



Knowsley Local Plan: Re-Convened Core Strategy Examination

**Written Statement
Relating to Matter 1
(Questions 1.1-1.6)**

In respect of
Land off Fox's Bank Lane, Whiston
(In Support of Release of Sites from the Green Belt
and Reallocation for Residential Development)

July 2014

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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

This Written Statement has been prepared by Frost Planning Ltd in connection with the Re-Convened Examination Hearing of the Knowsley Local Plan Core Strategy ('KLPCS').

It specifically addresses the Inspector's Questions (1.1-1.6) outlined in the Provisional Hearing Agenda concerning 'New Matters Arising Since 2013 Hearings'.

1.2 References

This Written Statement relies upon and should be read in conjunction with the documents constituting the Examination Library.

2 Response to Questions 1.1-1.6

2.1 Question 1.1:

There are no significant implications to be drawn from the latest Sub-National Population Projections 2012-2027, produced by the Office of National Statistics (ONS), with regards to how the Council has objectively assessed housing needs.

The ONS update shows a decline in the projected rate of increase in Knowsley's population between 2012 and 2037. However, the reliability of such data and its interpretation for plan-making purposes must be treated with a high degree of caution. As part of any 'objective assessment' of housing needs it cannot be taken on face value or considered in isolation.

The reason for the projected decline in the rate of increase is primarily attributable to the ONS expectation of continued 'out-migration' from the borough. The actual natural change (births and deaths) delivers a net increase in population. This is a crucial point to consider because an overarching objective of the Local Plan is to 'reverse' out-migration for economic and social reasons, as outlined below.

It is well documented that Knowsley has witnessed a decline in manufacturing and an increase in unemployment over the past 40 years. It is also known that its housing stock is of relatively poor quality compared to other areas of the North West. Unsurprisingly, this has manifested in significant out-migration from the borough. It has not been helped by the lack of a positively prepared and economically focussed planning policy framework which may have stemmed population leakage through the provision of suitable sites for investment and housing in the right locations. However, since the publication of the NPPF the goalposts have changed. Local Plans are now required to meet the 'full, objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing in the housing market area'. Any objective assessment of such needs must take into account the socio-economic problems associated with out-migration and the need to correct this through the planning policy framework.

Regrettably, the ONS update does not take into account the impact of the new NPPF or national or local policies which may be applied in the future, or economic changes which might influence population change in the borough. In effect, the ONS update simply draws from past trends and blindly assumes that the out-migration trend will continue. However, there is no reason why it should. A more positive response and objective assessment of housing need is required which pays regard to the potential shift in the borough's economic and social fortunes arising from the Local Plan which can reverse this population decline.

As paragraph 5.20A of the KLPCS (Modifications) states: *"A key theme running through the Core Strategy is the need to rebalance the housing market in Knowsley in order to meet the needs of local people and address projected out migration. This will include widening the choice of market sector housing across the Borough whilst also helping to meet established needs for affordable housing."* Identifying a sufficiently high housing requirement, facilitated through the release of Green Belt land, is clearly vital to achieving this objective.

In addition, a stated Strategic Objective of the Local Plan is: *"To encourage and maintain sustainable economic and employment growth in Knowsley, complementary to that within the wider Liverpool City Region, by accommodating employment related development, improving skills within the workforce, and promoting enterprise, entrepreneurship and innovation."* Identifying a sufficiently high housing requirement, facilitated through the release of Green Belt land to grow the borough's workforce and support new economic investment, is clearly vital to achieving this objective.

Our views are therefore aligned with the Council's as outlined in their 'Sub-National Population Projections Update' (June 2014). We would also point out that in our experience long-term population projections are in reality often wide of the mark.

To conclude, the newly published population projections should not have any downward pressure on the objectively assessed need for housing as set out in the emerging Local Plan. Consequently, they should have no impact on the demonstrable need to release the SUE sites immediately.

2.2 Question 1.2

Response – no comment.

2.3 Question 1.3

Response – no comment.

2.4 Question 1.4

Response – no comment.

2.5 Question 1.5

Response – no comment.

2.6 Question 1.6

Response – no comment.

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