



SMITHSGORE

ID Reference 72
Smiths Gore on behalf of
The Knowsley Estate
Matter 2

Knowsley Local Plan Core Strategy Examination

Matter 2: Council's Response to Inspector's Interim Findings

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Knowsley Local Plan Core Strategy – Re-convened Examination Hearings

These representations are submitted on behalf of The Knowsley Estate and are in response to the Submitted Knowsley Local Plan Core Strategy and matters arising since the November 2013 Hearings. The submitted representations seek to address the Matters and Issues identified by the examination Inspector as set out below.

Overall it should be noted that the Knowsley Estate broadly support the plan and its overall strategy and there is little difference between the Council and our client. However, where there are differences these relate to the Core Strategy's ability to respond appropriately to the need to deliver housing and employment land in a timely manner and in a manner consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework's (NPPF) requirement to meet the full objectively assessed need for market and affordable housing in the housing market area and to "boost significantly the supply of housing" (NPPF para. 47).

The Knowsley Estate owns land within the Knowsley Local Plan area and there are three sites within the Estate's ownership which have been assessed and reviewed through the Council's Green Belt Technical Report. These sites have been assessed by the Council as being suitable for Green Belt release and our client concurs with this view. Our client is committed to bringing forward these development sites to support the housing and employment land needs of the borough and is pleased to be working with the Council to secure the delivery of these sites. The land owner envisages these sites will bring forward high quality and inclusive design as sustainable developments to the benefit of the area, its residents and visitors.

Matter 2: Short Term Land Supply and Release of Green Belt Sites

Issue: 2.1 Is the designation of 'reserve locations' as Sustainable Urban Extensions and the omission of a phased approach to their release (new policy SUE 1) justified by evidence?

Based on the Inspectors Interim Findings and as set out in current evidence, there is a need for land to be brought forward from sites in the Green Belt earlier than anticipated in the Core Strategy in order to address housing need and demand.

It is considered that the inclusion of 'reserved locations' / 'safeguarded land' is a positive approach to the Plan and this approach is needed to ensure that land supply for housing and employment meets the short term needs identified in the Interim Findings and that a satisfactory supply is subsequently maintained. The identification of safeguarded sites will ensure that the revised Green Belt boundaries will endure and will prevent future incremental amendments over the longer period as set out in the NPPF (paragraph 83).

The exclusion of a phased approach is also very much supported. The removal of phasing increases flexibility, enabling development to take place when there is an identified need and demand. Phasing requirements are no longer required following the allocation of former Green Belt locations via Policy SUE1.

Furthermore, a mechanism in the policy which enables a site to come forward to maintain a five year deliverable supply is welcomed. However, it is considered that further clarification with regard to this mechanism is required. The table on page D21 of the 'tracked changed' Core Strategy Submission Document identifies the safeguarded site to come forward as an allocation, however, how this is to occur is not clear. Does the Council propose a review of the Plan on a regular basis during the Plan period in respect of when the early delivery of this site can take place? Further clarification on this matter is essential to understand delivery rates etc. and how the early delivery of the Knowsley Village site will occur if needed. It is essential that housing delivery must be monitored correctly and the release of safeguarded sites should be supported for development when necessary.

The proposed modifications to policy (e.g. M168), its supporting text and the accompanying policy maps is therefore supported, particularly with regard to the deletion of land from the Green Belt at 'East of Knowsley Industrial and Business Park', 'Knowsley Lane, Huyton' and 'Land at Knowsley Village'. However, further clarification with regard to its mechanisms, particularly with regard to the potential early delivery of the safeguarded site is needed before adoption of the Plan.

2.2 Does the approach to Sustainable Urban Extensions adequately address concerns about the availability of a five year housing land supply?

As set out in the NPPF (paragraph 157), Local Plans should set out broad locations for strategic development. The identification of SUE's helps landowners and stakeholders, including developers, understand where the majority of new development will be directed during the Plan period.

The identification of safeguarded land for future residential development is supported as it is considered that it provides the necessary flexibility to address existing and future housing need in a district where settlements are surrounded by Green Belt.

Land at Knowsley Village is supported as being a safeguarded SUE. However, should there be a need to bring forward additional sites for development outside those which have been allocated in the Plan, this site should be one of the first sites to be brought forward as it is available for delivery now and already has interest from volume housebuilders. This should be incorporated into the policy to ensure that the policy and its delivery mechanism is fully understood and justified throughout the Plan, in addition to Appendix D 'Delivery Mechanisms'. As stated above, further clarification on this matter is essential to understand delivery rates etc. and how the early delivery of the Knowsley Village site will occur if the need is identified, before the Plan can be adopted.

Furthermore, any under delivery from this plan period (up to 2028) should also be directed to safeguarded land. This should be included within the Core Strategy and, in particular, the SUE policies.

2.3 Is the treatment of safeguarded land at Knowsley Village justified by evidence? Is the potential development of this land before 2028 if required to maintain a five year housing land supply (new policy SUE 1) consistent with national policy?

We fully support the proposed amendments to Map Extract 9 of the Proposed Modifications to the Policies Map (June 2014) where the modification shows land to be deleted from the Green Belt. The land to the east and south of Knowsley is within sole ownership of our client and has active interest from known volume housebuilders.

Whilst we fully support the site being deleted from the Green Belt and identified as safeguarded land (for residential use post 2028), we would like to state that, should there be a need for the site to be delivered during the plan period up to 2028, we fully support the early delivery of the site for residential development. The potential development of this land before 2028, if required to maintain a five year housing land supply, provides the necessary flexibility to ensure that the plan is prepared in a positive and flexible manner. As such, we fully support Policy SUE 1, its justification text, particularly paragraph 6A.9 and the amendments to the Green Belt boundary to ensure that (should there be a need) the site can come forward prior to the preparation of the next Local Plan. Intrinsicly, we support the amendments to the Green Belt policy (CS5) and the modifications to the KLPCS to support this approach (e.g. M001, M006, and M020 etc.). However, a clearer mechanism for delivery of the safeguarded site is required as part of the Plan.

This is particularly important when looking at the revised trajectory (page 45 of the CS). The revision illustrates a spike with regard to early delivery of development during the next five years of the Plan. Whilst we support this, as it follows the Sedgefield approach and accommodates the delivery of the allocated SUE's, we have concerns regarding the delivery of development during the latter half of the plan (2026/2027 onwards). Given the profile of the trajectory and the need for a rolling five year housing land supply, it will be essential for a review of the Plan to be swift. As an example, when the Authority starts to approach the latter half of the Plan, we question which mechanism will be in place to assess when the safeguarded site should be delivered. Whatever is put in place should ensure a quick turnaround is achievable in order to prevent the Council falling below a 5 year housing land supply and opening themselves up to future sites coming forward on unallocated sites i.e. planning via appeal.

Once a clearer mechanism is in place, particularly for the latter half of the Plan, which will provide a greater understanding in respect of the future development programme for Knowsley Village, this will be a well-rounded and considered policy which is compliant with national policy and guidance.

2.4 Are the criteria to be applied to development of Sustainable Urban Extensions (new policy SUE 2) justified and effective?

New Policy SUE 2 and SUE 2A), 2B) and 2C), including new paragraphs 6A.1 to 6A.31 and Appendix E are considered sound. These policies provide the necessary flexibility to address housing and employment needs as and when they are identified.

2.5 Is it appropriate to require the preparation of master plans and associated Supplementary Planning Documents to guide the development of the three largest sites?

It is vital that, if considered appropriate, the preparation of any masterplan does not lead to a significant delay in respect of these development sites coming forward. There is already a backlog of development to address; the Council does not therefore want to add to this backlog due to a delay in supporting documentation being prepared and adopted.

We would therefore seek clarification as to how this requirement is to operate. In particular, we would contend that any masterplan should be submitted as part of, rather than in advance of, planning applications for the site in order that the application process is not unduly delayed.

Furthermore, as set out in the Green Belt Technical Paper (July 2013), there are no environmental or infrastructure constraints to warrant lower levels of growth or to prevent these sites being delivered. If there is therefore an opportunity to deliver these sites early, and there is a delay in preparing a masterplan, based on the identified need, backlog and demand, the Council should support a future planning application if it is in accordance with relevant policy (as set out in the NPPF).

2.6 Does the subdivision of land at Knowsley Lane, Huyton into specific employment (Use Class B1) and housing allocations (new policy SUE 2a) meet the identified needs? Are the other requirements of policy SUE 2a appropriate?

With part of the site being within our client's ownership, we fully support the future development of this site during the Plan period up to 2028.

We therefore fully support the Inspectors recommendation to refrain from postponing releasing the allocated and safeguarded sites from the Green Belt. This ensures that the Core Strategy proactively meets the current housing land supply shortfall and minimises delay with regard to future development sites.

Our client has active interest in Knowsley Village from known volume housebuilders. As such, it is anticipated that a more detailed response with regard to delivery rates and requirements will be address by a third / interested party.

Technical works to support the future development of the site have been commissioned and are currently being prepared. Furthermore, as set out in the Green Belt Technical Paper (July 2013), there are no environmental or infrastructure constraints to warrant lower levels of growth of to prevent these sites being delivered.

2.7 Is the approach to development of land East of Halewood (new policy SUE 2b) appropriate?

No comments.

2.8 Is the approach to development of land South of Whiston for housing and South of M62 for Use Class B8 employment (new policy SUE 2c) appropriate?

No comments.

Matter 2: Employment Land Target

2.9 Is the revised minimum target for employment land in the KLPCS policy CS4 (modification M070) justified by the evidence?

On behalf of our client, we generally support the aims of the Core Strategy to meet employment needs and to support both established markets and emerging sectors and to encourage mixed use housing and employment schemes.

This amendment to the Core Strategy provides a much more appropriate release of sites by removing them from the Green Belt and allocating them for development as part of the emerging Plan.

Our client owns part of the site at Knowsley Industrial and Business Park and we fully support the future development of this site for employment uses. This is a deliverable and attractive site and, following the additional allocation of residential sites in the area, particularly Knowsley Lane, Huyton and the safeguarded site at Knowsley Village, it is considered that the employment land provision will match the housing land supply provision, in line with paragraph 152 of the NPPF.

Whilst we have not undertaken a detailed review of the revised minimum target for employment land in the KLPCS (Policy CS4) from 183.5 hectares to 164 hectares (a reduction of 19.5 hectares), we continue to support the future identification of Knowsley Industrial and Business Park and part of the site at Knowsley Lane, Huyton for future development during this Plan period up to 2028 and continue to support the Council's assertions, as set out in the Council's Green Belt Technical Report, that the above two sites should be released from the Green Belt. Not only will this assist in the regeneration of Huyton, it will help address the identified employment need. As such, these sites should be available to the market at the early stages of the Plan as they are identified allocations.

Although there has been a reduction in the number of hectares identified for future employment use, in line with the Inspectors Interim Findings, we support the text which states that the 164 hectares is a 'minimum' requirement. Identification of land above this level is necessary to provide flexibility or "headroom" and should be demonstrated in the Core Strategy and future supporting Development Plan Documents.

Furthermore, as long as the Plan is regularly monitored, as set out in paragraph 5.23 (Ref M059) and paragraph 5.33 (Ref M072), (although further clarification on this mechanism is needed) and a sufficient range and choice of sites is available and deliverable, we consider the Core Strategy to be flexible enough to be considered sound.

Notwithstanding this, as several employment sites have been identified for employment use during the Plan period and therefore removed from the Green Belt, it is considered acceptable that, if the sites are not delivered for employment uses during the Plan period, the sites should be brought forward as housing sites (after 'safeguarded' Knowsley Village) if there is a housing need, before a further Green Belt review takes place. As such this should be incorporated into the wording of Policy CS4, CS5 and SUE1 where necessary.

Matter 2: Affordable Housing Provision

2.10 Are the reduction in the proportion of affordable housing sought from sites within the urban area (modification M169), and the flexibility relating to tenure split (modification M175), soundly based on evidence of viability?

2.11 What are the implications of the affordable housing changes for the KLPCS objective of re-balancing the housing market?

In line with M005, we support the decision not to implement CIL in the short term. This provides the Authority with an opportunity to deliver some new development sites, as set out in the KLPCS, before imposing significant levy charges on a scheme.

As long as there is the ability to discuss viability, in line with the modifications proposed to developer contributions (modifications Policy CS27) and the prioritisation of such contributions, then we foresee no reason as to why the plan should be found unsound on this basis.

Matter 2: Sustainable Construction

2.12 Do the modifications proposed to policy CS22 fully take into account the Government's latest thinking on the approach to sustainable construction?

No comments.

Matter 2: Infrastructure and Viability

2.13 Are the modifications to policy CS27, including the prioritisation of developer contributions, consistent with the overall strategy of the plan?

No comments.

Matter 2: Other Modifications

2.14 Are there concerns about the soundness of any of the Main Modifications not addressed above? (Please note: those Modifications listed as 'Additional' in the Council's Schedule (CS08) are outside the scope of the Examination and will not normally be considered at the re-convened hearings).

No comments.