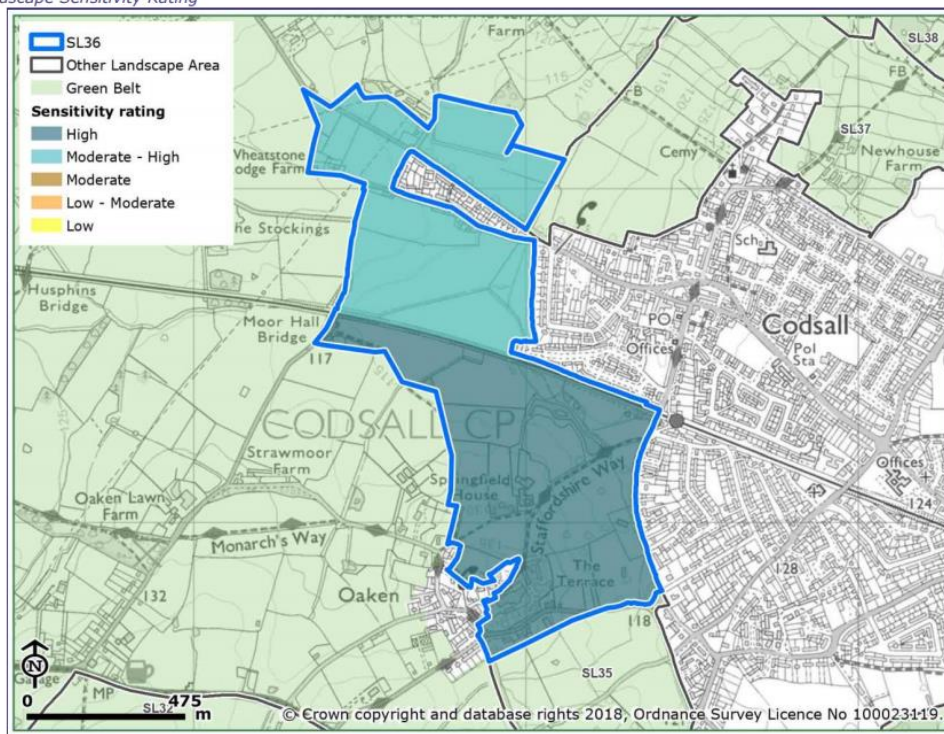


Figure 8.2: Landscape Sensitivity Rating Parcels SL36

8.33. The findings of the Landscape Study for the wider parcel are not necessarily disputed by Richborough Estates. However, it remains that land off Station Road performs significantly better in landscape terms, principally due to the presence of mature vegetation including hedgerows, hedgerow trees, parkland trees and woodland, which block views from the west and south of the site. This existing vegetation will help to minimise the visual envelope of the site and will contribute to the capacity of the site to accommodate development.

8.34. Furthermore, the physical and visual relationship of the site to the existing urban edge of Codsall, in conjunction with the presence of features such as the railway line to the north detract from the overall landscape sensitivity of the site.

8.35. The landform of the site is relatively uniform which will reduce the potential for extensive earthworks during development, whilst existing water bodies and drainage ditches provide opportunities for wetland planting, recreation, and habitat enhancement.

8.36. The Illustrative Masterplan for the site (see Appendix 2) offers a significant opportunity to enhance the landscape fabric and character of the site through the retention of the existing trees and hedgerows and the creation of new public open space.

### Sustainability

8.37. South Staffordshire District Council has prepared a Rural Services and Facilities Audit (2021) ('the RSFA') which presents evidence on the relative level of services and facilities present in settlements within South Staffordshire.

8.38. The RSFA identifies five key indicators to compare the relative sustainability of settlements within the District as follows:

- Access to food stores;
- Diversity of accessible community facilities/services;
- Access to employment locations;
- Access to education facilities; and
- Public transport access to higher order services outside of the village.

8.39. Land adjacent to Station Road is located on the edge of Codsall, a Tier 1 Settlement.

8.40. The overall settlement hierarchy scoring for Codsall is presented below.

Access to convenience stores/ supermarkets	
Diversity of other accessible community facilities/ services	

Retail Centres Study	
Access to employment locations	
Access to primary/ first school within settlement	
Access to secondary/ high school within settlement	
Access to 6th form/college within settlement	
Public transport access to higher order services outside of the village	

**Table 8.3: Settlement Hierarchy Scoring for Codsall, RSFA (2021)**

- 8.41. Richborough Estates supports the findings of the RSFA in relation to Codsall.
- 8.42. The site is located immediately adjacent to Codsall Railway Station, which provides regular rail services between Birmingham and Shrewsbury. The site also provides a unique opportunity to provide a dedicated car park to serve the railway station. Due to the location of the site in relation to the railway station, no other site would be able to deliver this benefit.
- 8.43. The site is therefore sustainably located.

### **Impact on the Historic Environment**

- 8.44. A Heritage Report prepared by RPS concludes that the development of the site will have no direct impacts on built heritage assets and no impacts on the settings of the identified assets. The site's location within a Conservation buffer zone instead provides the opportunity to both preserve and enhance the character and the appearance of the Conservation Area through sensitive design.
- 8.45. The provision of a station car park within the new development will enhance the setting of Codsall station and the southern extremity of the Codsall Conservation Area through the removal of parked cars from the station approach off Station Road.
- 8.46. In summary, the technical work undertaken to date concludes there are therefore no heritage constraints to the allocation of the site for residential development.

### **Surface Water Flooding**

8.47. Richborough Estates has previously undertaken technical work and a modelling exercise in respect of flooding and the Moat Brook.

8.48. In summary the modelling exercise demonstrates the flooding extent on the site is reduced from that shown on the EA surface water flood map, although it is recognised that mitigation measures will be required to accommodate built form in certain areas. The report goes on to propose two potential mitigation options utilising either land raising and creation of flood corridor within the site, or realignment of the existing ditch to the northern boundary of the site. Both options, following modelling, have been demonstrated to be able to mitigate flood risk to the 1 in 1000-year standard.

### **Highways (Accessibility to the Site)**

8.49. The site is sustainably located, and a range of local retail, leisure and employment facilities are accessible by modes other than the private car.

8.50. Vehicular site access can be provided via new point of access to Station Road, in accordance with relevant local and national design guidance, ensuring there would be no material impact on highway safety or highway capacity as a result.

### **Impact upon the Natural Environment**

8.51. A range of ecological assessments have been undertaken and a Tree Survey prepared to inform the Illustrative Masterplan. The Tree Report has recommended the removal of low-grade trees to allow for the construction of an access to the site, which would not impinge on the viability of the remaining higher-grade trees on site.

### **Site Specific Opportunities**

8.52. Richborough Estates are keen to proactively support the Council in meeting their targets within the Local Plan. Strategic Objective 9 of the Publication Plan seeks to ensure that new development is served by appropriate infrastructure.

8.53. In line with Strategic Objective 9 and Policy SA5 the development of the site for residential purposes presents the opportunity to deliver a new car park to serve Codsall Railway Station, which is identified within the Council's Infrastructure Delivery Plan as a future project.



- 8.54. This represents a significant benefit of allocating land at Station Road, Codsall, for residential development

### **Suitability**

- 8.55. The information set out above demonstrates that Land adjacent to Station Road is a suitable site for development.

### **Deliverability**

- 8.56. There is an agreement in place between the landowner and Richborough Estates to facilitate the development of the site.
- 8.57. There are no constraints likely to render the site undeliverable in the Plan period. The site is available now.
- 8.58. There are no existing uses that would require relocation and no issues of contamination that would require remediation. Many of the impacts of the development of the site can be mitigated and, in many cases, a positive outcome can be achieved.
- 8.59. The site is deliverable and immediately available and subject to allocation, could deliver homes and associated community early in the Plan period.



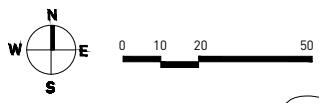
## 9. Conclusion

- 9.1. This representation is made by Pegasus Group on behalf of Richborough Estates Limited to the South Staffordshire Local Plan Review, Publication Plan (Regulation 19). This representation relates to land adjacent to Station Road which Richborough Estates is promoting for residential development.
- 9.2. Richborough Estates is supportive of the Local Plan Review undertaking but has made specific comments on key matters associated with the Local Plan Review. These include on the amount of land identified for housing, Green Belt land release and safeguarded land, on some development management policies, and, on site specific matters associated with the Council's consideration and evidence base on the land adjacent to Station Road.
- 9.3. Richborough Estates considers that their land interests at Land adjacent to Station Road are a suitable and deliverable site for residential development, subject to release from the Green Belt and that the site could deliver development to meet the identified housing needs within the Plan period.

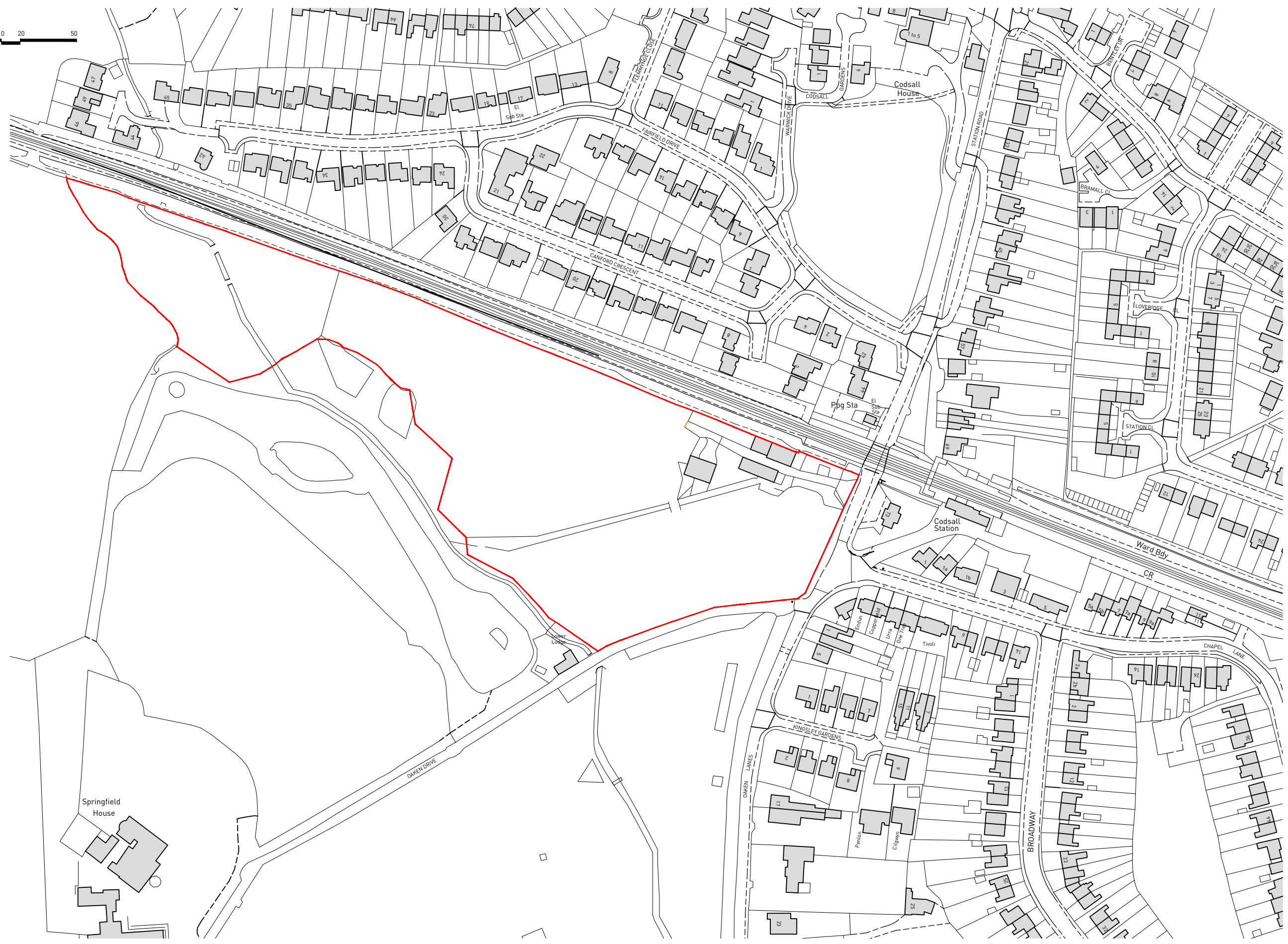



# Appendix 1

Site Location Plan



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**KEY**  
 Site location  
8.44 Ac/  
3.42 Ha

# LAND OFF STATION ROAD, CODSALL SITE LOCATION PLAN





## Appendix 2

Illustrative Masterplan



- NOTES**
- Contractors must check all dimensions on site. Only figured dimensions are to be worked from. Discrepancies must be reported to the Architect or Engineer before proceeding. © This drawing is copyright.
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**DRAFT**  
**12/12/19**

REV	DESCRIPTION	DRN	CHD	DATE	
<input type="checkbox"/>	PRELIMINARY	<input type="checkbox"/>	INFORMATION	<input type="checkbox"/>	TENDER
<input type="checkbox"/>	CONSTRUCTION	<input type="checkbox"/>	AS BUILT		

SCALE: 1:500 @ A1      DATE: DEC 2019

DRAWN: GS/JPG      CHK: CM

DRAWING NO. 18417/1005      REV: -

TITLE: Land off Station Road  
Codsall

DETAILS: Coloured Sketch Layout

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