

St Francis Group (Featherstone 2) Ltd

Matter 12: Hearing Statement

Respondent Reference Numbers:

**AGT24-048-02-01, AGT24-048-02-02, AGT24-048-02-03, AGT24-048-02-04 and
AGT24-048-02-05**

by CarneySweeney

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PLANNING

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1.0 Introduction

CarneySweeney are acting on behalf of St Francis Group (Featherstone 2) Ltd in making representations to the emerging South Staffordshire Local Plan, with representations having been made to the previous Regulation 19 consultation stage.

As requested, we have provided separate Hearing Statements for the following Matters:

- Matter 5: Spatial Strategy
- Matter 7: Site Allocations
- Matter 12: Building a Strong Local Economy

This Hearing Statement covers Matter 12 – Building a Strong Local Economy.



2.0 Matter 12: Building a Strong Local Economy

Respondent Reference Numbers: AGT24-048-02-01, AGT24-048-02-02, AGT24-048-02-03, AGT24-048-02-04 and AGT24-048-02-05

[Focus: Policies EC1, EC2, EC3, EC4, EC5, EC6, EC7]

Issue 2:

Whether the approach of Policy EC2 to the retention of employment sites is justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

Questions:

1. In terms of being justified and consistent with national policy, what is the basis for this policy approach?

This is a question for the Council to respond to, and depending on their response, we may wish to comment in the Hearing Session.

2. In terms of being effective:

a. Does the title adequately reflect the scope of Policy EC2 in so far as it extends to individual premises beyond employment allocations?

This is a question for the Council to respond to, and depending on their response, we may wish to comment in the Hearing Session.

b. Does Policy EC2 clearly set out the circumstances where alternative uses on existing unallocated employment sites and employment allocations will be permitted?

In part yes. The opening paragraph is clear in setting out that the policy would apply to development resulting in the loss of existing designated employment areas (as defined on the policies maps), in whole or in part, or a site/premises which is currently or last used for employment.

However, it is noted that the opening sentence of Part a) of Policy EC2 refers to demonstrating that “*the retention of the site or premises for use classes E(g), B2 or B8 use has been fully explored without success...*”. For clarity and consistency, the opening sentence of Part a) of Policy EC2 should also refer to employment allocations so that it is clear that employment allocations are also capable of being considered for alternative uses.



We note the Council's response at page 536 and page 537 of the 2024 Submission Consultation Statement states that "...The policy does not completely preclude the loss of strategic sites if the criteria in the policy can be met...". This clarification is welcomed but we believe the addition of "allocations" to site or premises in the text would be beneficial in terms of clarity and consistency.

c. Are the marketing requirements to justify the loss of existing employment sites and premises to other uses clear? Should they be proportionate to the importance of the site to the local economy and if so, how will that importance be consistently determined?

In part yes as it is not unusual for a minimum marketing period to be required for a proposal seeking approval for an alternative use to employment.

Whilst it is noted that Policy EC2 does not make reference to any specific marketing requirements, it is presumed that this is to provide flexibility as part of any decision-making process so that any marketing requirements are proportionate to each site. Notwithstanding this, Part a) of Policy EC2 suggests that the marketing requirement would apply to all sites which does not align with Paragraph 10.6 of the Publication Plan (CD1), which states as follows:

"The lack of viability of an existing business may lead to proposals to find an alternative use, in which case, the applicant will be expected to provide full details of at least 12 months marketing of the site/premises for employment use..." (underlining is our emphasis)

For consistency with Paragraph 10.6 of CD1, the requirement for a minimum marketing period in Part a) of Policy EC2 should therefore apply to an existing business.

3. Are any modifications necessary in the interests of soundness?

Yes. Please see our responses above to Question 2b) and Question 2c) with our suggested amendments.

