

South Staffordshire Local Plan Examination

Respondent No: AGT 24-030-01-03

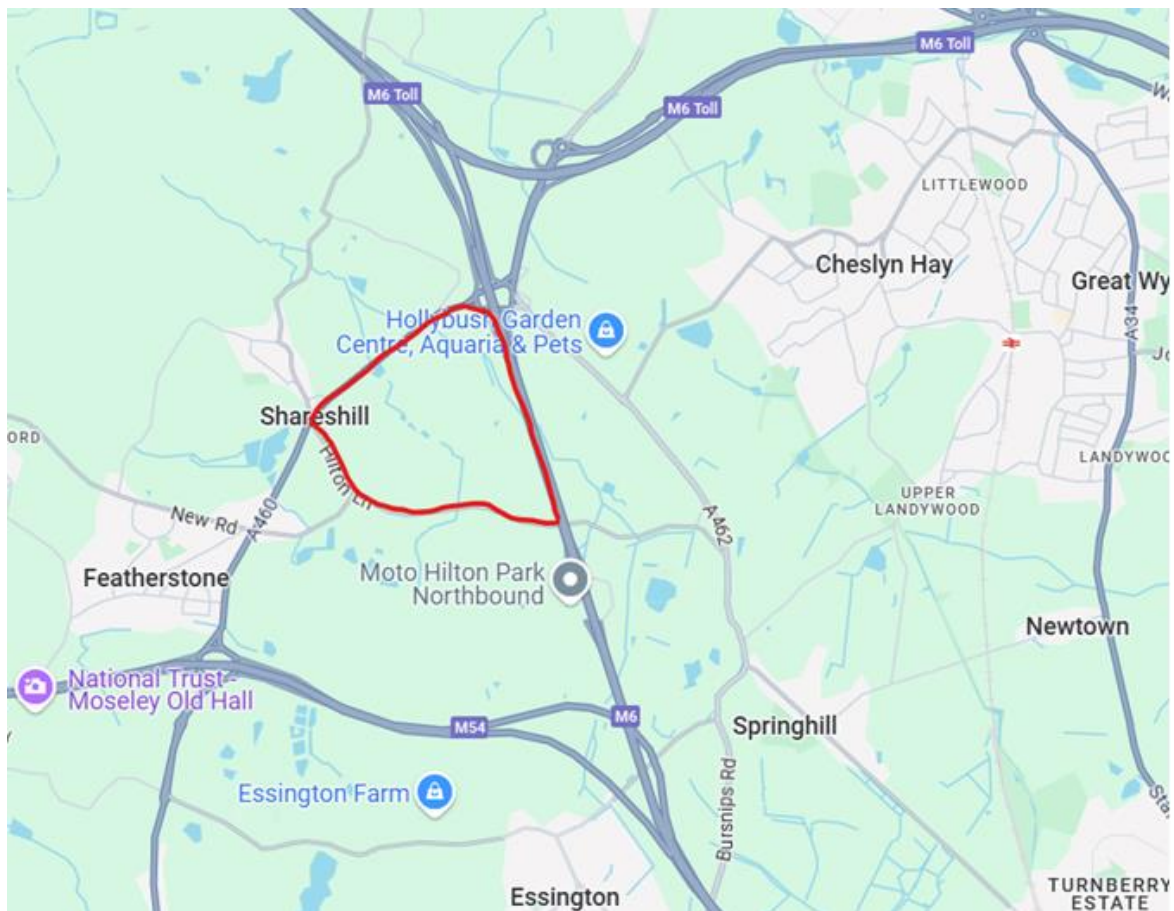
Position Statement by Nurton Developments Ltd

Matter 6: Green Belt

Issue 3: Whether the Plan's approach to Green Belt is positively prepared, justified and consistent with national policy.

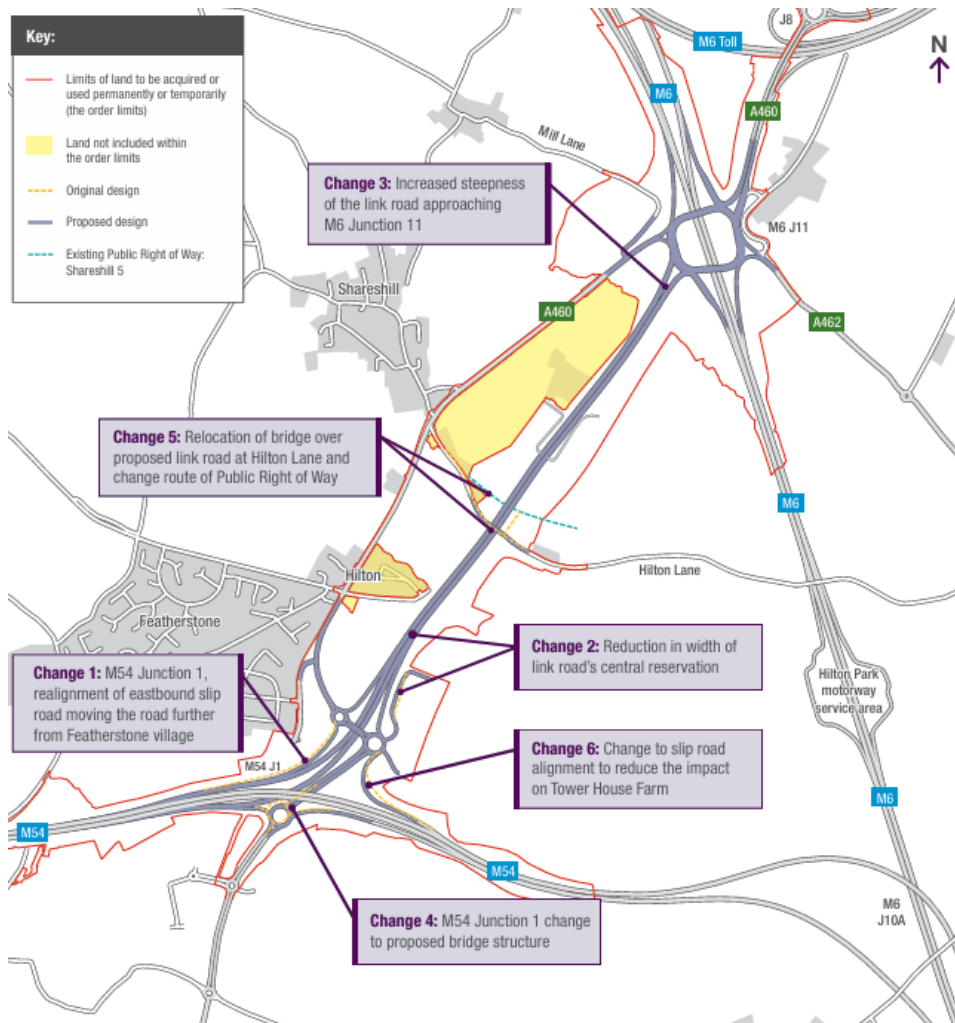
Question 4: How has the Council assessed the suitability of land parcels and their contribution towards the purpose of including land in the Green Belt?

1. Nurton Developments Ltd (NDL) is promoting the allocation of a strategic employment site at Hilton Park, Junction 11 M6. This site is located in the Green Belt. Full details of the site are presented in a Position Statement in response to Matter 7: Site Allocations, Issue 3: Policy SA7.
2. For ease of reference, a location plan is provided below. The outline of the site is marked in red.



3. In the light of the Council's failure to properly assess employment needs in the plan, NDL does not consider that the Council has properly assessed the opportunity that this site presents to meet both the local and wider needs for employment land, especially in the light of anticipated improvements in the Strategic Road Network (SRN). Specific issues with the Council's assessment have been set out in NDL's Position Statement in response to Matter 7. Properly assessed exceptional circumstances exist which would warrant the release of the site from the Green Belt and its allocation for employment development.
4. A particular criticism of NDL is the obviously erroneous assessment of the site with regard to potential Green Belt harm. This is addressed by this Position Statement.
5. The conclusions to the site assessment of Site E43 (i.e. Hilton Park) in both the 2022 and 2024 Economic Strategy and Employment Site Assessment Topic Papers note that: -

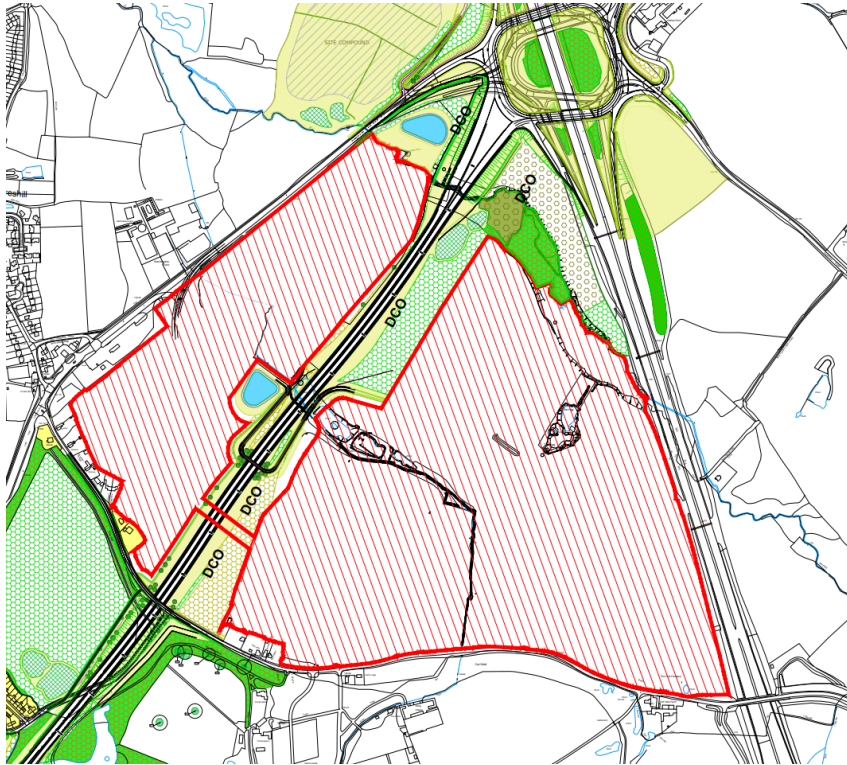
"The site performs relatively well and has a clear advantage for distribution/logistics of being close to the M6 (Junction 11). However, major negative affects are also predicted in the Sustainability Appraisal, due to the site being in one of the more harmful Green Belt areas within the district."
6. The assessment to the Site Selection Criteria of Green Belt harm is rated as "high".
7. This rating inexplicably ignores the substantial effect of the approved M54/M6 Link Road on the site and the wider area. The South Staffordshire Green Belt Study (conducted in 2019) did not take this into account, perhaps understandably, since the scheme was not yet consented at that time. Consent was confirmed in April 2022. That position has obviously changed and a reassessment is warranted.
8. As part of the consultation response to the South Staffordshire Spatial Housing Strategy and Infrastructure Delivery (in December 2019), JLL (acting as planning consultants for NDL) submitted an assessment by independent consultants, Tyler Grange, on the contribution that this site would make to the Green Belt. This assessment downgraded the land between the A460 and the Link Road as "moderate/high" and between the Link Road and the M6 motorway as "moderate". In the absence of any assessment from the Council, this is the only evidence before the examination as to the likely effect upon the site from these significant improvement works to the SRN.
9. A plan showing the route of the Link Road is provided overleaf.



10. The Link Road is described in the Examiner's Report to the DCO decision (and referred to in the Secretary of State's decision letter) as "*a significant element of engineered highway infrastructure*". Its principal elements include: -

- Dual carriageway in both cutting and embankment.
- New junction at Junction 1, M54.
- Enlargement and signalisation of the junction at Junction 11, M6, including raising it by 1.5m.
- A series of accommodation works such as a new bridge carrying Hilton Lane over the new carriageway.

11. The impact of the link Road on the contribution the site makes to the Green Belt can be gauged by the plan overleaf, which shows the routing of the proposed Link Road (annotated by DCO) straight through the site (developable area edged in red and hatched). It will clearly compromise the openness of this part of the Green Belt and warrants a reassessment of this parcel of land.



12. An addendum to the Green Belt Study was produced in 2022. However, despite JLL's representations pointing to this obvious omission, the Council simply has not addressed this point. Instead, the addendum just concentrated on assessing a new housing site.
13. This egregious evidential omission was referred to again by JLL to the Council in making representations to the November 2022 Regulation 19 draft Plan. However, the Council has continued to ignore these representations and no further addendum or update has been made to the Green Belt Study. There is a serious problem with the evidence provided by the Council to the plan, with the SA (which disregards the effect of this new road infrastructure as to the existence of reasonable alternatives) and to the soundness of the plan overall
14. In conclusion, the site has simply not been properly addressed by the Council. This is despite the imminent major change in circumstances in Green Belt terms. This is a deeply flawed approach.
15. To rectify this flaw, the Council needs to undertake an immediate partial review of the Green Belt to establish and re-assess the contribution the site would make to this part of the district in light of the consented scheme for the M54/M6 Link Road. Absent such an assessment, the examination is being invited to proceed on a wholly erroneous basis by simply relying upon the Council's Green Belt evidence to date.

Question 5: Are there exceptional circumstances to alter the Green Belt in the district in principle? If so, what are they? If not, how could housing and employment requirements be met in other ways?

16. Yes, and the NDL site at Hilton Park, Jn 11 M6 ought to be allocated.
17. No land at all is proposed to be released from the Green Belt to meet the need for employment land. Consideration of this issue is restricted to one paragraph of the Green Belt Exceptional Circumstances Topic Paper (April 2024) – paragraph 6.3.

18. Paragraph 6.3 states that: -

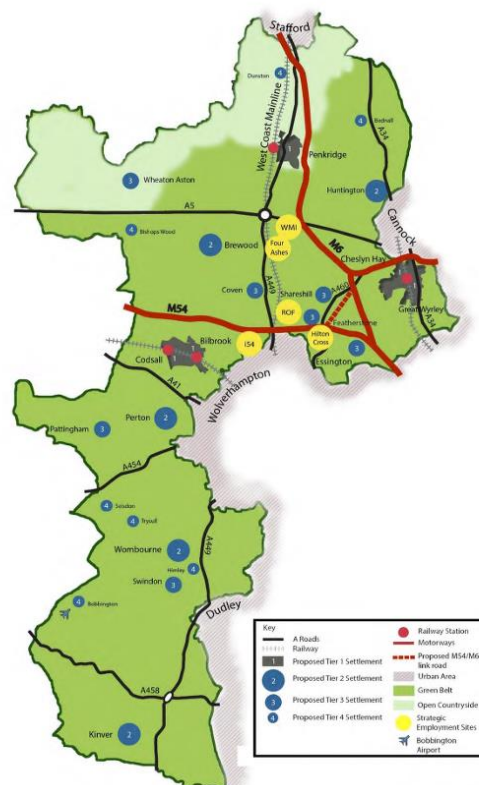
“The Council can meet its own needs for employment land and make a proportionate contribution to unmet needs within our Functional Economical Market Area (FEMA)”

19. For these reasons, it concludes that: -

“It is not considered that exceptional circumstances exist for Green Belt release for the allocation of further employment land”.

20. NDL’s position is that the figures set out in Policy DS4 – local need of 62.4ha, supply of 107.45ha, leading to a surplus of 45.2ha – are unreliable and should be the subject of complete re-assessment. This is set out in full in NDL’s Position Statement to Matter 4.
21. Instead, NDL’s analysis points to a local need of 129ha, a supply of just 23.6ha, leading to a substantial shortfall of 105.4ha. To make up this shortfall will require the identification and allocation of new sites.
22. The position with the contribution South Staffordshire can make to help meet the unmet needs from the Black Country has also changed materially. The shortfall from the Black Country has increased from 153ha to a minimum of 280ha following the publication of the Black Country EDNA Update in November 2024. NDL considers this should be treated as a minimum figure for the reasons set out in its Position Statement to Matter 4.
23. Contributions to meet this shortfall can be made by West Midlands Interchange (67ha), the western extension to i54 (40ha) and ROF Featherstone (36ha). However, this still leaves a minimum net shortfall of 137ha (i.e. 280 less 67 less 40 less 36). The ability of other local planning authorities to help meet this shortfall is heavily constrained.
24. By contrast, South Staffordshire is uniquely placed to meet this shortfall. This is because of: -
 - It is very close geographical and economical relationship to the Black Country.
 - Its access to the sub region’s motorway and strategic road network (that is about to be improved by the consented M54 – M6 Link Road).
 - Its reach in terms of Labour catchment.
 - The availability of development land, particularly sites of strategic scale.

25. It is for these reasons why South Staffordshire has been able to attract inward investment and development in the relatively recent past. Obvious examples include the JLR engine factory at i54 and, more recently, the factory for GPG at i54 Western Extension.
26. The need to find and allocated new strategic sites to serve South Staffordshire and the Black Country has been identified by two iterations of the West Midlands Strategic Employment Sites Study. Details of these are provided in NDL's Position Statements for Matters 4 and 7. However, in summary, the first iteration (May 2021) concluded that there was an **"urgent"** need to allocate new sites and identified four key locations across the West Midlands for future strategic employment sites. One of these locations – Area 4 – was the Black Country and South Staffordshire.
27. The second iteration (September 2024) also identified a need for the Black Country and South Staffordshire (Area 2) and quantified this need – one site for Class B2 (at least 25ha) and one site for Class B8 (at least 50ha). NDL's analysis of this study concludes that the residual need for Area 2 is underestimated as the Study's assessment of past take-up (which underpins the Study's methodology) is incomplete and missing a large number of completions.
28. Given these circumstances, NDL considers that South Staffordshire should contribute at least another 75ha. This would help to reduce the residual shortfall in the Black Country and would also be consistent with the recommendations made by the most recent West Midlands Strategic Employment Sites Study.
29. The extent of the Green Belt under the Council's jurisdiction is illustrated by Map 1 in the draft Plan. For ease of reference, it is provided below: -



30. The Green Belt takes in the whole of the district with the exception of land to the north and west of Penkridge. Land to the north and west of Penkridge is mostly rural and inaccessible to the Black Country.
31. It is to be noted that the top end of the district, which is not constrained by the Green Belt, was identified by the September 2024 Study as a separate area of opportunity – Area 1: M6 - Stoke and Stafford. This area takes in the Dunston allocation at Junction 13, M6.
32. In summary, the four separate elements identified by the relevant evidence base and NDL's analysis, namely:
- shortfall of supply to meet local need;
 - shortfall in residual unmet need from the Black Country;
 - quantitative and qualitative need for large strategic employment sites; and
 - lack of obvious alternatives outside the Green Belt

amount to **exceptional circumstances**.

33. These exceptional circumstances are sufficiently strong to justify the release of land in the Green Belt that is well located to meet the identified needs. NDL considers that its site at Hilton Park, Junction 11 M6 is particularly well placed to meet these needs – both local and strategic – and should be allocated accordingly. The opportunity this site offers in meeting the identified needs is explained in greater detail in NDL's Position Statement to Matter 7 – Site Allocations.

PJL

10 April 2025