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SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION

HEARING SESSION – MATTER 5 SPATIAL STRATEGY

ON BEHALF OF MR M. STEPHENS (AGT24-002-03-01, 02 and 03)

Matter 5 – Spatial Strategy

Whether there is a clear Spatial Strategy which is justified, effective and consistent with national policy?

Questions

Q1 and Q2. The reasoning and process for identifying the spatial strategy for housing is outlined at paragraphs 5.12 to 5.17 of the Plan. Paragraph 5.14 confirms the Council's preferred approach (Spatial Option 1) which is described as a capacity-led approach focusing growth to sustainable non-Green Belt sites and limited Green Belt development in Tier 1 settlements well served by public transport. At paragraph 5.16, it is acknowledged that Tier 1 settlements are areas in the district that are the best served by public transport, particularly into the neighbouring conurbations.

This approach must be the right one for South Staffordshire and is supported. Great Wyrley and Cheslyn Hay are two large 'villages' that are now effectively amalgamated to form a large urban area that shares numerous services and facilities and combined, probably represents the largest urban area within South Staffordshire. It benefits from a railway station and excellent connections to the local and national road network; it is close to the retail and employment opportunities just to the north in Cannock and is also close to the west midlands conurbation to the south. It is rightly identified as a Tier 1 settlement to which development should be directed, as it has been in previous local plans.

Q3 and Q4. Our objection to the plan centres on the fact that the spatial strategy as indicated at Table 8 proposes that Cheslyn Hay/Great Wyrley should only accommodate 11.3% of the housing delivery, as compared with Penkridge and Codsall/Bilbrook, which are to accommodate almost 25%, each. It is not suggested that the proportions for Penkridge and Codsall/Bilbrook are inappropriate, but the comparison is stark

More importantly, it is proposed that 22% of housing delivery should be in Tier 2 and Tier 3 villages. This approach is inconsistent with the proposed spatial strategy set out at paragraphs 5.12 to 5.17 and highlighted above (Q1 and Q2).

Such an approach might be acceptable if there were no additional suitable sites available for consideration in Cheslyn Hay/Great Wyrley, but that is not the case. The adopted SAMDev allocated Site 119 – Saredon Road Cheslyn Hay (immediately opposite the Secondary and Primary Schools) for housing and the majority of this has been developed. It also removed land to the west from the Green Belt and Safeguarded it for future development. This is now a proposed housing allocation Site 119a in this plan. Both of these sites have been endorsed as sustainable.

Our client has promoted the balance of the land on the north side of Saredon Road (Site 119b) which is equally sustainable in terms of its location. Furthermore, the Green Belt Study assessed the site as providing ‘weak/no contribution’ to the five purposes of the Green Belt and considered that development of the land would cause ‘low/moderate harm’. Moreover, the Landscape Sensitivity Assessment considered the land to be of relatively low landscape sensitivity. It can therefore be seen that Site 119b represents a logical and appropriate rounding-off opportunity that would merely consolidate the urban area in this location, without significant harm to Green Belt purposes or the wider landscape.

Apparently, however, Site 119b was not progressed due to ‘some initial concerns’ expressed early in the local plan preparation process, presumably in relation to the capacity of the local highway network. These concerns have never been properly explained, quantified or justified, which is odd, especially in the light of the other allocations in Saredon Road (Sites 119 and 119a) and also off Landywood Lane Great Wyrley (Site 136) to which the highway authority raised no objections subject to appropriate mitigation.

Perhaps other factors at play here, otherwise, the LPA should have sought further clarification from the highway authority, especially since the objector supplied a copy of the Transportation Assessment that supported the planning application for SAMDev Site 119, which is now completed? Instead, it has merely relied on the most cursory and flimsy of comments from the highway authority and discounted an otherwise eminently suitable site, that has low green belt and landscape impacts; relates well to the urban area and key services and facilities, being within very close walking distance to the secondary and primary schools and a leisure centre; and offers convenient access to the A460 and wider road network to the west.

Mitigation of impacts and improvements to local highway infrastructure have been required in respect of Sites 119 and 119a and other sites in the locality and there is no reason to suggest that any 'initial concerns' of the Highway Authority cannot be satisfactorily addressed.

It is acknowledged that the Examination is not to consider 'Omission Sites', but it is plainly evident that the proposed distribution of housing allocations does not properly reflect the proposed spatial strategy, but the plan could be made sound in this respect, by modifications to identify at least one additional site in Cheslyn Hay such as Site 119b, either in addition to, or because of a reduction of provision within Tier 2 and Tier 3 villages.

It is also understood that the owner of the existing nursery business off Norton Lane Great Wyrley, Site 704 (31 dwellings) has recently advised that prospective developers that this commercial site is to remain operational and is no longer available for residential development. If it is the case that Site 704 is now unavailable and therefore undeliverable, then it could be included within the development boundary as a potential future windfall opportunity, but for the time being, a replacement site should be found in Cheslyn Hay/Great Wyrley.

A J Williams Dip TP, MRTPI

Director