Ashfield District Council Local Plan Examination

Matters, Issues and Questions identified by the Inspectors

Response from Teversal, Stanton Hill and Skegby Neighbourhood Forum (Statutory Consultee)

Black type – Inspectors questions

Yellow highlighted – TSS responses to Inspectors questions

Red italics – additional Inspectors questions

Red type – TSS answers to additional questions

Matter 2 – Meeting Ashfield's Housing Needs

Issue 1

Whether the Local Plan has been positively prepared and whether it is justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to meeting housing needs.

Relevant policies – S1, S7, H2, H2a, H3, H4, H5, H6, H7, H8

Questions

2.1 Has the calculation of Local Housing Need (LHN) (446 dwellings per annum) been undertaken correctly?

2.2 Has the correct median workplace-based affordability ratio been used to undertake the LHN calculation having regard to the date of submission of the Plan?

2.3 Are there any exceptional circumstances which justify an alternative approach to using the standard method? If so, what are they, and what should the housing requirement be?

2.4 Is the plan positively prepared in light of the under-identification of homes over the full Plan period compared with the requirement under the standard method (6,825 compared to the LHN of 7,582)?

2.5 The plan identified a shortfall in housing allocations over the full plan period but nonetheless proposes the release of a number of sites from the Green Belt. Is this approach consistent with paragraph 143(e) of the Framework which indicates that when defining Green Belt boundaries, plans should be able to demonstrate that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the plan period?

2.6 How has the SA considered the under-allocation of housing compared to the housing requirement over the full plan period?

2.7 Do the Council's latest Housing Delivery Test results have implications for the housing delivery and trajectory expectations in the submitted plan?

2.7.1 Would the proposed additional sites put forward by the Council provide sufficient capacity to address the housing shortfall over the plan period?

Issue 2

Whether the plan will deliver an appropriate mix of housing to meet the various housing needs over the plan period and whether these are justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

2.8 How does the need for affordable housing compare to the housing requirement? Based on the thresholds and requirements in Policy H3, will affordable housing needs be met?

2.9 What is the need for specialist forms of accommodation (e.g. Older persons housing, housing people with disabilities, student accommodation)? How does the submitted plan seek to address these needs?

The TSS NP commissioned a Housing Needs Assessment during the development of the NP (2016). A key finding from the assessment was the need for housing for older people in the TSS NP area.

2.10 Are the requirements for affordable housing in Policy H3, including the proposed tenure splits justified? Are the affordable housing percentages justified? Will they be viable?

2.11 Are the requirements in Policy H4(1) justified?

2.12 What is the need for custom and self-build housing in the District? How will this be met over the plan period?

2.13 Are the requirements of Policy H5 justified? What is the evidence for the thresholds set out in the Policy?

2.14 Is Policy H5(1)(b) sufficiently clear to developers, decision-makers and local communities? Is it justified?

2.15 Does Policy H6 accord with paragraph 62 of the Framework in respect of those who wish to commission or build their own homes?

2.16 Does Policy H6 reflect the housing mix that was subject to viability testing in the Whole Plan Viability Assessment (SEV.38)? Why is the recommended housing mix not included within the text of Policy H6?

2.17 Are the housing density requirements in Policy H7 justified? Are they evidence-based?

2.18 Is the wording of Policy H7 sufficient clear as to whether the density requirements are gross or net? Is Policy H7 sufficiently flexible to deal with circumstances where the minimum densities set out may not be appropriate for particular site-based reasons?

2.19 Is Policy H8 sufficiently clear to decision-makers, developers and local communities where Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) will be permitted?

2.20 Taking each in turn, are the criteria in Policy H8(2) justified?

Matter 3 – The Spatial Strategy and the distribution of development

Issue

Whether the Spatial Strategy and the distribution of development are justified, and can be accommodated without releasing land from the Green Belt? If not, do exceptional circumstances exist that would justify altering the Green Belt boundary?

Relevant policies – S1, S4, S7, EV1

Questions

3.1 Is the spatial distribution of development across the borough justified and what factors influenced the Spatial Strategy, for example physical and environmental constraints and the capacity to accommodate development?

No

3.1.1 What effect would the proposed additional sites have on the distribution of new housing development across the plan area?

Beck Lane South.

There are currently 657 homes proposed via four sites that make up the Beck Lane development site. They are Rear of Beck Lane, East Beck Lane, 113–139 Beck Lane and Land at Beck Lane and have permissions for 23, 212,100 and 322 homes respectively. Each was approved at different times with little regard for social infrastructure. The additional site called Beck Lane South will add 106 homes totalling giving a new total of 763 homes at Beck Lane. The cumulative effect on infrastructure by this incremental growth including this new allocation should be properly assessed.

The proposed allocation to the rear of Kings Mill Hospital (264) just a couple of hundred metres away should be included in this cumulative impact on infrastructure. It takes proposed housing in this Beck Lane area to 921.

The Forum acknowledges that strategically Beck Lane is a location that could support development of the scale proposed. However, the effect of the incremental way it is being planned, with this additional site being added, means that it is coming forward unsustainably by adding huge pressures to the already stretched local community infrastructure. Its planning has been short sighted and represents a lost opportunity to deliver something worthwhile, something beneficial to the current local community and a place where the future a future community could thrive.

Dawgates Lane

The additional site at Dawgates Lane site was granted outline permission for 90 homes in March 2025 subject to conditions and a S106 agreement. The site is surrounded by countryside and detached from the settlement boundary of Skegby. It is accessed via single track country lanes with tight corners and awkward junctions in each direction.

Despite having planning permission, the Forum would urge the Inspectors to not allocate the site. To do so would be to allocate a site on which development is contrary to other policies in the draft local plan (and the TSS Neighbourhood Plan), including mainly but not exclusively, EV2 relating to development in the countryside, SD10 relating to transport infrastructure and SD13 relating to provision and protection of community infrastructure. The proposed development of the site was opposed by Planning Officers and the Highway Authority for very clear reasons relating to harm to the objectives of countryside protection and highway safety policies.

In the event of due process not being completed to allow a lawful start and implementation of the planning permission, the allocation of this site in the Local Plan would be a compelling reason to grant a new permission despite it being contrary to so many of the Plan's policies. The wider effect of such an allocation would be to encourage other countryside sites with poor access and contrary to policy to come forward, further undermine the distribution of

new housing development in the Plan and legitimately bring into question the purpose of the Plan.

3.1.2 Is the Spatial Strategy effective having regard to the scale and location of the proposed additional sites?

Beck Lane South.

Having five allocated sites which work together as one delivering 763 homes, makes a mockery of the council's spatial strategy of dispersal and only having sites that deliver fewer than 500 homes. There is a very clear concentration of sites at Beck Lane made greater by the proposed additional site. The effect is that the Beck Lane site delivers over 50% more homes than the strategy seeks to limit sites to. Even if only the sites west of Beck Lane are added together, the additional site creates a Beck Lane site of 551 homes.

In practice it allows for a major new housing site to be developed without strategic or master planning which would have looked holistically at the needs of this new community including local shops and health care.

Dawgates Lane

The wider effect of such an allocation would be to encourage other countryside sites contrary to policy to come forward, further undermining the distribution of new housing development in the Plan and legitimately bring into question the purpose of the Plan.

3.2 What alternative options for the spatial strategy were considered?

The options appraisal outlines the different options for development. Where the option includes dispersed development (as applied in the proposed allocations in TSS and Huthwaite) it will result in the impacts as described in the 'commentary' of the appraisal. Yet other options would have less impact on health, education, climate change, access to employment and would have better transport infrastructure including road network, public transport etc.

The dispersed development also increases the percentage of people living in the north by 4.7%. The north is already the most populated area with 61.1% of the population of Ashfield living there. Yet the northwest (TSS and Huthwaite) has poor access to critical services and infrastructure in the district, and apart from education there are no provisions being put in place to improve the situation. This is outlined in the Infrastructure Development Plan 2024 (released yesterday and circulated by the Programme Officer). It is of concern that such a document was released at such a late stage in this process, without it being part of the consultation. Basically, the IDP appears to release ADC of any duty to provide sites for health and community services, emergency services, leisure services and green space. This issue is of significant concern as it appears to potentially negate the Councils 'duty of care' to its communities.

3.3 Why was the submitted approach to disperse development chosen and is it an appropriate strategy having regard to reasonable alternatives?

It is unclear as to why the dispersed development approach was chosen. As identified in the options appraisal there are concerning negative impacts to health, education, climate change, lesser local employment opportunities, and poor public transport and infrastructure. The TSS area includes part of a ward which is one of the most deprived in the country and has some of the worst health indices – with high (and increasing) mortality and morbidity.

The LP will add a further 1681 (this number is achieved by counting all the proposed allocations – with and without planning permission as recorded in Policy H1 (Page 151-2)it is difficult to present accurate figures as to the TSS area (and 801 to Huthwaite).

Development should be concentrated in the south of the district and/or close to Sutton Parkway/Kirkby Stations where there is suitable land with good transport infrastructure, access to public transport, for example: trains, buses and much closer to the Nottingham tram network, and critical (and non-critical) infrastructure. Some of the suitable land may be in Green Belt. However, Green Belt, whilst acknowledged as serving a clearly stated planning purpose, is an artificial construct. The walkable distance to a train station with a regular service the short distance into the city of Nottingham and its tram connections to all the facilities and services expected of a major city is an indisputable physical fact. The absence of similar critical infrastructure within other areas of the District such as the TSS and Huthwaite areas and the inability of the plan to deliver them, creates the exceptional circumstances to justify such release from the Green Belt. It is the Forum's position, supported by some of the Council's own evidence base, that the plan is currently not delivering sustainable development.

Employment land development at Junction 27 (M1) has been identified principally for logistics and distribution, thus creating much needed employment opportunities. Junction 27 is close to the south of the district and much closer to Kirkby, Annersley and Selston than the north of the district. This will mean that those needing employment living the north will be disadvantaged due to accessibility and the cost of covering travel. Dispersed development will result in greater car use (as referenced in the options appraisal), thus increasing harmful emissions.

Dispersed development places more strain on local services and infrastructure without access to developer contributions. Development concentrated a smaller number of larger sites provides the opportunity to incorporate the provision of new facilities such as health centres and schools and moves the cost, at least in part, to the developer. In the case of the Neighbourhood Area its health centre has already failed and had to be rescued but still struggles to meet patient demand. Stanton Hill is one of the most deprived places in the Country with a range of health and other issues. This places further strain on health provision.

Dispersed development means that developer contributions from smaller sites simply goes into a larger pot to be dispersed across a larger area and at risk of not being spent on community infrastructure that serves the residents of the new developments. This appears to be the case in the new developments on Beck Lane, Skegby and at Brierley Park, Stanton Hill.

Dispersed development places greater strain on the surrounding road network. On paper the road network through the TSS Neighbourhood Plan Area seems adequate but on the ground the amount of traffic greatly exceeds that expected on roads of a similar designation, with many roads being constrained with narrow roads by buildings (mainly housing) on both sides, and rural lanes which are hilly, single tracked with passing places. Surveys by the Forum during the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan revealed that, in 2015, some roads were at capacity.

Dispersed development appears to take no account of local conditions. The Neighbourhood Area is poorly served by public transport and has no immediate access to the Robin Hood railway line. Whilst a quick scan of bus timetables will reveal that there are two bus services in the area, part of the area has no bus service altogether, the 417 service operates for a

brief period in the day and outside commuter hours and the 141 service is notoriously unreliable and cannot be relied on and is only funded from year to year. New housing can't be relied on to bring improved public transport, that's a commercial decision by bus operators who are influenced by various factors. To be sustainable development should be concentrated close to good public transport links.

3.4 Are the Plan's Strategic Policies sufficiently clear about the scale of development envisaged in each settlement/ area?

No. Over the past 6 or so years there has been significant housing development across the TSS area (in excess of 1000 dwellings), without any necessary additional health care facilities. Health care is of particular concern, with the largest practice collapsing with near catastrophic consequences, needing to be taken over by a neighbouring practice (Huthwaite) which was already near to full capacity. Currently access to the facility is poor with huge waiting times for calls to be answered and lengthy waits for appointments. Health care has suffered from the lack of development and appropriately qualified staff, which has impacted on the health of the community, including the unknown unmet needs within the community. It is important to also note that Huthwaite, which links to the south of TSS is struggling currently with access to healthcare, and it is proposed that it will need to accommodate significant number of new dwellings.

3.5 Does the submitted Plan's approach strike an appropriate balance between the identification of land for new homes and employment?

3.6 Is the settlement hierarchy set out in Policy S1 Justified?

ADC has never explained why Skegby and Stanton Hill have been moved upwards in the hierarchy tiers. There has been no consultation with the TSS Neighbourhood Forum on the issue of changing Skegby and Stanton Hill from being settlements to being put into the Main Urban Area. In fact, when asked directly for an explanation of the reason for the change the senior officer and leader failed to provide an explanation but rather dismissed the question.

Fackley, which is a small 'settlement' between Stanton Hill and Teversal remains as a 'settlement' yet it is proposed that housing developments which will increase the size of the settlement well in excess of 50% is at odds with the Local Plan. Page 33 (S1) of the LP Reg 19 states that settlements to accommodate smaller scale growth which meets the needs of the community and sustains services and facilities. Clearly this does not apply to the plans for Fackley.

3.7 What evidence is there to justify the identification of each settlement within the respective tiers of the hierarchy?

We are not aware of any evidence to justify the identification of each settlement.

3.8 What reliance does the Plan's overall strategy have on the proposed Maid Marian line? Is there a reasonable prospect of it coming forward during the plan period? How will the Plan respond to it? Green Belt

3.9 What proportion of new housing and employment proposed in the Plan would be on land currently designated as Green Belt?

3.10 What other reasonable options for meeting the identified housing requirement were considered prior to the proposed release of land from the Green Belt?

? If not, why is this the case?

3.12 How has the assessment of sites within the Green Belt informed the Council's approach to site selection?

3.13 Before concluding that exceptional circumstances exist to justify changes to Green Belt boundaries, paragraph 141 of the Framework states that strategic policy-making authorities should be able to demonstrate that it has examined fully all other reasonable options for meeting its identified need for housing. This will be assessed through the examination and will consider whether the strategy:

- Makes as much use as possible of suitable brownfield sites and underutilised land;
- Optimises the density of development, and
- Has been informed by discussions with neighbouring authorities about whether they can accommodate some of the identified need.

How has the preparation of the Plan sought to make as much use as possible of suitable brownfield sites and optimise the density of development?

3.14 How would the proposed release of land maintain the openness and permanence of the Green Belt?

3.15 How has the Green Belt assessment considered the potential for mitigation?

3.16 Do the Plan's strategic policies set out the scale and need for the release of land from the Green Belt as required by paragraph 140 of the Framework?

3.17 Having regard to the shortfall of housing provision over the plan period, what evidence is there that the Green Belt boundary will not need to be altered at the end of the plan period as set out at paragraph 143(e) of the Framework?

3.18 At a strategic level, do exceptional circumstances exist to alter the Green Belt boundary, having particular regard to paragraphs 140 – 143 of the Framework? If not, how could housing and employment needs be met in other ways?

3.19 Is the special Strategy effective if any further proposed sites would be required to be released from the Green Belt?

3.20 Is the release of the Green Belt land necessary to address the shortfall in housing across the plan period?