

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION

Date: 27 February 2020

To: Dai Larner, Executive Director – Place

Dear Mr Larner,

Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan Examination

I refer to the hearings that took place on 4 and 5 February 2020. Before the close of the hearings I outlined a number of options for the way forward for the Local Plan. After carefully considering everything that has been written and said, this letter comprises my post hearings advice and recommendations. Although I have given some explanation for my recommendations, the full reasoning will be provided in my report.

The advice in this letter takes into account the representations on the Main Modifications (MMs), the statements prepared for the hearings and the discussion that took place at the hearings. The advice is also mindful of the earlier stages in the examination process, including the hearing sessions that took place in October 2018, the actions that arose from those hearings, the consultation on the Housing Implementation Strategy in early 2019, and the Council's consideration of the options for Biddulph in the summer of 2019.

I will deal with the matters raised at the recent hearings in turn:

Biddulph – safeguarded land and provision of housing

The 2012 National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) indicates that, *once established Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances through the preparation or review of the Local Plan. At that time, authorities should consider the Green Belt boundaries having regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so that they should be capable of enduring beyond the plan period.*

Following the October 2018 hearings, I advised the Council that the release of the site known as BDNEW from the Green Belt had not been justified stating, amongst other things, that: *'exceptional circumstances have not been demonstrated for the specific proposals in Biddulph and this aspect of the Plan is unsound. In the first instance I would ask that the Council set out how this soundness issue is to be resolved. In reviewing whether exceptional circumstances exist consideration should be given as to whether it would be*

appropriate to identify areas of 'safeguarded land' in order to meet longer-term development needs in Biddulph¹.

The Council came up with an option of not allocating land to replace BDNEW but instead proposed altering Green Belt boundaries to identify safeguarded land at Gillow Heath, comprising three separate sites. The Council also proposed to increase the housing yields at the Tunstall Road mixed-use allocation and the remainder of the Wharf Road allocation. At that time, I agreed that this option should be taken forward for consultation with other MMs which had arisen as part of the examination process. However, I have now had the benefit of the consultation responses on the MMs and discussion of the issue at the recent hearings.

The deletion of BDNEW results in a shortfall in provision through the LP against the net requirement of some 344 dwellings. Biddulph which, in accordance with Policy SS3, is intended to take 20% of housing, has the substantial proportion of this shortfall. The provision of the safeguarded land would not make any inroads into this shortfall. An alternative option would be to recommend an MM which allocated the safeguarded sites for housing. That said such an option would still not bridge the entire gap between provision and the net requirement for the Plan period as a whole.

Although, where possible, sites or broad locations for growth should be identified for years 11-15, I am mindful that there is not an absolute requirement to identify sites for the entirety of a plan period². The Council's trajectory indicates that there would be sufficient land in Biddulph for the next 10 years. Moreover, the revised 2019 Framework now requires that Local Plans should be reviewed to assess whether they need updating at least once every five years. In reviewing the requirement for an update, the Council will have regard to the local housing need figure at that time. All in all, I do not consider that there are exceptional circumstances to justify safeguarding the Gillow Heath sites or indeed allocating them at the present time. For the above reasons and for the Plan to be sound, MM12 needs to be further modified so that land at Gillow Heath is no longer safeguarded but remains as Green Belt. The status of these and other sites around Biddulph could be reviewed when the Plan is updated taking into account any change in circumstances.

I have taken into account that both the Council and landowners have carried out work in relation to the suitability of the Gillow Heath sites. I am also aware of what the Core Strategy Inspector said in his report about a comprehensive review of the Green Belt around Biddulph and small urban extensions at Gillow

¹ Paragraphs 10 and 11 of EL6.004

² Paragraph 47 of the 2012 Framework

Heath³. However, I have come to my conclusions based on the evidence before me and national policy as it now stands.

Housing Land Supply

I have dealt with the fact that there is not an absolute requirement to identify sites for the entirety of a plan period in relation to Biddulph. The same applies to the Plan area as a whole. That said the trajectory only shows a deficit of just over one year's supply against the requirement to 2033.

For reasons which I will set out in my final report I consider that the Council's trajectory attached to its Matter 2 statement is a reasonable basis for the up-to-date housing supply position (as at 31 March 2019). Pushing back commencement of the Biddulph Wharf Road site until 2022/23, which would be more realistic, would not materially alter the trajectory or five-year supply position.

Monitoring of the Plan will identify any issues with housing delivery and the need for a full or partial review of the Plan. A review may take place earlier than the 5 years referred to in the 2019 Framework. This is explained by MM54.

Local Green Space (LGS)

I have reviewed my previous recommendations to delete the LGS designations at Ox Pasture, Cheddleton and Dorset Drive, Biddulph having regard to the representations on the MMs, the hearing statements, further site visits and what I was told at the hearings. I consider that the criteria in paragraph 77 of the Framework are met in respect of these sites and, thus for the Plan to be sound, MM73 should be amended so that 13 and 14 (Dorset Drive) and 29 and 30 (Ox Pasture) remain as LGS designations. In relation to Ox Pasture West (Site 29), the Inspector considering the current appeal should be made aware of this advice.

Main Modifications

The other changes to the MMs, post MM consultation, are largely addressed in the Council's Matter 4 hearing statement. As a result of discussion at the hearings the following additional MMs are confirmed as necessary for the Plan to be sound:

- Table 7.9 and Appendix 11 (Neighbourhood Plan Housing Requirement) will need to be amended to reflect the updated housing figures.
- Policy SS4 should refer to 'at least 3763 dwellings'.
- References to 'target' in paragraphs 8.56 and 8.57 are to be deleted.
- Criterion 6. of Policy DC2 (MM27) – 'buildings' to be replaced with 'assets' (2nd sentence).

³ Paragraph 70 of EL5.002

- The land available for employment and residential at Tunstall Road to be amended – 4 ha and 2.48 ha respectively (MM41).
- Monitoring indicators for Policy DC2 to be adjusted to take into account MM27 above.

Other Matters

I raised an issue in December 2019 about provision of a traveller site at Checkley and was advised that a response would be provided soon afterwards. I do not recall having received a response. My query was as follows:

In relation to MM23 (Policy H4), a representation questions whether the site at Checkley provides 3 separate pitches. The Officers response refers to information passed on to the consultants about the site. Can the Council itself confirm the number of pitches by reference to records e.g. planning permission, plans, site visits?

Please could the Council clarify the position and amend MM23 if necessary.

Next Steps

Assuming that the Council would be content to adopt the plan on the basis of the amended modifications that I have indicated are necessary, I would be grateful if it would prepare a finalised schedule of MMs that takes into account the Schedule of MMs dated February 2020 as modified by this advice and subject to the other MMs discussed at the recent hearing sessions. Should this not be the case please advise me as a matter of urgency so that I can consider how best to proceed with the examination.

There will be no need for further consultation on the MMs as all matters have been raised and discussed in previous consultations and two rounds of hearings. The new/amended modifications which are necessary are all either relatively minor in nature, responding to points raised during consultation on the MMs, or will result in the plan remaining as originally submitted by the Council for examination. I will liaise with the Council via the Programme Officer to ensure that the schedule accurately reflects the above. The updated schedule will form an appendix to my report.

If the Council requires any further clarification on the contents of this letter, please contact me via the Programme Officer. However, I am not inviting, nor envisage accepting, comments from any other parties to the examination.

Yours sincerely

Mark Dakeyne

INSPECTOR

Inspector: Mark Dakeyne BA (Hons) MRTPI