

**PSB Part 2 – Examination – Hearing Statement – Milwood Ltd (Land interests at Stafford Town)**

Issue 3: Proposed Settlement Boundaries: Policy SB1

3.1 Criteria for determining the proposed settlement boundaries:

(i) Are the criteria set out in paragraphs 2.11-2.23 appropriate to define the extent of the areas within the settlement boundaries to accommodate the necessary development, so as to enable the delivery of the objectively assessed housing requirement for Stafford Borough, as set out in PSB1?

At face value, it would appear that the p2.11-2.23 criteria are appropriate to define the areas within the settlement boundaries to accommodate the necessary development to enable delivery of the objectively assessed housing requirement.

However, this does not incorporate any degree of flexibility going forward, nor does it address or resolve the question of under delivery, and failure to meet that minimum requirement.

(ii) Are the boundaries drawn in accordance with these criteria?

At face value, it would appear that these boundaries are drawn in accordance with the same.

3.2 Overall capacity within the proposed settlement boundaries:

Is the overall capacity within the proposed settlement boundaries, having regard to the latest housing land supply situation, and taking into account constraints such as areas of importance for nature conservation, tree preservation orders and other environmental considerations, sufficient to satisfactorily accommodate the objectively assessed housing requirement for Stafford Borough, as set out in PSB1?

At face value, it would appear that the capacity within the proposed settlement boundaries is sufficient to accommodate the objectively assessed housing requirement for Stafford Borough.

However, this does not incorporate any degree of flexibility going forward, nor does it address or resolve the question of under delivery, and failure to meet that minimum requirement.

3.3 Flexibility within the proposed settlement boundaries:

Is there a case for flexibility within the proposed settlement boundaries in the light of the likely delivery of the housing requirement as set out in PSB1? If the answer is yes:

Yes.

Whilst the proposed settlement boundaries appear to, at face value, provide sufficient capacity to sufficiently accommodate the Plan objectively assessed minimum housing requirement, and also that, on paper at least, there does appear to be a healthy housing land supply, they do not incorporate any degree of flexibility or preparedness for uncertainty going forward, nor do they address or resolve the question of under delivery, and failure to meet that minimum housing requirement, which, in itself, highlights the need for such flexibility.

*With regard to housing delivery;*

The PSB Development Strategy, as adopted, is heavily reliant upon four urban extension SDL locations, which, in the context of housing provide three locations at Stafford Town;  
Stafford North = 3100 plots,  
Stafford East = 600 plots, and  
Stafford West = 2200 plots, and one location at Stone;  
Stone West = 500 plots.

In the context of Stafford Town;

As evidenced by the 2016 5YS Statement, some 1,847 of the PSB allocated 5,900 dwellings have, five years into the LP period, what could be considered as a potentially realistic guarantee of delivery, having the benefit of planning permissions, being some 31.3% of the same.

On paper at least, with the most recent published 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016 5YS Statement asserting a 6.76 years supply (Sedgefield) of deliverable housing, SBC appear to currently have a valid and healthy supply of deliverable sites, yet, it is noted that since the start of the PSB Plan period, even the minimum requirement of the LP is not being delivered, so there is a clear disconnect between what is shown on paper to be the supply case, and what is actually being delivered, even to satisfy the 'minimum' LP requirement.

Against the LP minimum requirement of 500 dwellings per annum;

2011/12 = 425 completions = 75 dwellings shortfall  
2012/13 = 306 completions = 194 dwellings shortfall  
2013/14 = 411 completions = 89 dwellings shortfall  
2014/15 = 428 completions = 72 dwellings shortfall  
2015/16 = 688 completions = 188 dwellings overage

Since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011, there has been a consistent year on year under delivery equating to some 242 dwellings, as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016.

Year 2015/16 (5YS Statement 2016 – published June 2016) saw a spike in housing delivery of 688 dwellings, and, notwithstanding this, the average annual housing delivery rate since the start of the Plan period (1<sup>st</sup> April 2011) to date (31<sup>st</sup> March 2016) equates to some 452 dwellings.

Ensuring that the objectively assessed requirement is met in full is an obligation to boost significantly the supply of housing (p47 – the Framework).

It is noted that these figures adopt a consistent year upon year 500 dwelling requirement threshold, yet, as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014, the accumulated shortfall from the 2011/12 start of the PSB Plan period was 358 dwellings, generating a revised annualised minimum requirement, including a 20% buffer of some 672 dwellings.

However, inexplicably, this revised requirement has not been used as the basis for re-calculation of the 5 year/annual requirement over subsequent years to date?

Had this been applied, and used as the basis for re-calculation at years 2014/15 and 2015/16, the current annual requirement would be considerably higher than 500 dwellings.

The Framework is quite clear, at p47, with regard to the application of a buffer.

As is the case here, with persistent under delivery, a 20% buffer is applied, and that this should be moved forward from later in the Plan period to provide a realistic prospect of achieving the planned supply.

(It is also quite clear that, in addition to a 5YS of specific deliverable sites, a further and additional 5YS of specific developable sites / broad locations for growth be provided).

Whilst the overall minimum Plan requirement figure would remain the same;

In effect, if you don't provide enough houses in any given year, you can call upon your developable supply (or reserve supply), and bring a site/s forward to make up the shortfall, thus enabling you to maintain a consistent supply and deliverability at the required level.

The dilemma here is that SBC do not have, in real terms, a (reserve) developable supply to physically call upon, with their displayed supply sources for years 6 to 10, being exactly the same sites as those for years 1 to 5.

Therefore, because they are not additional and/or alternative sites/locations in their own right, it is physically impossible for them to drawn down from this (reserve) developable supply when required, as, to access years 6 to 10, you first have to have completed years 1 to 5, which is, in itself, restrictive and inflexible.

Further, you never actually gain access to the 6 to 10 year portion, for, as the sites and time progress; the forward part is always that of the year 1 to 5 deliverable supply.

The SDL locations are significant sites, and of utmost importance to the delivery of the PSB, both in terms of housing numbers and infrastructure.

By definition, they are potentially problematic given their sheer scale, being prone to unforeseen delays and phasing provisions that may not materialise as planned etc.

Since adoption of the PSB and publication of the Appendix F Trajectory, and subsequent SDL trajectories to date, the yield timeline has been progressively eroded sufficient that, the 2 largest scale sites – Stafford North & West – are now, as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016, projected to miss their Plan target, and be incomplete by the 2031 end of the Plan period, currently showing in joint total, a 355 dwelling overrun into the next Plan period, and therefore, contrary to PSB Policies Stafford 2 (North) & Stafford 3 (West).

The obvious implication is therefore that the Plan may not achieve its requirement by the end of the Plan period.

However, just because these individual sites are now already set not to be completed by the end of the Plan period, does not necessarily mean that this may result in the Plan requirement not being met, although, the implications at 5 years into the Plan period, are of concern.

Again, because delivery is so rigidly focused around these sites, with no alternatives or reserve in play, or indeed prepared in readiness, there are no flexibility options available to remedy this.

Currently, with the slower than anticipated rate of delivery from these SDL's, the supply and completion rate has been bolstered by windfall proposals (78% = 2015/16), which, is a finite source. There is no certainty to this approach, as there is no guarantee that these sites will consistently continue to come forward, and in such quantities.

(2015/16 saw the total number of commitments reduce by 418 dwellings).

The 2015 SHLAA (2016 SHLAA remains unpublished) identifies (p5.23-26) a considered deliverable quantum of only 166 dwellings over a 5 year period, and a considered developable quantum of 3,105 dwellings in the longer term.

It further states (Table 4) that since the 2011 start of the plan period, an average of only some 24% of these sites have transpired into completions.

Certainty would be provided if additional sustainable sites were allocated.

A recent planning application (15/23050/OUT) to develop circa 330 dwellings at the Stafford North SDL was refused in March 2016.

Whilst it was refused predominantly on technicalities, these were substantive and fundamental. Whilst I am sure that, at some point these will be resolved and development enabled, this example serves to highlight that, by definition, these sites are potentially problematic given their sheer scale, being prone to unforeseen delays and phasing provisions that may not materialise as planned etc, and further highlighting a strategy that is not risk averse.

*With regard to flexibility:*

The need for flexibility is self apparent.

In Policy terms, it is a core matter of Soundness.

In practical terms, it enables the Plan to positively manage and deal with any eventuality, such as slower than anticipated delivery rates, and thus, ensure delivery of the Plan in all regards.

It cannot be under estimated, as displayed by the current Government proposals to make material change to the Framework where there is a shortfall between the houses provided for in a Plan and the houses actually being built, to deliver the housing requirement, by driving up delivery rates by, such as the identification of additional sustainable sites with clear prospects for delivery, clearly displaying the absolute need for flexibility.

There appears to be little accountability of the possible uncertainties and risks involved, which, in conjunction with other points raised, clearly displays a case for greater flexibility to provide sufficient scope to enable delivery of the Plan, and to cater for any future material requirement change over the Plan period, when taking into account all material considerations.

The SDL locations are significant sites, and of utmost importance to the delivery of the PSB, both in terms of housing numbers and infrastructure.

By definition, they are, in delivery terms, potentially problematic given their sheer scale, being prone to unforeseen delays and phasing provisions that may not materialise as planned etc.

Therefore, a degree of slippage is almost inevitable, as is the case here; with slower than anticipated delivery rates, and as such, the Plan should incorporate sufficient flexibility and certainty to cater for the same to ensure the consistent delivery of the Plan requirement as a minimum.

The current approach is heavily reliant upon a small number of concentrated large scale allocations, and if these underperform, the only source of supply is absolute reliance upon a sufficient number of windfall proposals continuously coming forward and being completed in sufficient numbers to satisfy the obligations of the Plan.

The lack of, in real terms, a specific year 6 to 10 a (reserve) developable supply, aside from being contrary to the Framework, is clearly a restrictive and uncertain approach, with obvious risks, especially given the scale and inherent problems associated with the current allocations.

It is very much a hand to mouth approach, reliant on matters, which are not robustly reliable.

This highlights the need for greater flexibility in the Plan structure.

Submissions above, highlighting the under delivery, display the need for greater flexibility in the Plan structure.

Submissions at Issue 2, highlighting the under delivery and potential implications of material considerations display the need for greater flexibility in the Plan structure.

Submissions at Issue 9, highlighting the insufficient accountability of uncertainties and risks display the need for greater flexibility in the Plan structure.

One of the bases upon which the PSB was deemed sound by the Local Plan Inspector, was the provision of a Site Allocations Document, to make specific allocations for additional housing sites, if necessary, which is no longer deemed necessary on the basis that it is projected that the Plan requirement can be met (p2.4).

The concern here is again one of flexibility.

The PSB Inspector had the future assurance of the SAD, to cater for any possible deviations in delivery and expectation etc, and, whilst the current headline reasoning for its removal is plausible on the surface, there is now no such like provision going forward.

Notwithstanding the made case for an immediate degree of flexibility, such as the allocation of additional sites, there appears to be no accountability going forward, no tier of built in flexibility to ensure continued and certain delivery of the Plan in any circumstance.

**(i) What should the appropriate level of flexibility be for Stafford Borough?**

To be of sufficient scope, capacity and flexibility, this level should provide at least a minimum of 10% of the overall Plan requirement, equating to at least 1,000 dwellings.

**(ii) Do the proposed settlement boundaries provide for this level of flexibility?**

No.

As proposed, they are to be tightly and restrictively drawn around the existing settlements, including the Plan allocations, providing no degree of Plan flexibility, or certainty to such flexibility such as the clear identification of additional sustainable sites.

**(iii) If not, which settlements should have their boundaries extended to provide the required level of flexibility and where/by what amount?**

The principle and implementation of the Sustainable Settlement Hierarchy (PSB SP3) is broadly sound, in the interests of sustainable development.

Stafford Town is at the head of this, being the principle and most sustainable settlement in the Borough.

The KSVs are fragile and sensitive to further development.

They are already set to broadly provide a proportionate share, relative to their scale and ability, and an additional increase at these locations could, in all reasonableness, lead to a negative impact, with a possibility of undermining the purpose of SP3.

There could be a case for a modest and carefully managed increase in development at Stone, yet, there is a need to ensure that the amount of new housing reflects the role, scale and character of the Town. Therefore, if any additional development was proposed, it should, in all reasonableness, be no more than 10% of the additional level, being 100 dwellings.

Stafford Town is the single exception.

Aside from being the principle focus of SP3 housing distribution, it is in any event, the most sustainable location in the Borough, and therefore, unlike the other locations in the Hierarchy, the best equipped to accommodate and absorb additional development and expansion in a positive manner, on all levels.

If a degree (10% = 100 dwellings) was proposed at Stone, then the remaining 90% = 900 dwellings would be located at Stafford Town.

However, Stafford Town could feasibly, on its own, accommodate the whole of any additional requirement in its entirety (1,000 dwellings).

The PSB housing requirement is not a ceiling, and the Plan's strategy would not be undermined if Stafford Town, as the top settlement in the Sustainable Settlement Hierarchy, improved upon the planned performance, and the SP3 intention to re-balance the distribution of housing in favour of Stafford Town, supports this.

Stafford Town offers numerous peripheral; edge of urban area locations that could comfortably and positively accommodate additional development to provide the entire required level of flexibility, and, on this basis, Stafford Town is the most logical and capable location to have its boundary extended.

### 3.4 Specific settlement boundaries:

In the light of the above considerations, are any of the proposed settlement boundaries inadequately drawn? If so, which of the following settlement boundaries should be redrawn, in terms of specific sites and development capacity?

#### (a) Stafford town

On this basis, the proposed settlement boundary for Stafford Town is inadequately drawn, and should be redrawn.

One such suitable site that would contribute toward the required level of flexibility is that which we have both an interest in and are promoting for residential development, being an approximately 13.8 hectare parcel of land, being that between Ashflats Lane and the A449 Mossnit, in the South of Stafford Town.

Being in this location, it would offer a greater geographical spread to choice and competition in the market.

An important aspect of any additional site that would contribute toward the required level of flexibility is that it is sustainable, and, genuinely deliverable with a clear prospect for delivery, (which could be set out within any future planning consent).

This site has already been the subject of the scrutiny of the planning system, via planning application 13/19524/OUT and planning appeal APP/Y3425/A/14/2217578.

Whilst being both refused at application stage, and subsequently dismissed at appeal stage, this site, despite being found to be sustainable and otherwise technically unobjectionable, was ultimately dismissed by the Inspector on the basis that it is predominantly Greenfield.

(2015/16 saw only a 50% delivery on PDL, a downward trend on previous years).

The site promotes a capacity of up to 320 dwellings, of which 30% would be affordable dwellings, which would significantly contribute toward the required level of flexibility.

The site has a clear prospect of delivery;

Being under option by a developer, has committed affordable housing delivery in place, and would accept a reduced timeframe for commencement / implementation condition upon any future consent given.

(2015 SHLAA defines this site, at ID66, to be developable, financially viable, immediately available and achievable).

- (b) Stone town
- (c) Barlaston
- (d) Eccleshall
- (e) Gnosall
- (f) Haughton
- (g) The Haywoods
- (h) Hixon
- (i) Tittensor
- (j) Weston
- (k) Woodseaves
- (l) Yarnfield
  
- (m) Any other settlements