

Peter Brett Associates on behalf of Barwood Homes

Representor ID: PS102

Matter 2: Spatial Strategy

Introduction

This statement has been prepared by Peter Brett Associates, now part of Stantec (PBA), on behalf of Barwood Homes to discuss matters of soundness of the emerging Daventry Settlements and Countryside Local Plan (Part 2). This Matter Statement focuses on and answers questions which are pertinent. It follows on from representations made at Regulation 19 stage on their behalf.

Issue1

Question 4: Does the plan include sufficient flexibility and contingencies to take account of unexpected changes in circumstances, including a review of the JCS?

1. For the reasons set out in the response to this question, and also on Matter 3, no the Plan does not include sufficient flexibility and contingencies. There is insufficient contingency within the Part 2 Plan due to the spatial strategy which seeks to cap rural development and overly restrictive rural policies which fail to positively identify sufficient locations for growth.
2. We recognises that the Plan needs to be examined against the old NPPF and that there will be a JCS Review which will capture the new NPPF, but, in the meantime, the Part 2 plan need to be flexible enough and clear of expectations to allow the new NPPF to work alongside the Plan.
3. The greatest risk to the combined JCS and Part 2 Plan is whether it can demonstrate a sufficient supply of housing land to deliver a robust five-year land supply and accord with the Standard Methodology figure of 375 dpa for Daventry and a combined need of 2,414 dpa for the JCS area. The reason for this, is that when determining planning applications, the housing requirement within the JCS is already out of date as per NPPF2019/NPPG. As such, for the development plan to be effective for decision making purposes upon adoption, the Part 2 Plan needs to supply enough sites per annum to maintain their five year land supply until such time that a replacement plan is adopted, this may only be for a period of 2-3 years depending on the speed of the JCS Review adoption process. PBA believe that this risk can be significantly mitigated against by providing an appropriately flexible contingency of sufficient identified sites in sustainable locations within this plan.

4. There is precedent to allocate more sites where delivery is not being achieved. For example, Rushcliffe Borough Council have identified additional growth beyond the level in the adopted part 1 Core Strategy. We are also promoting it to Mendip District Council to help them maintain a robust five-year supply of deliverable housing sites.
5. Ensuring sufficient contingency is essential to address the risks without resorting to a lengthy delay to the adoption of this Plan. To further reduce this risk the Part 2 Plan should also be clear about the timing of the JCS Review. Plan reviews are generally slow to react to change. Flexibility is paramount to the delivery of this Plan and ensuring sites can be released for development early.
6. In the likely event that a new JCS could be adopted in the next 4 years the difference between the housing trajectory and the Standard Method figure is approximately 100 dpa. A combination of sites across the rural area, would provide that level of flexibility needed to reduce the risk of speculative applications upon the adoption of this Plan.
7. The NPPF at paragraph 157 states that '*Crucially, Local Plans should...allocate sites to promote development and flexible use of land*'. Throughout the NPPF, there is a consistent theme of flexibility in both plan making and during application stage to allow development coming forward to adjust to changes in market conditions and to prevent sustainable development being stalled.
8. To ensure adequate flexibility the Part 2 Plan policies should provide a sufficient flexibility contingency allowance to ensure adequate response to changes in demographic circumstances and specifically for further delays in the delivery of the large sites in Daventry. This means either relaxing the Rural Area policies and /or identifying additional land for development. This additional land should be provided within the Rural Area, at the Primary and Secondary Service Villages, including, Flore where land at Brington Road been identified as deliverable through Regulation 19 submissions by Barwood Homes.
9. Site Specific allocations – Representations have previously provided comments to site specific allocations which could provide suitable locations for growth, if the Inspector is minded to require additional flexibility and the Council could include these within main modifications.

Question 8: What is the approach of the Plan in terms of defining settlement boundaries or confines and development in rural areas? Do these approaches reflect the characteristics, roles and functions of individual settlements and other areas of Daventry District during the plan period?

10. It appears that the approach is to reflect criterion G of R1 of WNJCS – ie concentrating development within the confines of settlements.
11. While considerable work has been done on the settlement hierarchy and justifying the place of each village and settlement within it according to an assessment process, far less work has been made available to check whether the settlement boundaries are fit for purpose. The only mention of boundaries within the Plan is in para 5.2.07 which states that the confines have been mapped, using desktop survey, site visits and local knowledge using criteria in table 3. These criteria are very strict and do not consider whether there are any positive opportunities or sites which are well related to the settlement and which could provide for a well-designed extension to the village to support meeting local needs through sustainable growth; including economic and mixed-use growth. So existing boundaries have therefore been plotted with little or no assessment as to suitable expansion for growth to enhance the vitality of rural communities by providing affordable housing and supporting the viability of village services and amenities.
12. As explained in paragraphs 1-9 above, a positively prepared plan would allow some flexibility to deliver enough growth in the next 4-5 years either through:
 - A relaxation or removal of settlement boundaries to allow sustainable growth to take place in accordance with national policy.
 - A level of allocated land that is capable of meeting an increased supply for this period (sites for about 500 dwellings).

Question 9: Is the wording of Policies RA1, RA2, RA3 and RA4 sufficiently clear for the purposes of decision-making? Is the wording consistent with other related policies of the Plan (i.e. Policies ENV7, ENV10, EC4, CW3)? Is the restriction that development outside of defined confines will only be acceptable in “exceptional circumstances” as set out in Policies RA1 and RA2, justified and consistent with national policy?

13. The Spatial Strategy which restricts development to only within the existing settlement boundaries and their confines is contrary to policy because it fails to provide positive opportunities for growth within the rural area. The Rural Areas are suffering from affordability issues. The affordability ratio for Daventry has increased since 2014 by 31% from 7.82 to 10.87 in 2018. This is highly significant and shows the need for additional homes. Local housing needs surveys also identify the need for affordable housing in the villages.

14. The latest NPPF is an important material consideration in determining planning applications. It is clear that planning policies should support the sustainable growth of rural areas, maintain and enhance the vitality of rural communities, and *'Identify opportunities for villages to grow and thrive, especially where this will support local services'*¹
15. At paragraph 001 (ID: 50-001-20160519), the PPG recognises that blanket policies restricting housing development should be avoided. There is no evidence provided by Daventry District Council to justify such a restrictive approach which far exceeds the positive approach set out in national policy and guidance. There is material evidence is successful appeals² which confirm that the new NPPF no longer takes such a restrictive approach to development in the countryside. Failure to identify positive opportunities for growth will threaten the function that rural settlements play in providing an important range of services to meet the day to day needs of the communities they serve. Restricting development is likely to stifle their role and lead to a situation where it could be too late to save services and amenities whose viabilities are threatened.
16. There is also concern that by restricting growth to only within the confines of the villages, this may undermine the existing character of the villages and their historic qualities. It would be preferable in design and placemaking terms to provide high quality well designed and landscaped new development on the edge of villages. Sensitive development on the edge of rural settlements, in keeping with its character is highly desirable and should be encouraged.
17. Policy RA1 and RA2 refers to exceptional circumstances, which are then explained in para 5.2.19 and 5.2.23. However, these exceptional circumstances are all situations that are provided for within national policy anyway, so are not exceptional in the case of Daventry and the individual circumstances of the different settlements.
18. To achieve a sound plan which is consistent with national policy and positively prepared, policies RA1 and RA2 have not been positively prepared, justified, and are not effective or consistent with national policy. They need to be revised to recognise the differences between the category of settlement in the hierarchy and allow an appropriate scale of new development at each rather than applying a blanket restriction which is contrary to national policy. These policies should not rely upon a backwards looking view of past completions as a means of restricting future growth; this is to maintain the sustainability of these settlements and their ability to continue to thrive.

¹ NPPF 2019 Paragraph 78

² APP/Y2430/W/17/3177102

Question 12: Are Policies NP1, SP1 RA1, RA2, RA3, RA4, RA5 and RA6 otherwise positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy?

19. These policies and particularly NP1, RA1, and RA2 have not been positively prepared, justified, and are not effective or consistent with national policy. They do not provide a positive framework for sustainable development in the future. They do not provide a positive drive for growth which responds to the role and function of the different villages nor do they identify opportunities for sustainable and mixed-use growth. These are negatively prepared policies which restrict growth outside of the existing confines of a village, and further do not enable flexibility to allow neighbourhood plans to identify suitable sites for development within their Neighbourhood Areas.
20. These policies are not justified by local evidence, rather they just seek to restrict growth in the rural areas because there has already been some rural growth, and they fear their spatial strategy will become unbalanced. No evidence is presented for this assertion and it is highly relevant that without the past growth in the Rural Area the Council would have built hardly any new homes and would not be able to come close to demonstrating a five-year housing land supply. By restricting growth in the Rural Area they are perpetuating the previous problems and there is a real danger that further delays in the delivery of the large SUEs will mean that insufficient growth occurs, leading to a repeat of the same situation that happened before. Without a strategy which provides for appropriate and sustainable growth in a variety of locations, not just in and around Daventry, the Council is set to fail to deliver homes to meet their needs and will once again find themselves unable to provide a land led strategy to achieve a robust five-year land supply, exacerbated by the Standard Method changes.
21. The policies are not consistent with national policy which seeks a positive and proactive approach to sustainable growth which brings forward sites and identifies opportunities for villages to evolve and thrive as set out in paragraphs 77 and 78 of the NPPF. By applying such restrictive policies, the Council is limiting the ability of Neighbourhood Plans to *'shape, direct and help deliver sustainable development in their area'*. This is contrary to the advice in paragraph 29 of the NPPF which is explicitly about giving communities the power to develop a positive shared vision for their area. Neighbourhood Plans should be able to consider the opportunities for allocating small and medium sized sites suitable for housing in their area as set out in paragraph 69 of the NPPF. This should include consideration of sites outside their village boundaries. Imposing such severe restrictions on their remit goes against the principles of neighbourhood planning and is inconsistent with national policy and guidance.