



HEARING STATEMENT

in respect of
South Staffordshire Local Plan Examination Matter 2
on behalf of
Barberry Perton Ltd

10 April 2025
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1. Introduction

- 1.1. This hearing statement is made by RCA Regeneration Ltd on behalf of Barberry Perton Ltd to the South Staffordshire Local Plan (SSLP) EIP.
- 1.2. This statement relates to Matter 2 – Duty to Cooperate.
- 1.3. We have not provided answers to all questions under this heading and have only offered answers where we consider it to be necessary.

2. Matter 2: Duty to Co-operate

Issue: Whether the Council has complied with the Duty to Cooperate in the preparation of the Plan.

Question 8 *Are the co-operation activities and outcomes sufficiently evidenced? Have all relevant signed and dated Statements of Common Ground been provided, consistent with the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework and the associated Planning Practice Guidance? If not, why?*

- 2.1. We do not agree that the relevant co-operation activities and outcomes have been sufficiently evidenced where it comes to the agreement that the originally agreed 4,000 homes of unmet need from the GBBCHMA (in previous iterations of the plan) should be reduced to 640 homes.
- 2.2. This was picked up on by a number of respondents at the Reg 19 consultation in 2024, including neighbouring Lichfield District Council¹ who were concerned that the reduced level of contribution would need to be robustly evidenced and justified in the context of the emerging unmet housing needs within the GBBCHMA (this is set out in the Local Plan as being 28,239 homes from the Black Country authorities and 78,415 from Greater Birmingham).
- 2.3. Similarly, Sandwell MBC² 'note' the 640 home contribution, but conspicuously do not support it as they do the unmet employment land need figure.
- 2.4. Walsall MBC³ state clearly that the reduction in the provision for unmet need 4,000 to 640 '*does not align well with the test of soundness requiring plans to be positively prepared*'. They also point out that the December 2023 NPPF revision does not alter this need or the supply shortfall.
- 2.5. Wolverhampton City Council in their response⁴ have argued that of the 640 unmet needs contribution figure, they would like a 'Wolverhampton' element of the contribution to be confirmed – arguing that 37-70% should be a contribution to meet Wolverhampton's needs specifically.
- 2.6. Dudley MBC⁵ consider that a further 10% flexibility figure should also be a contribution to the unmet needs of the Greater Birmingham and Black Country Housing Market Area (GBBCHMA), rather than it simply applying as a generic allowance for flexibility for the Borough as a whole.
- 2.7. When taken together, these comments do not point to the fact that the Council have adequately discharged their Duty to Cooperate. There are a number of unanswered questions and significant disagreements between the Council and its neighbours.
- 2.8. We agree with the HBF⁶ where they explained in their representation to the Reg 19 plan in May 2024, that they are '*disappointed that the DTC statement simply sets out what has happened but gives no explanation of what has been agreed upon and why. Merely noting that there is an unmet need, does nothing to address it. HBF is supportive of the need for the Council to have an*

¹¹ https://www.sstaffs.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-12/sta24-027-01_lichfield_district_council_rep.pdf

² https://www.sstaffs.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-12/sta24-038-01_sandwell_mbc_rep_late.pdf

³ https://www.sstaffs.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-12/sta24-049-01_walsall_council_rep.pdf

⁴ https://www.sstaffs.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-12/sta24-012-01_city_of_wolverhampton_council_rep.pdf

⁵ https://www.sstaffs.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-11/dudley_mbc_ssdc_socg_2024.pdf

⁶ https://www.sstaffs.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-12/sta24-024-02_home_builders_federation_rep.pdf

up to date Local Plan which is why it is so disappointing that there is a total lack of collective thinking around how the unmet need of the whole Housing Market Area will be addressed.'

- 2.9. The Council have not added any further robust evidence setting out how the 640 figure has been arrived at, nor why the contextual policy changes at a national level would justify such a drop in the unmet need provision.
- 2.10. The converse implication of not providing evidence to show that the duty to cooperate has been met, is that if one of the GBBC constituent Councils are unable to meet their own needs within their boundaries and there is no agreed apportionment of unmet needs to South Staffordshire within the HMA (or beyond) then there is, in our view a considerable problem with the duty to cooperate not having been discharged, and the plan not being positively prepared.
- 2.11. It is clear that neither neighbouring Wolverhampton nor Dudley can meet all of their own need within their boundaries (unmet need by their own admission adds up to 11,000 dwellings), and both Councils have now submitted their plans for examination: the Wolverhampton City Plan was submitted for examination on 7th March 2025 and the Dudley Local Plan was submitted for examination on 14th February 2025. We do not expect either plan to make significant progress through examination with so much housing unaccounted for.
- 2.12. Finally, in January 2025 a GBBCHMA Statement of Common Ground⁷ was produced, and seemingly (and frustratingly) the only matter that has been agreed upon is that further work is necessary. At para 7.2 the parties have agreed to undertake 'further evidence base work' to update the 2018 Housing Growth Study.

⁷ https://www.sstaffs.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-04/ssted11_officer_agreed_gbbchma_socg_-_january_2025_.pdf

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