

Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan Examination

Hearing Statement by David Nixon : Strategy and Strategic Policies and; Allocations (Villages) presented 24 09 2018

This hearing statement relates to two hearing sessions (Strategic and Strategic Policy and; Allocations (Villages)). It is in addition to the submissions we have made at each stage during the course of the preparation and consideration of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan. These have related to wider issues as well as the particular qualities of site BB042/BB043 which we own. I invite the inspector to consider the points which we have previously made. However, I now provide a short statement in advance of the forthcoming hearing sessions, particularly that relating to strategy and strategic policies (9th October) and village allocations (17th October).

My name is David Nixon, the representor. I am the executive partner of C Nixon & Partners. Our family has farmed in Forsbrook since the 1940s and our land stretches from the northern edge of Forsbrook up to the village boundary at Cresswell Ford. We are working with Natural England under higher level stewardship schemes to maintain the special environments of our 1km stretch of the Forsbrook brook and 700m of the River Blithe. Also 17 acres have been planted as woodland in conjunction with the Forestry Commission. There are 3.5km of public rights of way through our land in 7 separate footpaths. Our aim is to operate a sustainable and environmentally sound business into the long term future.

Blythe Bridge and Forsbrook are jointly identified as one of the larger villages within the submission version of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan and subject to Policy SS8. The aims of that policy are set out in the preceding paragraphs 7.58 and 7.59. These include enhancing their role as service centres by addressing the number of specific social, economic and environmental challenges. The policy allows for development to come forward which is appropriate to the spatial strategy and character of each settlement. In relation to housing requirements the policy aims to increase the range of available and affordable housing, including for first time buyers and families. Other aims include meeting limited employment needs and retaining and enhancing the role of the villages as rural service centres.

In our previous representations in relation to the earlier consultation exercise on the draft Local Plan, we challenged the underlying assumptions and the detail of the council's proposed settlement strategy. We set out what we consider to be an excessive reliance upon the three towns and Blythe Vale and by concentrating on these settlements, we were concerned that the council is basing its reliance for delivery upon a limited number of national house builders and not providing sufficient opportunities for smaller developers and individual land owners who would deliver housing more effectively.

I strongly believe that the rural settlements should not be ignored but also be included as suitable locations for future development needs and to deliver a greater proportion of the area's future housing. Such delivery will enable those settlements to survive and grow and local services to be retained. The inclusion of sites for housing development within rural settlements provides the local community with an opportunity to incorporate a range of

development ingredients to contribute to the social, economic and environmental fabric of those villages.

There is increasing concern nationally and locally that Green Belt boundaries have been drawn too tightly and it is felt that the release and the incorporation of some areas for future development can take place without undermining the purposes of the Green Belt and without causing unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding area.

We recognise that the Green Belt should only be released for development where there are exceptional circumstances. A primary concern for us is that the boundary of our site with the village is completely inappropriate both for agriculture and as acceptable built form. In addressing this we have had regard to the 5 purposes of Green Belt land as set out in paragraph 134 of the NPPF. The proposal will not result in an unrestrictive sprawl of a large built up area but would appear as a rounding-off of the settlement. There are substantial fingers of development which project to the south west and north east of the site and additional development to the north west as well. There is no way that our proposal would merge neighbouring towns. The site scored well in the council's Green Belt Review Study 2015. This indicated its greater potential for release than many other promoted sites.

It is also significant that after the 1980's Green Belt Review, the Inspector then stated in his report of February 1982 in relation to our site, "the interface between built up area and farmland is unsatisfactory" and that our proposal then was "an improvement in physical planning terms." Again in 2008 the Wardell Armstrong report drew particular attention to the porous edge of our boundary and need for strengthening to the north of Forsbrook.

Our view, therefore, is that this land could be taken out of the Green Belt without any significant demonstrable harm to the purposes of the Green Belt designation and that in the process a more appropriate and defensible settlement edge would be established.

Our proposals are different from others in that they are largely based upon delivering a range of necessary development to meet local needs. We believe that we can achieve this without harm to the character and appearance of the countryside.

As the promoter of this site I have a strong commitment to environmental stewardship and to delivering wider benefits for the community. My intention would be to deliver a scheme with remarkable environmental, community and aesthetic characteristics.

I propose extending blocks of woodland to provide a strong northern edge to the settlement. At the moment, the transition from built development to the countryside is abrupt and harsh. I would incorporate a new green link with footpath and cycleway and work closely with Natural England to improve biodiversity in this location.

The site is immediately adjacent to the village and its range of facilities and services. The site is within easy walking distance of those facilities. This is a characteristic not enjoyed by the Blythe Vale site which is not contiguous with the settlement and where residents would be largely car dependent. We have a well-established connection with the village and we have a long term aim to deliver some tangible benefits for our local community. We have

already made a number of approaches to the Parish Council and to ward councillors offering to work closely with them. Our site would be ideal for a range of housing, community, employment and recreation uses. We wish to provide housing for first time buyers, for families and for the elderly. We would deliver a full quota of affordable housing and we would also consider offering a small number of self-build housing plots. Our proposals would incorporate substantial areas of woodland and open space. We would increase permeability with the provision of a footpath, bridleway and cycle route through the woodland and through the development itself.

I therefore invite the inspector to consider our previous submissions and this short additional submission. I hope that after having considered them and visited the site and surrounding area, he will share our vision for the site and its benefits and include it as an allocation for a mixed use development involving housing for first time buyers, for families and the elderly (with a full policy-compliant delivery of affordable housing), for small scale employment use, woodland and open space. These tangible social and environmental benefits can readily be provided here unlike the Blythe Vale site where the timescale and content must be in doubt. I believe, therefore, that there is sufficient justification for modifying the Green Belt boundary at this point so that these benefits can be realised.

List of Previously submitted material which we would like to be considered :-

- Response to 4.1 Accommodating and delivering growth
With attached site plan MGF 001 : Extent of CNP holding
- Response to 5.3 Spatial Vision
With attached site plan MGF 005 : Agriculture/built form conflict
Supported by photographs P1,P2,P3
- Response to 6 Aims and Objectives
 - 6.1
 - 6.2 Availability, Deliverability, Access, Setting, Edge
With attached site plan MGF 015 : Existing Infrastructure
site plan MGF 016 : Traffic Plan
site plan MGF 021 : Landscape setting
supported by photographs P4,P5,P6
site plan MGF 022 New Settlement Edge
supported by photograph P7
site plan MGF 006 Green Infrastructure
- Response to 7.54 Policy SS8