

**LEEDS SITE ALLOCATIONS PLAN**

**RESPONSE TO THE INSPECTOR'S MATTERS AND ISSUES**

**PREPARED ON BEHALF OF ABERFORD PARISH COUNCIL**

**MATTER 7**

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This response to the Inspector's Matters and Issues has been prepared by Directions Planning Consultancy Ltd on behalf of Aberford Parish Council. Directions Planning Consultancy Ltd has been instructed to represent the Parish Council during the Examination. The Parish Council has previously submitted representations at the various stages of the Site Allocation Plan preparation in connection with the allocation of a new settlement at Parlington under reference MX2-39.
- 1.2 Our comments in relation to the Inspector's Matters and Issues focus on the Parish Council's concerns regarding the allocation of the new settlement at Parlington within the last stage of the Plan's preparation. This means we have not responded to every Matter and Issue: only those relevant to concerns previously expressed and that are specific to MX2-39 Parlington Estate, Aberford.

## **2.0 MATTER 7**

### **2.1 MAIN ISSUE 1: For each Housing Market Characteristic Area, are the individual sites selected sound? Questions relevant to all HMCAs:**

#### **2.2 QUESTION 1. Are the selected sites justified having regard to the site selection methodology and process, paying particular attention to the deliverability of the allocated sites?**

- 2.2.1 We are not convinced that the Council has fully justified all of the selected allocations. This is particularly in relation to the Parlington site. At the time the draft allocation was consulted upon the Council published a number of reports in support of the allocation. We cannot, however find any reference to an assessment of the deliverability of the site. The Revised Publication Draft Section 3: Area Proposals: 6. Outer North East (September 2016) simply sets out suggested requirements for the site. The Sustainability Appraisal Addendum (September 2016) does not provide a detailed sustainability appraisal for the site. Instead it flags up a number of areas for mitigation. We are therefore at a loss to find any evidence in relation to the deliverability of the site and the original site selection methodology and process to which other allocations were subjected.

#### **2.3 QUESTION 4. Is the proposed mix of uses on mixed use allocated sites justified?**

- 2.3.1 We have found no evidence to justify the proposed mix of development at MX2-39 within the evidence base. There is simply a lack of documentation to set out on what basis decisions have been reached. It is unclear how the sum of 5 ha of employment land has been allocated as part of this initial stage in support of 1850 dwellings. Overall, the Council expect that 5000 new homes and 11.5 ha of employment land might come forward following the release of land at Parlington in stages that extend beyond the Plan period. In this initial stage, 1850 dwellings represents 37 per cent of the homes to be provide. However, 5 ha of employment land represents 43 percent of the total amount of employment land to be developed. There is, however, no explanation as to why more employment land needs to be released in the first phase in support of a smaller phase of residential development.

2.3.2 Furthermore, the allocation sets out how supporting retail and commercial space will also need to be provided, but no outlines as to the amount is provided. This is of concern as without limits set on the size of supermarket floorspace, or the mix of comparison and convenience retail floorspace, then it could cause harm to other retail centres in surrounding villages and the town of Wetherby. The lack of detail in relation to the types of development to be provided as part of a mixed scheme is therefore a concern and suggests the Plan is not sound.

**2.4 QUESTION 5. Where the development of a site relies on the delivery of critical infrastructure (e.g. new roads, new water and waste water infrastructure, significant pre-commencement work), does the evidence support that the infrastructure will be in place to support the timely development of these sites?**

2.4.1 Whilst the Council has identified what infrastructure may be required, there appears to be no indication as to when it will be delivered or if it is viable to bring the infrastructure forward ahead of development. The delivery of infrastructure has a clear impact on delivery rates, especially if connections onto the strategic road network are required.

2.4.2 The lack of evidence is particularly evident in relation to MX2-39 as it appears there are still a lot of unanswered questions at this moment in time with regards to the deliverability of the site. This is evident from the Revised Publication Draft Section 3: Area Proposals: 6. Outer North East (September 2016), which states in relation to Parlington "A comprehensive master-planning and transport planning exercise will be needed to confirm the details of the road network and public transport enhancements needed to mitigate this major site. Mitigation works should be carried out in accordance with the findings of the assessment work." Clearly, there is no clear picture as to what road improvements are required or their cost. In relation to costs, the Addendum to the Sustainability Appraisal (September 2016) makes clear that the cost of infrastructure has not yet been evaluated. On this basis it cannot be said that there is any evidence to suggest infrastructure will be in place to support the timely development of MX2-39. Given this is a strategic allocation of significant scale to meet a notable part of the housing requirement then it would suggest the Council should have a better grasp on the deliverability of the site.

**3.0 MAIN ISSUE 2: For each site, are the policies and specific site requirements sound?  
Questions relevant to all HMCAs:**

**3.1 QUESTION 2. Are the specific site requirements relating to individual sites justified and effective (are they clearly expressed so they can be applied in day to day decision-making) and consistent with national policy? For example, many suggest that 'consideration' should be given to various matters as part of proposals / planning applications but does not explicitly require anything further to be done beyond that.**

3.1.1 Whilst the Council has made clear the site requirements, these have not been expressed in the form of a planning policy to provide criteria against which a planning application might be determined. Instead the Council has provided a 'to do' list of what documents applicants will be expected to provide and matters will need to be addressed as part of a planning application.

- 3.1.2 The list covers a number of critical matters to the delivery of development, and also matters that are at the heart as to whether development is at all even appropriate in this location. For example, in the case of Parlington, the site requirements refer to “multiple linked points of access should be provided from the adjacent road network.” Also, in relation to Listed buildings, the Council’s Plan states “any development should preserve the special architectural or historic interest of Listed Buildings and their setting.” We are concerned that these requirements are loosely expressed so they are not effective. In particular, how might they be measured in relation to whether development is appropriate or not without defined criteria?
- 3.1.3 In respect of both examples mentioned here there is no indication as to why it is necessary or desirable for there to be multiple linked points of access or how the special interest of Listed buildings might be measure to ensure it is appropriately preserved. We understand the Council has an idea as to where the multiple access points need to be located, and also which buildings are Listed. It is therefore unclear as to why more specific requirements could not be stated within a Policy that provides a clearer framework for development. The allocations cannot, therefore, be said to be effective or positively prepared because of their ambiguity and lack of clear direction to applicants.
- 3.1.2 Furthermore, there is no clear evidence to suggest the list is comprehensive or fully justified. For example, in relation to education, we understand there is a need for new schools, given the scale of development, but no justification is provided as to the number of places that need to be provided. The lack of evidence and justification is surprising as the methodology for calculating the number of future school places arising from development is well established. We have been left wondering why the need for primary and secondary schools has not been fully explained to justify the requirement, and also so the Policy can be more effective.
- 3.1.3 In relation to the site requirements conforming with the NPPF, we are concerned that the requirements would not necessarily lead to development being sustainable with reference to the presumption in favour of sustainable development. The list of matters that need to be addressed within a planning application is not comprehensive and so all matters that might need to be compensated for or mitigated have not been listed. For example, no mention is made of drainage. Furthermore, the site requirements do not allow an assessment to be made as to whether development will have a significant detrimental impact in relation to heritage assets or highways. All these matters are pertinent to securing sustainable development, which should ultimately be the purpose of the Site Allocations Plan. However, the way in which the Plan is expressed at the moment suggests the Plan is likely to fall short of delivering sustainable development.
- 3.1.4 The Parish Council’s response to the Pre-Submission Changes sets out in full what development control matters need to be addressed through a planning policy for the allocation of MX2-39 in order to ensure an appropriate framework is provided by Leeds City Council to applicants. We would therefore kindly request due consideration is given to the Parish Council’s previous representations.

**3.2 QUESTION 3. Does the evidence demonstrate that the deliverability and viability of the allocated sites is not prejudiced by the site requirements, particularly those that have been subject to additional / revised requirements as a result of consultation during the plan process?**

3.2.1 In the case of Parlington, the site is currently agricultural land, so the infrastructure requirements to develop a new town will be significant. It is generally more expensive to develop a greenfield site than a brownfield site because utility connections need to be made for the first time. In particular, Yorkshire Water's requirement to deliver 30 per cent improvement in surface water runoff can be particularly costly due to needing to create additional storage capacity on land that has not been previously developed. Also, road infrastructure becomes an abnormal cost as it is not simply the case of creating new junctions, which would be the case with a previously developed site.

3.2.2 We are concerned that there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate the deliverability or viability of the proposed allocation of MX2-39 at this moment in time. We have found no evidence that any of the development costs have been evaluated. Without having costed the proposed development, how can an assessment be made of the viability of the proposed allocation? Especially, as there will be a number of abnormal costs, including the need to address the impact of development on adjacent heritage assets and ecology. For example, both are likely to require additional landscaping requirements as mitigation measures. Also, the quality of new development within the setting of the Listed buildings and conservation area will need to be higher than might be typical, which will cost more to build.

3.2.3 Without a comprehensive list of site requirements and their costings then there is no opportunity to appreciate whether the deliverability and viability of the site will be prejudiced.

**4.0 PARLINGTON (MX-32)**

**4.1 QUESTION 1. Is the approach to site selection in the Outer North East HMCA which favours a new settlement (Parlington) over the expansion of existing settlements or release of Safeguarded sites previously identified in the Leeds UDP justified and consistent with the CS?**

4.1.1 The Spatial Vision of the Core Strategy sets out how the intention under point 8 is to "deliver housing growth in sustainable locations related to the Settlement Hierarchy..." and under point 16 "ensure new development takes place in locations that are or will be accessible by a choice of means of transport, including walking, cycling, and public transport."

4.1.2 Policy SP1 then goes on to set out how the location of development will be expected "to deliver the spatial development strategy based on the Leeds Settlement Hierarchy and to concentrate the majority of new development within or adjacent to urban areas, taking advantage of existing services, high levels of accessibility..." Criterion (ii) then sets out how land will be prioritised, but no mention is made of new settlements or isolated development. Instead development is expected to be located on land within the Settlement Hierarchy or as "sustainable extensions to the Main Urban Area / relevant settlements."

- 4.1.3 Policy SP1 criterion (viii) makes the point that the review of the Green Belt is expected to direct development so it is consistent with the overall strategy of the Core Strategy.
- 4.1.4 Spatial Policy 6 sets out how the housing requirement will be delivered with a view to achieving the distribution in tables H2 and H3 in Spatial Policy 7 using a number of considerations which include “(i) Spatial locations (which meet standards of public transport accessibility...), supported by existing or access to new local facilities and services)” and “(iii) The impact on Green Belt purposes”.
- 4.1.5 On the basis of Policies SP1, SP6 and SP7 the idea of a new settlement at Parlington is clearly not consistent with the Core Strategy. These policies are intended to form the framework for distributing development across the district, but there is no mention of the intention to allocate a new settlement. Instead the strategy aims to see redevelopment within existing settlements or else their expansion.
- 4.1.6 There is simply no mention in any part of the Core Strategy of the concept of new settlements. When reviewing the Green Belt, the Core Strategy expects the review to direct development to be consistent with the overall strategy, so again, this precludes the concept of a new settlement. This is because the overall strategy intends for existing settlements to be redeveloped or expanded. A new settlement simply does not sit within the overall strategy because it is unlikely to help deliver the regeneration objectives of the Core Strategy, or the intention to help bolster the vitality and sustainability of existing settlements.
- 4.1.7 On this basis the Core Strategy did not assess the impact of new settlements as part of the EIA or HA, which are both required in order to determine the potential impact of the plan under EU Directive. Consequently, the Core Strategy should be reviewed to make reference to the intention to create new settlements in order for the Plan to be sound. As the Core Strategy does not mention the concept of a new settlement then the Plan should not be found sound at this time. A review of the Core Strategy is, in our opinion, required in order to support the concept of a new settlement.
- 4.1.8 Please also see our response to Matter 3, as our comments are pertinent to the consideration of Matter 7.
- 4.1.9 In relation to whether the new settlement is justified, we believe the Council has not set out clear evidence to determine that the site is the most appropriate option in relation to achieving the objectives of the Core Strategy and there is still a lot of work to be certain the site is deliverable. Furthermore, there does not appear to be an assessment to establish that the benefits of development outweigh the harm it might cause; particularly, in relation to highways, ecology, and designated heritage assets. Instead, the Council appear to have simply updated reports to reflect inclusion of the site within the Site Allocations Plan rather than undertaking a fresh review of the implications of allocating the site will have on the overall Plan in the context of the Core Strategy. We believe this approach is unsound given the strategic significance of allocating a new settlement within land that is currently Green Belt and located on the edge of the district.

**4.2 QUESTION 2. In relation to MX2-39 (Parlington), do the site requirements clearly express what a future planning application will be required to demonstrate in relation to highway considerations, the historic environment and ecology?**

4.2.1 The draft Policy that details the considerations for any future planning application are set out in the Submission Draft Pre-Submission Changes (February 2017) consultation document. The draft Policy does mention highways considerations, the historic environment and ecology. However the necessary detail is lacking within the Policy to secure the necessary mitigation or compensation we understand the Council would require as part any future development.

4.2.2 In particular, the Policy refers to how two points of access should be provided. The use of the word 'should' provides a get out clause as it is not a strong enough word to convey how a second access is a necessity to deal with the anticipated volume of traffic. Furthermore, there is no mention of any expectations for future phases of development that could require additional access points. The lack of ability to express the necessary highways improvements to deal with the volume of traffic to be generated is clear from the Policy as under "Local Highway Network" it is made clear that insufficient ground work has been undertaken to date to identify exactly what enhancement works will be required in mitigation. This is of grave concern as it suggests a clear picture as to the potential impacts of development have not been identified or fully assessed to determine whether the impact of development will cause significant harm.

4.2.3 In relation to ecology, Listed Buildings and the Aberford Conservation Area the wording of the Policy is general in nature, which means it is woolly and non-specific. It appears that the Policy simply identifies how ecology, the setting of the various Listed buildings and the presence of the Conservation Area all exist and may have some impact on the nature of the proposed development. However, the implications and any priorities for protection and enhancement have not been identified. Instead, it appears it will be left to the developer to assess the impact and determine the appropriate mitigation or compensation. This is unsatisfactory given the significance of these matters, which is evident from the objection raised by Historic England.

**4.3 QUESTION 3. Would it be necessary to ensure that any development would not prejudice the development of the wider area beyond the plan period?**

4.3.1 It appears LCC are reliant upon subsequent phases to deliver future development requirements. It would therefore follow that the Council should ensure through the initial phase of development identified in the current SAP that future development is not prejudiced. After all, it is a basic premise of planning that sustainable development is about positive growth and progress for this and future generations (para 7, NPPF). It therefore follows that a local plan should appropriately plan for the future of an area, which includes setting the context for subsequent reviews of the local plan.