



Hearing Statement on behalf of Wainhomes (North West) Ltd

In relation to: Matter 2 – Strategy and Strategic Policies

Wainhomes (North West) Ltd

Project : 17-204
Hearing : Matter 2 – Strategy and
Strategic Policies
Client : Wainhomes (North West)
Ltd
Date : September 2018

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1. Introduction

1.1 Emery Planning is instructed by Wainhomes (North West) Ltd to attend the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan Examination. This statement summarises our client's position in response to the Inspector's schedule of Matters and Issues, specifically the questions under Matter 2: Strategy and Strategic Policies. It should be read in conjunction with our detailed representations to the Submission Version of the plan.

2. Response to the Matters and Issues

1.1 Is the strategy for the distribution of development justified (Policy SS3)?

2.1 No.

2.2 Firstly, we have concerns in relation to the distribution ratios for Cheadle and the rural area contained within Tables 7.1 and 7.2. In the Preferred Options consultation the Council reduced the distribution to the rural area from 28% to 25%, on the basis that it "*reflects the constrained supply of suitable sites*". No evidence has been provided in terms of need between the settlements. We are also concerned as to whether the quantum of development proposed within Leek, Biddulph and Cheadle is realistically deliverable, having regard to attractiveness to the market of sites in these locations and the local delivery record. The proposed distribution is therefore not justified.

2.3 Secondly, we have specific concerns in relation to provision within the rural area, and in particular the Blythe Vale site which we consider distorts the spatial strategy. We address this further below.

2.4 We consider that the strategy for the rural areas needs to be fundamentally re-adjusted, with sufficient housing provided to meet needs across the rural area.

1.4 Does the housing allocation at Blythe Bridge (300 dwellings) distort the strategy and the approach to the rural area by proposing a large proportion of dwellings in one place which will primarily serve the needs of the Stoke-on-Trent conurbation (65% of the dwellings to be allocated in the rural area)? Would an alternative approach of distributing allocations over a number of smaller villages be more sustainable?

2.5 Yes.

2.6 Of the 461 dwellings to be allocated within the rural area, 300 dwellings are to be provided on one site (Blythe Vale, Policy DSR1). The distribution around the rural area is extremely uneven, with most villages not accommodating even one site allocation, and consequently their needs would not be met.

2.7 Blythe Vale is located within Blythe Bridge. Although Blythe Bridge falls within Staffordshire Moorlands administrative area and is a village, it directly adjoins and is effectively a suburb of the city of Stoke-on-Trent. It was this direct relationship between Blythe Vale and Stoke-on-Trent which underpinned the identification of the site to meet the inward investment needs of the Stoke/Newcastle conurbation. We note that Stoke-on-Trent City Council still considers the Blythe Vale site to be an important strategic employment site on the boundary of Stoke-on-Trent¹.

2.8 In the adopted Core Strategy it was acknowledged that Blythe Vale should not count towards the employment land requirements for the district as it caters to a wider sub-regional need. Having regard to what reasonably can be considered the housing market area, and importantly the needs of individual sub-areas and villages within the rural area, there is no evidence to suggest that the delivery of Blythe Vale would contribute to addressing housing needs in the rural area of Staffordshire Moorlands.

2.9 We therefore do not consider that the site should be included within the requirement for the rural area. Instead it should be included within a separate category relating to the city of Stoke-on-Trent.

¹ CD 9.3 – SOCG between Staffordshire Moorlands DC, Stoke-on-Trent CC, Newcastle-under-Lyme BC & Stafford BC

2.2 Should Leekbrook be treated as part of Leek or as a larger village within the settlement hierarchy rather than as a smaller village taking into account the character and accessibility of the settlement?

2.10 Leekbrook is a sustainable location for growth, benefits from very strong links with Leek, and has an important role to play in the consolidation of Leek as the principal service centre and market town. As such Leekbrook is specifically identified within the spatial strategy to provide the majority of employment land for Leek under Policies SS5 and E2. However as the plan is currently drafted, Leekbrook is outside of the existing and proposed 'town boundary' of Leek and is a separate entity within the settlement hierarchy (Policy SS9). Furthermore the development boundary for Leekbrook would be removed under Policy SS2.

2.11 The Leek Area Strategy (Policy SS5) seeks to consolidate the role of Leek as a principal service centre and market town.

2.12 We have extracted below the relevant parts of Policy SS5 which specifically refer to Leekbrook:

"2. Create employment growth and increase the diversity of employment opportunities to meet existing and future needs by:

- Supporting the development of the employment site allocations (as identified on the Leek and Leekbrook Policies Maps)*
- Improving and intensifying the use of existing employment areas at Barnfields and Leekbrook;"*

2.13 Furthermore under the heading 'Leek (including Leekbrook)', Policy E2 proposes two allocations for employment development on sites within Leekbrook:

- Policy DSR2 – Land east of Brooklands Way (4.01ha)
- Policy DSR3 – Land west of Bashford Lane (0.80ha)

2.14 Both of these sites count toward meeting the the employment land requirement for Leek. In fact they account for the majority of the employment allocations in Leek (65% of the 7.14ha allocated). Paragraph 7.45 of the Submission Version provides the following explanation:

Employment provision will be met through the expansion of existing employment areas to the south of the town and Leekbrook which have good access to the road network. These are considered to be the most sustainable locations for employment development and will minimise the impact of development on the countryside and residential areas. In response to Leek's

residual employment land requirements Policy SS3 of the 2014 Core Strategy identified 'Broad location EM2' east of Brooklands Way Leekbrook, for future employment allocation (dependent on the need for further employment land provision across the town). Despite being a smaller village Leekbrook is closely related to Leek (falling within the same Ward), and it is considered that allocations across the village can contribute towards the future employment land requirements for Leek as existing industrial areas in the village already serve Leek residents; and industrial areas by definition often tend to be peripheral. (our emphasis)

- 2.15 We have no objections to the proposed approach of development within Leekbrook contributing towards the requirements for Leek. This accurately reflects the role of Leekbrook, its sustainability credentials and its relationship with Leek. It also reflects a longstanding strategy set out through successive Local Plans. However, it is illogical and contradictory for Leekbrook to form part of Leek for the purposes of employment land, but to treat it as a 'small village' in all other regards, where there will be no development boundary and only 'limited' development will be allowed. The proposed approach is inconsistent and not justified.
- 2.16 In addition to the allocations proposed within this plan, Leekbrook is home to a proportionally significant number of small to medium sized businesses falling within Use Classes B1/B2/B8. It also benefits from frequent bus services to Leek and Hanley, has its own pub, convenience store and petrol station / garage. It is clear that the settlement does not perform the role of a 'smaller village', where development should be 'limited'. It is a sustainable location for accommodating future growth.
- 2.17 A full planning application for 41 dwellings on the land off Wardle Gardens, Leekbrook was refused in September 2017 (LPA ref: SMD/2017/0387). The reasons for refusal related to the loss of employment land, detailed design issues, and technical matters relating to flood risk and ecology. The reasons for refusal do not cite locational sustainability / accessibility, or any concerns in relation to the scale of development having regard to the existing settlement. The only conclusion can be that in principle, Leekbrook is suitable and capable for accommodating more than just 'limited development' of the scale envisioned under Policies SS2, SS9 and H1.
- 2.18 We therefore consider that Leekbrook should be treated as part of Leek in terms of the spatial strategy, and specifically for the purposes of Policies SS2, SS5 and H1. However without prejudice to that view, if Leekbrook is not included as part of Leek then as a minimum it should be designated as a 'larger village', to reflect its role, function and sustainability credentials. Leekbrook does not fit the profile of a smaller village as defined in Policy SS2.

3.1 Is the approach to settlement boundaries for the larger and smaller villages justified (Policy SS2) particularly the removal of settlement boundaries for the smaller villages?

2.19 No.

2.20 The decision to remove the existing development boundary for Leekbrook, or indeed any of the other villages, is not justified. The evidence base does not provide any analysis of the physical form and character of these settlements, their contribution and role in terms of the open countryside (given that this will be their designation will be), and whether there are opportunities for development within them (infill or otherwise). Defined development boundaries allow for an assessment of the physical form and character of a settlement, and if drawn flexibly can provide a degree of sustainable growth and contribute to the delivery of housing.

2.21 In our representations to the Submission Version we have provided details of our client's site, which is currently located within the settlement boundary of Leekbrook, has previously benefited from planning permission for employment development, and is surrounded by development on all sides. The site bears no physical connection or relationship to the wider open countryside, and no part of the evidence base seeks to claim otherwise. It logically forms part of the village. There is therefore no justification for altering the Local Plan proposals map to fundamentally alter the designation of the site from within a development boundary to outside of it, as open countryside. The site should not be excluded from the development boundary as it is one of the few areas within Leekbrook that can successfully and sustainably meet future local housing needs, and contribute to the district wide shortfall in housing delivery.

2.22 Consequently we consider that a development boundary for Leekbrook should be identified, and that it should include our client's land as per the existing development boundary (see Map A5.17). The development boundary would also need to be extended to include the draft allocations proposed in the Submission Version (identified as 'Leek EM2' and 'ADD09' on Map A5.17).

3.3 Are the policies relating to development in and adjoining settlements justified and consistent with national policy (Policies SS2, SS8, SS9 and H1)?

Policy SS2

- 2.23 Without prejudice to our view that Leekbrook should be re-classified as part of Leek, or failing that as a 'larger village', we consider that the proposed approach of only allowing 'limited development' within the smaller villages and not defining a development boundary is unduly restrictive. It would not allow smaller villages to meet their needs and grow in a sustainable fashion.
- 2.24 The Council's approach is predicated upon accessibility to services and facilities. Paragraphs 29 and 34 of the Framework clearly set out the need to recognise the differences in accessibility between urban and rural areas, and furthermore that accessibility is only one strand of sustainable development and there is a need to take into account other policies in the Framework, particularly in rural areas.
- 2.25 We consider that the proposed settlement hierarchy, allied with Policies SS9 and H1, represents exactly the sort of restrictive approach in rural villages that national planning policy is seeking to avoid. There has been no assessment of whether promoting development within these settlements can increase vitality or sustainability. Rather the Council's approach is that as accessibility to services is inevitably 'poorer' within smaller villages, only limited development should be allowed. The approach is not consistent with national planning policy. It is also not justified, as it is not clear how the application of such criteria would affect the delivery of the quantum of development required during the plan period.
- 2.26 The approach also fails to have regard to the significant differences between the smaller villages identified. It is based on the general assertion that all smaller villages have poorer access to services and facilities, and does not allow for a different approach in settlements where there may be better access to services and facilities. For example in the case of Leekbrook, the settlement benefits from extremely close links with Leek, and its wide range of facilities and services. There are frequent bus services to Leek and Hanley. The settlement includes a public house, convenience store and petrol station / garage. In addition to the allocations proposed within this plan, Leekbrook is also home to a proportionally significant number of small to medium sized businesses falling within Use Classes B1/B2/B8. A 'one-size-fits-all' approach is not appropriate.

Policy SS9

- 2.27 We consider that Policy SS9 is far too restrictive in terms of housing delivery in the smaller villages. The policy states the smaller villages shall provide only for appropriate development which enhances community vitality or meets a social or economic need of the settlement and its hinterland. In terms of residential development, the policy clarifies that only the types of development specified under Policy H1 will be acceptable. We refer to our objections in relation to Policies SS2 and H1 which address the restrictive approach to housing development in the smaller villages.
- 2.28 In terms of employment development, the policy is permissive of enabling small-scale new employment development including 'live-work' developments which are for a rural enterprise or an existing authorised business use, and supporting the diversification of existing farm enterprises. Again, the proposed approach is inconsistent with other strategies and policies within the plan, in particular Policies SS5 and E2, which identify allocations within Leekbrook to meet the majority of the employment land requirement for Leek.

Policy H1

- 2.29 We comment on the approach to limited infill under question 3.5 below.

3.5 Is the approach to limited infill justified and consistent with national policy, particularly in relation to larger and smaller villages?

- 2.30 No.
- 2.31 We consider that the proposed approach is unduly restrictive, and would not allow smaller villages to meet their needs and grow in a sustainable fashion. There has been no assessment of whether promoting development within the rural areas can increase vitality or sustainability. Rather the Council's approach is that as accessibility to services is inevitably poorer within rural areas, only limited development should be allowed. Please refer to our representations in relation to Policy SS2 in this regard.
- 2.32 There may be sites available which do not meet the limited criteria set out within Policy H1, but due to their physical characteristics and/or surrounding land uses are effectively located within the built up area of a 'smaller village'. One such example is out clients land at Wardle Gardens, Leekbrook (see our response to Question 3.1).

2.33 Therefore if development boundaries are to be removed, the form of settlements will need to be assessed on a site-by-site basis, and a flexible approach will need to be applied to allow for sites which logically form part of a settlement (and would have otherwise been included within the development boundaries) to come forward. We are aware of two recent examples which we consider provide a potential way forward in Staffordshire Moorlands. These are discussed below.

2.34 The first example is Policy 3 of the Cornwall Local Plan: Strategic Policies (2016). It states:

“Other than at the main towns identified in this Policy, housing and employment growth will be delivered for the remainder of the Community Network Area housing requirement through:

- *identification of sites where required through Neighbourhood Plans;*
- *rounding off of settlements and development of previously developed land within or immediately adjoining that settlement of a scale appropriate to its size and role;*
- *infill schemes that fill a small gap in an otherwise continuous built frontage and do not physically extend the settlement into the open countryside. Proposals should consider the significance or importance that large gaps can make to the setting of settlements and ensure that this would not be diminished;*
- *rural exception sites under Policy 9.”* (our emphasis)

2.35 In the Cornwall Local Plan this principle is intended to apply to all villages and hamlets which “have a form and shape and clearly definable boundaries” (Cornwall Local Plan: Strategic Policies, paragraph 1.68). A definition of ‘rounding off’ is also provided at paragraph 1.68 of the plan:

“Rounding off: *This applies to development on land that is substantially enclosed but outside of the urban form of a settlement and where its edge is clearly defined by a physical feature that also acts as a barrier to further growth (such as a road). It should not visually extend building into the open countryside.”*

2.36 We consider that in the absence of development boundaries, rounding off as described within the Cornwall Local Plan should be allowed for in the smaller villages within the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan.

2.37 The second example is Policy H1 of the High Peak Local Plan (2016). During the High Peak Local Plan Examination, the Inspector found that greater flexibility was necessary within this specific policy in order to enable development, and accordingly Policy H1 was amended to state:

“The Council will give consideration to approving sustainable sites outside the defined built up area boundaries, taking into account other policies in this Local Plan, provided that:

- The development would adjoin the built up area boundary and be well related with the existing pattern of development and surrounding land uses and of an appropriate scale for the settlement; and*
- the development would not lead to prominent intrusion into the countryside or have a significant adverse impact on the character of the countryside; and*
- it would have reasonable access by foot, cycle or public transport to schools medical services, shops and other community facilities; and*
- the local and strategic infrastructure can meet the additional requirements arising from the development.”*

2.38 Clearly if no development boundaries are proposed then it would be necessary to amend the wording to refer to existing villages, as per the Cornwall Local Plan, and for a planning judgement to be made on a case by case basis as to where the edge of a village lies. However the principle of approving sustainable development outside of the settlements subject to certain criteria is a potential solution to the unjustified and highly restrictive approach currently proposed by the Council.

2.39 We consider that the above policies would give greater flexibility in order to help meet housing needs, and would reflect the fact that there may be sustainable sites within and adjoining the smaller villages which are capable of accommodating future growth.

3.6 Will the reliance on windfalls in villages through Policies SS2, SS8, SS9 and H1 undermine the ability of development to provide affordable housing and contribute to infrastructure?

2.40 On the basis of the policy as currently drafted, yes. Most windfall development would be of less than 10 dwellings, and is therefore unlikely to deliver affordable housing or contribute to infrastructure.