

## **Examination of the South Staffordshire Local Plan Review**

### **Hearing Statement prepared on behalf of Mr Lee Penrose (Ref: RES24-176-01)**

#### **Matter 5: The Spatial Strategy**

#### **Issue 1: Whether there is a clear Spatial strategy which is justified, effective and consistent with national policy.**

##### **Introduction**

The Tyler Parkes Partnership Limited has previously made detailed representations at both the Regulation 18 and 19 stages on behalf of Mr Lee Penrose (Ref: RES24-176-01) with regard the proposed Policy DS5 – The Spatial Strategy to 2041.

The substantive Regulation 19 representations are already before the Inspectors, to be found via the links within Core Documents CD3 and CD4 (Index of 2024 and 2022 Regulation 19 Representations, respectively).

##### **Nature and Extent of this Statement**

This Hearing Statement is submitted in direct response to the specific questions raised by the Inspectors under ***Matter 5: Spatial Strategy, Issue 1 (Questions 1 to 3 only)***. It is not the intention to restate, verbatim, what has been submitted previously, however some repetition will occur as each question is addressed in turn, below.

## **Inspectors' Questions**

### **Q.1 How was the settlement hierarchy derived? When qualifying your answer, is the methodology used to determine the hierarchy appropriate and sufficiently robust?**

Generally, the top-down tiered approach to the settlement hierarchy appears to be logical and appropriate (Tiers 1 to 3), but there appears to be some inconsistency regarding Tiers 4 and 5, and in particular with regard to settlements which have a clearly defined settlement boundary.

Paragraph 73 of the NPPF states: *'Small and medium sized sites can make an important contribution to meeting the housing requirement of an area, are essential for Small and Medium Enterprise housebuilders to deliver new homes, and are often built-out relatively quickly. To promote the development of a good mix of sites local authorities should (inter alia) .....*

*d) support the development of windfall sites through their policies and decisions – giving great weight to the benefits of using suitable sites within existing settlements for homes ....'*

Despite the clear Government position with regard windfall sites within existing settlements, the Tier 5 settlements currently include some villages/settlements which have a clearly defined settlement boundary (e.g. Acton Trussell – see **Policies Map ref: PM3:1 Inset Plan 1: Acton Trussell**), but new residential development in Tier 5 settlements is to be restricted to conversion of existing redundant rural buildings; limited redevelopment of previously developed land; and limited affordable housing to meet specified local needs under Policy DS5 – The Spatial Strategy to 2041.

Such restrictions on settlements with defined settlement boundaries is clearly at odds with National Planning Policy. They are not justified and are unnecessarily onerous. Furthermore, particularly given some of the sensitivities of development within the wider South Staffordshire District, and especially the significant areas of Green Belt, every opportunity to deliver new homes within existing defined settlement boundaries, however modest, should be taken, thereby further easing the pressure on the Green Belt and Open Countryside.

The approach to the hierarchy has been largely driven by the Rural Services and Facilities Audit 2021 (RSFA) (**Evidence Base document: EB15**). However, the RSFA does have its limitations and should not be the only determinative factor in arriving at the proposed settlement tiers, especially those at the lower end of the scale (Tiers 4 and 5 in particular).

This categorisation of tiers within the RSFA is based upon an assessment of the presence and comparative quality of three key services - general store, primary school and public transport - together with the existing size of the settlement. However, it is no longer appropriate to rely solely upon surveys of the physical infrastructure and access to public transport, particularly given the significant shift in peoples' living and working arrangements, post the Covid-19 pandemic.

With an emphasis on quality of life and the environment, and with increased levels of home/remote working and an expectation for more hybrid working patterns into the future, there is a notable increased shift in demand towards more rural living, and less day-to-day commuting to work for many.

Clearly many, both in urban and rural areas, now rely on the Internet for accessing a broad spectrum of social, community, entertainment and other services, as well as for work. This trend has grown significantly during the Covid-19 pandemic and has continued, with people accustomed to the opportunities and tangible benefits, which include increased levels of home deliveries, including, but not restricted to, meals and grocery shopping. The need and demand for a local "village shop" is, therefore not what it once was. It is respectfully suggested that the RSFA fails to fully recognise such factors, and reliance upon the RSFA alone is therefore an unsound approach. The tiered approach championed by the RSFA opportunities for residential development in the lower tiers, particularly Tier 5, despite the presence of a defined settlement boundary in many cases.

It is respectfully suggested therefore that Policy DS5 should be amended, with Tier 5 settlements only being restricted to those villages and settlements that currently have no defined development boundary. Those current Tier 5 settlements that do have such a defined development boundary should be upgraded to Tier 4, which would include Acton Trussell.

Without such changes, Policy DS5 and the differing scope for housing development between Tier 4 and Tier 5 settlements will remain an anomaly. Without the suggested changes, Policy DS5 will remain inconsistent, and will be at odds, with national policy, as highlighted above.

**Q.2 How has the level of development anticipated in different settlement categories been derived? Does the settlement hierarchy appropriately reflect the role and function of these settlements?**

Please refer to comments above.

Furthermore, the Council is missing opportunities for, albeit modest levels of new housing development, within defined settlement. The allocation of settlements within the suggested lower Tiers (4 and 5) in particular warrants reconsideration and reappraisal, which goes beyond the out-dated limitations of the RSFA. By doing so a

number of Tier 5 settlements, including Acton Trussell, should be recategorised as a Tier 4 settlement.

Paragraph 3.12 of the Housing Site Selection Topic Paper (2024) (**Evidence Base Document: EB20**) sets out a Sequential Test: *‘To minimise more sensitive land release, as part of the Council’s wider duty ....’*, with the sequential approach considering whether a housing site is, in turn, within: ‘the development boundary of an existing settlement; safeguarded land previously removed from the Green Belt; Open Countryside beyond the Green Belt; Green Belt.’ That is to say, the first, and thereby, preferred choice would be for the provision of new housing within a development boundary of an existing settlement.

Yet, despite this, a village such as Acton Trussell, with a clearly defined and established adopted settlement boundary, carried forward from the current Development Plan (Adopted Core Strategy 2012), has unwarranted restrictions placed upon it in terms of new housing development, seemingly based purely on the RSFA, which as indicated under the response to Q.1 above has its limitations.

This anomaly requires attention and redressing via changes to Policy DS5. In those cases where a village/settlement has a clearly defined development boundary, such as Acton Trussell, it would be entirely appropriate for new development to come forward, via windfall opportunities within such settlements in a similar fashion to current Tier 4 settlements, especially where in some cases the difference in the level of services between some Tier 4 settlements and some Tier 5 settlements is negligible.

The reappraisal of some of the lower-level settlements (Tiers 4 and 5) is entirely appropriate, with Tier 5 settlements which have a defined settlement boundary upgraded to Tier 4.

**Q.3 In terms of the distribution of housing and employment development across the plan area:**

**a. Is it clear how and why the preferred Spatial Strategy has been selected?**

As indicated under Q.1 and Q.2 above, in general, yes in terms of the overall top-down approach to the hierarchy of settlements and the focus for new residential development within the larger settlements. However, there is a blurring of the lines when approaching the lower settlement tiers (Tiers 4 and 5 in particular) and there is a need to reappraise settlements within Tiers 4 and 5, with those which have a defined settlement boundary, such as Acton Trussell, “upgraded” to Tier 4, which would in turn ensure compliance with Paragraph 73 NPPF and assist the Council in delivering, albeit modest levels, of windfall housing development.

- b. What options have been considered for accommodating the identified development requirements in a sustainable manner? Have reasonable alternatives been considered?**

No comments.

- c. Are the areas identified for new development the most appropriate locations? Is the rationale behind choices and reasoning for conclusions clear and justified by the evidence? How have the locational needs of different sectors been addressed.**

No. Opportunities have been overlooked.

Please refer to above comments under responses to Q.1 and Q.2 regarding Tier 5 settlements and the unnecessary and unwarranted restrictions placed upon new windfall residential development within settlements with a defined settlement boundary, such as Acton Trussell.

- d. What roles have the Sustainability Appraisal and Viability Study had in influencing the Spatial Strategy?**

No comments.

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