

**KNOWSLEY LOCAL PLAN  
CORE STRATEGY EXAMINATION**

**Matter 3: Housing Provision**

**Smiths Gore on behalf of  
The Knowsley Estate  
(ID ref 72)**

**October 2013**

## **Knowsley Local Plan Core Strategy – 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 minor changes published in July 2013. 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 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 under 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 3: Housing Provision**

*Issue 1: Whether the proposed amount of housing development meets the objectively assessed needs of the borough.*

*Issue 2: Whether the broad distribution of housing development across the borough is consistent with the spatial strategy and the evidence base.*

*Issue 3: Whether the KLPS is sufficiently clear, effective and robust to ensure timely delivery of the proposed amount of housing development.*

### **Issue 1**

1. Proposed Policy CS 3 requires provision to be made for 8,100 new dwellings to be delivered in Knowsley across the plan period of 2010 to 2028. The policy further advises this should be at an annual average rate of 450. The 450 dwelling per annum requirement reflects the housing delivery rate envisaged in the North West Regional Spatial Strategy to 2021. The Regional Strategy (RS) has now been revoked (20 May 2013). There are questions raised by others regarding the assessment of the housing requirement, indicating that the 450 dwellings per annum is too low. Our original representation does not comment on this aspect but is concerned with opportunity for the plan to deliver housing at the rate envisaged. If the Inspector considers that the annual delivery rate of 450 indicated in the policy is too low and does not fully reflect the objectively assessed housing needs of the borough then our concerns regarding the plan and its ability to deliver the housing quantum required are heightened.
2. It should however be noted that the 450 dpa figure identified by the Council for the new plan period to 2028 does not account for the RS shortfall (Paragraph 7.4.4 of the Housing Technical Paper July 2013 refers). Furthermore the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) of September 2010 by David Coultie Associates indicates a potential delivery of 550 homes per annum will still leave a significant shortfall against housing need. The SHMA further advises that the 2010 SHMA and Housing Needs Study data will remain valid until 2012 at which stage it will need to be fully updated as required in Guidance.
3. The borough of Knowsley has fallen short of its housing delivery target of 450 dpa as required in past adopted delivery rates set in the North West Regional Strategy (RS) since 2003 (Planning for Housing Growth in Knowsley Technical Report – July 2013 para 3.2.4 refers). There is therefore a shortfall of housing delivery that should be made up and a

record of persistent under delivery of housing. Both of these factors must be taken into account in housing supply.

4. The shortfall against the RS since 2003/4 to 2012/13 is identified in the Council's Housing Technical Paper at table 7.1 as 2,610 within the Knowsley housing market area. The majority of relevant planning appeal decisions since publication of the NPPF in 2012 have supported the 'Sedgefield' approach whereby shortfalls are addressed in the first five years.
  
5. The Government's web-based draft National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) was published for testing and comment in late August 2013. Whilst accepting the draft nature of the guidance at this stage, we note that the section 'Assessment of Land Availability' endorses the Sedgefield approach by stating that:  
  
*"Local Planning Authorities should aim to deal with any under-supply within the first five years of the plan period where possible. Where this cannot be met in the first five years, Local Planning Authorities will need to work with neighbouring authorities under the duty to co-operate."*
  
6. Added to the Council's identified housing requirement must be the Government's requirement for a further 20% provision (moved forward from later in the plan period) given that there has been a history of persistent under delivery of housing, to ensure that there is a realistic prospect of achieving the planned supply and to ensure choice and competition in the market for land. This brings the first five year housing requirement for the plan to 2,700 dwellings (450 dpa x 5 years = 2,250 + 20% = 2,700 dwellings). Added to this must be the housing shortfall at 2,610 dwellings. The first five years of the plan period must therefore accommodate provision for **5,310 dwellings** (2,700 dwellings as a five year land supply plus 20% and the historic shortfall).
  
7. The Council considers (at table 5.7 of the Housing Technical report) that it has a supply in the first five years of the plan period for 3,017 dwellings as follows:

Extant planning permissions	1,722 dwellings
Existing site allocations	354 dwellings
SHLAA sites	<u>942 dwellings</u>
	3,017 dwellings

8. This indicates that **the Core Strategy should at the very least be making new allocations to accommodate 2,293 homes** (5,310 minus 3,017) for the first 5 years of the plan.
9. The need to provide for homes is considered as exceptional circumstances that require a review of existing Green Belt boundaries. The evidence base provided by the Council has identified land that can be removed from the Green Belt to accommodate housing and employment needs through its Green Belt Technical Report July 2013. This identifies capacity for 3,258 - 3,332 dwellings within the 'reserve sites' and a further 1,093 in a 'safeguarded site'. There is therefore **identified capacity for up to 4,425 dwellings in the borough area** on newly allocated sites outside the existing urban area (which the Council has identified as suitable Green Belt releases in the Green Belt Technical Report) . The Council will require all of these allocations to meet its housing need across the plan period to 2028 (8,100 + 2,610 shortfall = 10,701 requirement - 5,989 existing capacity = 4,721 dwellings to allocate, shortfall in the current plan of 296 dwellings).
10. The housing shortfall should be accommodated in the first five years of the plan period and there is no clear reason why land cannot be identified to meet this requirement.
11. Thus the plan should therefore make provision for the delivery of *at least* 2,295 dwellings on *newly identified sites* in the first five years of the plan period.
12. In relation to the Inspector's question 3.5 under Issue 1 Matter 3 the Inspector raises apposite questions regarding the overall housing target and whether the figure of 8,100 dwellings across the plan period is truly reflective of the housing need and if it is not, are there any special environmental or infrastructure issues that would justify a lower figure. Whilst the figure is to be debated at the hearings what is clear, as set out in our statement under Matter 2, is that to support the delivery of 8,100 dwellings and to support a five year land supply the plan needs to bring forward allocations early in the plan period.
13. Suitable and achievable sites have been identified in the plan area through the Council's Green Belt Technical Report. The Council's Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) identifies at paragraph 5.8.2. that across three scenarios tested to deliver 8,100 homes in the plan area there were no infrastructure pressures identified that could be considered to be critical to the delivery of the plan. The IDP goes on to state, "Many

infrastructure standards can be addressed through the planning applications process, including enabling and essential infrastructure provision such as utilities connections, highways and transport connections and access for emerging services and waste management.”

14. Therefore there are no infrastructure or environmental constraints to prevent the sites currently identified through the Green Belt Technical Report July 2013 from coming forward early in the plan period. Later stages of the plan may have to be reconsidered if the target figure of 8,100 dwellings is found to be too low. This may comprise the allocation of a new site or sites within the borough or via cooperation with neighbouring authorities to accommodate some of Knowsley’s housing need. However, the plan can achieve the required certainty to provide housing sites to meet the first five years and to accommodate a historic shortfall of delivery and there are no environmental or infrastructure constraints to warrant lower levels of growth.

15. As such the first paragraph of Policy CS3 is unsound as it fails to support the required delivery of housing and is not therefore effective and is not consistent with national policy at NPPF which requires that local authorities through their plan-making should aim to boost significantly the supply of housing.

16. In order to ensure that the plan is sound the following rewording to the first paragraph of Policy CS 3 is proposed

*“Provision will be made for at least 8,100 new dwellings to be delivered in Knowsley between 2010 and 2028, together with provision for 2,610 dwellings representing the shortfall from the previous plan period ~~at an average of 450 dwellings per annum.~~ This is a minimum net figure, accounting for conversions, changes of use to and from residential use and clearance of dwellings via demolition.*

## **Issue 2**

17. In relation to Issue 2 on behalf of our client we consider the broad distribution of housing development across the borough is consistent with the spatial strategy and the evidence base.

## **Issue 3**

18. In relation to issue 3 on behalf of our client we consider the plan is insufficiently clear, effective and robust to ensure timely delivery of the proposed amount of housing development.

19. We consider the five year housing land supply to be incorrectly calculated and significantly too low, and there are recognised doubts regarding the consideration and evaluation of objectively assessed housing needs which suggests the housing requirement should be higher. However, even if the plan's housing targets as currently stated were to be found sound the plan would still fail to deliver housing in a timely manner.
20. Whilst the housing market is in a depressed state, local authorities must ensure that they provide to the market a range and choice of housing sites to stimulate the market, boost the economy and reactivate regeneration schemes. In the case of Knowsley this will mean releasing land from the Green Belt early in the plan period.
21. On behalf of our client we firmly believe that the Core Strategy should identify Green Belt land release by allocation in the Core Strategy both to support required housing delivery and support regeneration objectives for the area. The plan is currently unsound in this regard as it is not positively prepared or effective in providing for housing needs, nor is it consistent with National Planning Policy in boosting significantly housing supply.
22. In order to ensure that the plan is sound the following rewording to Policy CS 3 is proposed:

*"3. The availability of land for housing development will be monitored subject to phased release to ensure that a five year supply of deliverable sites is maintained at all times and in accordance with. ~~This will support the efficient use of available land and protect of urban regeneration priorities, as outlined in Policy CS 1 'Spatial Strategy for Knowsley' and Policy CS 2 'Development Principles'. Green Belt land for new residential development will only be released in line with the criteria set out in Policy CS 5 'Green Belt'.~~*

Consequent changes to the supporting text to Policy CS3 will also be required.