

**KNOWSLEY LOCAL PLAN – CORE STRATEGY
EXAMINATION**

EX 41 RECOVERED EXAMINATION HEARINGS

ON BEHALF OF SAVE KNOWSLEY VILLAGE GREEN BELT GROUP

AGENT MIDDLETON SOLICITORS

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1.0 Question 4.1 Having regard to emerging matters including revisions to PPG relating to Green Belt protection, new household projections, evidence of increased densities on certain sites, and so on, and in the light of recent substantial public opposition, is the proposal to safeguard land at Knowsley Village for housing development beyond the plan period necessary and does it satisfy the exceptional circumstances test of national policy?

1.1 The Save our Knowsley Green Belt Group responds to the key issues identified by the Inspector under the respective headings identified below.

Revision to PPG relating to Green Belt Protection

1.2 On 6 October 2014, The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) amended its online Planning Practice Policy Guidance (NPPG) on housing and economic land availability assessment to draw attention to existing policy on the Green Belt and other constraints in setting housing levels in Local Plans. The guidance was issued in a DCLG Press release entitled, "Councils must protect our precious Green Belt Land". In a ministerial statement, the then Secretary of State for DCLG emphasised that, *"when planning for new buildings, protecting our precious Green Belt must be paramount. Local people don't want to lose their countryside to urban sprawl, or see the vital green lungs around their towns and cities lost to unnecessary development. Today's guidance will ensure councils can meet their housing needs by prioritising brownfield sites, and fortify the green belt in their area."*

1.3 NPPG reminds LPAs that the National Planning Policy Framework (The Framework) should be read as a whole and emphasises that *need* is not the only factor to consider when drawing up Local Plans. Paragraph 044 of NPPG states that, *"The Framework is clear that local planning authorities should through their Local Plans, meet objectively assessed needs unless any adverse effects of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole."*

1.4 The Knowsley Local Plan: Core Strategy Proposed Modifications September 2014 (CS09A), Policy SUE1: Sustainable Urban Extensions and Safeguarded Land, states

that Land at Knowsley Village has been removed from the Green Belt as “safeguarded land” for development, not at the present time, but after 2028 (beyond the plan period). The subtext to the policy in Paragraph 6A.6 explains that, *“The Council has identified sufficient locations to cater for current development requirements identified by the evidence base including “headroom” to allow a degree of flexibility subject to monitoring up to 2028. It also identifies a “safeguarded location” which is likely to be required for development after that date.”*

- 1.5** The rationale of Policy SUE1 does not satisfy The Framework and NPPG requirement to, meet *“objectively assessed needs”* because the LPA acknowledges that the site is not needed within this Plan period. Even if the site was necessary to meet housing need, the revision to NPPG referred to above clarifies that housing need alone is not sufficient to justify harm to the Green Belt.
- 1.6** Policy SUE1.2 states that *“This site is not allocated for development at the present time as it is proposed that development in this location **will** take place after 2028”*. Expressed in these terms the site could reasonably be described as an “outline allocation” for the next plan. The approach taken is inappropriate and contrary to national planning policy guidance. In order to robustly assess the amount of land required beyond this plan period, the Council would need to take into account a variety of social and economic factors, which cannot be accurately assessed at the current time. Furthermore, the implications of emerging local plans within neighbouring districts would need to be considered along with the dynamics of housing and employment markets which will change over the next 15 to 20 years.
- 1.7** In short, the necessary evidence base to establish whether this site is “likely” to be required for the subsequent plan period does not yet exist. Therefore, the proposal to remove the site from the protective Green Belt status is not justified.
- 1.8** The Framework states in Paragraph 85 that LPAs should, “where necessary, identify in their plans areas of ‘safeguarded land’ between the urban area and the Green Belt, in order to meet longer term development needs stretching well beyond the plan period.” The LPA’s decision to remove the Land at Knowsley Village does not

accord with Paragraph 85 because the 'development need' for this land is hypothetical rather than evidence based at this stage. In addition, national policy suggests that safeguarded land be located between the urban area and the Green Belt. Paragraph 84 of the Framework draws a distinction between urban areas and towns and villages in-set in the Green Belt. The Spatial Strategy for Knowsley Policy CS1 refers to Knowsley Village as a "rural village". Thus, Knowsley Village is not an urban area abutting the Green Belt. It is a village surrounded by Green Belt land and therefore does not meet the criteria set by national policy for safeguarded land. The Local Planning Authority's assessment of the site is that it is not in a sustainable location (reference TRO3 – Green Belt Technical Report, KGBS6). By definition it is therefore not a Sustainable Urban Extension, and for this reason the policy is unsound and unjustified.

New Household Projections

- 1.9** We have considered the latest household projection data published in document AD60 – Sub-National Household Projections released by the DCLG dated 27 February 2015.
- 1.10** In summary it identifies that in the past 21 years (1991- 2012), the number of households in Knowsley increased by 4,437 representing an annual average increase of 211 households.
- 1.11** In the next 25 years (2012 to 2037), the number of households is predicted to increase by a further 5,836 households representing an annual increase of 233 households per annum. Over the plan period the rate of household formation is predicted to be at a higher rate of 255 households per annum (4084÷16).
- 1.12** Figures 6a and Figure 7a (Document AD60) identify that this growth is accounted for by an increase in the number of single person households particularly in the 65-85+age range. Conversely, the number persons living in households where the age of the head of household is 29 years of age or less and or between 30-64 years of age is falling. The number of households starting out or bringing up families is

predicted to fall during and beyond the plan period. This has implications with regard to future housing provision.

- 1.13** In terms of housing need, the priority up to 2028 and beyond should be to cater for the needs of an ageing population typically living in single person households. Schemes which satisfy this need are likely to include high density, multi- storey, sheltered or extra care housing accommodation in highly sustainable locations within easy walking distance of local services and in close proximity to public transport links.
- 1.14** The safeguarded land at Knowsley Village, comprising some 58 hectares, does not meet the required profile for the needs of an aging population. It is identified as suitable for low density, executive family housing (reference TRO7 Sustainable Urban Extensions), and is not in a sustainable location (reference TR03 – Green Belt Technical Report) and paragraphs 1.30 to 1.35 of this statement.
- 1.15** The latest household projections are a material consideration and identify that providing suitable housing for a growing ageing population is one of the key priorities for the emerging Local Plan up until 2028, and for the period beyond to 2037. In accordance with NPPG paragraph 044 “need” is not the only factor to consider when drawing up Local Plans. Nevertheless, on any reasonable assessment the safeguarded site is neither suitable nor appropriate to address projected housing needs and priorities beyond the plan period. Given that the Local Planning Authority has indicated that it has identified sufficient locations for development including headroom the removal of Green Belt status in this location is not justified.

Increased Densities

- 1.16** We have read documents TRO1A and TROB Draft Technical Report Planning for Housing Growth in Knowsley. These seem to suggest additional housing capacity can be identified from a number of sources. These include sustainable sites to be disposed of from the Council’s regular review of its own land assets as a major landowner. In addition, further capacity can be achieved by increasing the density of development in sustainable locations including Housing Action Areas at Tower Hill

and North Huyton estimated to provide a combined 2,600 units and a combined 850 additional units respectively. The aforementioned Housing Action Areas were identified in the adopted UDP when the emphasis was to minimise dwelling numbers in a period of housing restraint.

- 1.17** TRO1B identifies that the 2012 SHLAA takes a prudent view with regard to housing density based on an average yield of 33.5 dwellings per hectare and on housing delivery, discounting supply by 20% as part of a risk assessment (reference paragraphs 6.1.3 and 6.1.4).
- 1.18** Capacity plus headroom to meet current development needs is catered for by the allocations in the Plan, with additional scope to increase density in sustainable regeneration opportunity sites. These schemes could be prejudiced by safeguarding Green Belt land at Knowsley Village which developers may hold out for, leaving current allocations unfulfilled (as has occurred in the replacement UDP).

Substantial Public Opposition

- 1.19** Paragraph 155 of the Framework identifies that in the preparation of local plans *“Early and meaningful engagement with neighbourhoods, local organisations and businesses is essential. A wide section of the community should be proactively engaged so that Local Plans as far as possible reflect collective vision and a set of agreed priorities for the sustainable development of the area ”.*
- 1.20** The Save Knowsley Green Belt Group (SKGBG) was established in the autumn of 2014 when local residents first became aware of the proposal to safeguard land adjacent to Knowsley Village. SKGBG was established to represent local residents wishing to oppose and make representations against the removal of land from the Green Belt and the proposal to earmark the site for future development after 2028.
- 1.21** SKGBG has a formal constitution and a developing structure with appointed officers including a Chairman, Ian McKenzie, Vice Chair, Publicity Officer, Treasurer, Assistant Treasurer, Environment Spokesperson, Researcher and officers without portfolio. It has approximately 1700 supporters and is in the process of developing a formal

membership system. SKGBG organised two public meetings in 2014 each attended by 300-350+ local residents. Its Chairman has been recently elected to Knowsley Town Council as an independent member standing on the single issue of saving the Green Belt around the Village.

- 1.22** There have been approximately 1200 individual objections formally registered with the LPA.
- 1.23** The strength of local opposition to the removal of land from the Green Belt and safeguarding some 58 hectares for future development is considerable. It has been justified in the local community's view and in the setting of the tests to be applied in accordance with paragraph 182 of the Framework. Public consultation and due consideration of representations received is a material consideration in the examination process. The decision to re-open the Examination is therefore welcomed.

Safeguarding land at Knowsley Village beyond the plan period- is it necessary?

- 1.23** There are a number of reasons why it is not necessary to safeguard land in this location beyond the plan period. These are:
1. It should not be "safeguarded" because in accordance with paragraph 85 of the Framework it is not land between the urban area and the Green Belt, and therefore does not meet the relevant criterion.
 2. It is not necessary to safeguard land in this location for development beyond the plan period, because the LPA has no means to objectively assess need in order to justify development beyond the plan period.
 3. It is not necessary to safeguard land in this location as in fourteen years' time planning priorities may be very different from today. For example, the release of land from the Green Belt is a drastic departure from the housing and restraint policies operated by all Merseyside LPAs as recently as 2010. The policy emphasis at that time was focussed on minimising the amount of allocated land for housing, in order that development would focus on the regeneration of housing market renewal areas. In the future, Knowsley may

be part of a wider Liverpool City Region, governed by a Mayor. The planning priorities of a wider regional area cannot be predicted at this stage.

4. It is not necessary to safeguard land in this location as it is not part of any objectively assessed need. Any decision to safeguard land for development should be based on a site-by-site analysis, considering all options, greenfield and brownfield, at the time.
5. It is not necessary to safeguard land in this location as it is unsound and undermines other plan objectives. These are identified as follows:
 - a. Core Strategy Objective 5: Quality of Place - to protect historically important features and enhancing the character, quality and diversity of Knowsley's built environment, including rural areas and villages (Conservation Village).
 - b. Core Strategy Objective 6 : Sustainable Transport - to ensure new development in Knowsley encourages a reduction in the overall need to travel, and prioritises sustainable transport such as walking, cycling and public transport
 - c. Core Strategy Objective 8: Green Infrastructure and Rural Areas - to support and strengthen the role of Knowsley's Green Infrastructure (in rural and urban areas), promote biodiversity, and maintain the character of rural settlements including Cronton, Tarbock and Knowsley Village (Local Wildlife and Geological Site 40).
 - d. Core Strategy Proposed Modifications (CS09A), paragraph 6.44 identifies the need to protect and enhance environmental and historic assets, such as the 46 Listed Buildings (including the Grade I St. Marys Church), the historic Knowsley Hall and Knowsley Park (Grade II* listed), and the 3 Conservation Areas which includes Knowsley Village.
 - e. Core Strategy Proposed Modifications (CS09A), paragraph 6.45, recognises the historic and recreational significance and

contribution of Knowsley Hall Estate and Knowsley Safari Park at a local and sub-regional level and ensure appropriate support for complementary development of an appropriate scale at this location.

Satisfying exceptional circumstances policy test

- 1.24** As referred to previously, NPPG identifies that Green Belt boundaries should only be changed in exceptional circumstances, and through the preparation or review of the Local Plan. Housing need alone does not justify harm to the Green Belt.
- 1.25** Furthermore, NPPG states that “need” should be considered merely as the first stage in drawing up a Local Plan and not as the key issue. The second stage is a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment, which takes account of constraints, such as inter alia;
- I. Green Belt Designation;
 - II. Site of nature Conservation Interest;
 - III. Designated and Non- Designated heritage assets;
- 1.26** The site is in Green Belt. Knowsley Village is a Conservation Village. Part of the Safeguarded land is designated as a Local Wildlife and Geological Site. The safeguarded land is part of a buffer zone, which maintains the historic separation of the “service village” and a significant historic asset defined by the estate wall of Grade II Knowsley Hall, Registered Historic Park and Garden (List entry 1000997). Document TR07 (page 54) refers to a density of 25 dwellings per hectare allowing master planning minimising the adverse impact on historic assets. The adverse impact on the historic asset is acknowledged.
- 1.27** Paragraph 85 of the Framework identifies that Local Planning Authorities should not include land in the Green Belt, which is unnecessary to keep permanently open. The “openness” of land between Ormskirk Road/Home Farm Road and the boundary wall of Knowsley Hall Estate has an important function. It maintains the historic separation between the Estate and the neighbouring Village settlement. Knowsley

Village is a distinct settlement in the context of the Borough of Knowsley. It is a rural village with a historic core (containing a Conservation Area) and its separation from the Estate has important historic significance. The Ormskirk Road and Home Farm Road provide a much stronger boundary to the Green Belt than the Estate wall which is a less significant physical feature.

- 1.27** It would appear that the Local Planning Authority has not had due regard to the main purposes of the Green Belt as set out in the Framework (Paragraph 80). One of the main purposes of the Green Belt is to prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another (reference NPPG paragraph 80). Having regard to the Spatial Plan in which appears on page 38A of document CS09a, it is apparent that the removal of this land from the Green Belt contributes to an almost total coalescence of all the settlements along the M57 corridor.
- 1.28** The LPA has given reasonable consideration to the relevant constraints in identifying the site as safeguarded land but, in the absence of need, has not identified the exceptional circumstances justifying removal of the site from the Green Belt.
- 1.29** For the above reasons, removing the site from the Green Belt for designation as safeguarded land for development after 2028 has not been justified which is one the four key tests to be applied (reference The Framework, paragraph 182).

Other Material Considerations

Sustainable Location

- 1.30** The policies identified in Chapter 6 (Document CS09a) for Prescot, Whiston, Cronton and Knowsley Village identify that there is a specific need to increase access to local services and amenities and local transport links, specifically buses, in all these locations at the current time.
- 1.31** As such, land at Knowsley Village performs poorly with regard to “sustainability”. It is outside of the catchment of the existing retail provision within Knowsley Village. There is no railway station in the Village and the site is not located on the primary road network (reference TRO3 – Green Belt Technical Report, KGBS6).

- 1.32** Knowsley Village lacks the following essential services and amenities- hospital, dentist, leisure centre, secondary school, college and library. There are just two primary schools in the village, which both have an intake of only one class per year.
- 1.33** While we accept that the Local Planning Authority has made a decision regarding sustainability and reached the conclusion that this site compares favourably compared with other Green Belt sites, we would argue that it is unnecessary and premature to remove Green Belt protection from this site within this plan period.
- 1.34** The sustainability of this site should be considered in a site-by-site analysis, which would form part of the evidence base of the next Local Plan. It is likely that there will be other sites, particularly brownfield, which will emerge as opportunities for development and compare more favourably than this site in terms of sustainability.
- 1.35** The release now from Green Belt, for prospective development post 2028, has the potential to jeopardise future regeneration of forthcoming brownfield development located in sustainable areas.

Written Representations – Core Strategy Proposed Modifications.

- 1.36** In addition to the above responses, the Inspector is respectfully invited to consider the representation submitted in writing by Middleton Solicitors on behalf of SKGBG dated 14 November 2014 (Representations Form – Knowsley Local Plan – Core Strategy Proposed Modifications – Consultation under reference ID No 570).