

Huntingdonshire Local Plan Examination

on behalf of Messrs Hutchinson & Barford

Matter 7 . Proposed site allocations

St Neots Spatial Planning Area

land at Riversfield, Little Paxton.

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For and on behalf of Brown & Co.

Brown & Co is a leading provider of agency, professional and consultancy services across the whole range of rural, commercial, residential, and agricultural markets.

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Brown & Co Barfords represent Messrs Barford and Hutchinson in their capacity as joint trustees of land at Riversfield, Little Paxton (the objectors), as identified on the attached plan Appendix A.
- 1.2 The land has an extensive planning history with an extant permission for business and industrial uses, though it is not allocated in the development plan as an employment allocation.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The objectors have pursued the allocation of the site for residential development in the emerging Local Plan but this has not been supported by the Council, despite it receiving a broadly positive assessment in the Council's Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (June 2017). This concluded *'The site is considered suitable for medium density residential development across a net developable area of 50% of the site'*. Furthermore the site was included for consideration in one of the transport growth options with the preparation of the Local Plan.
- 2.2 This already committed site for development is suitably located within the St Neots Spatial Planning area; the site has no constraints which are unable to be resolved; it is readily available and achievable for residential development within the first five years of the plan, including a policy compliant level of affordable housing, which would reinforce the plan's delivery of housing.
- 2.3 In 2016 a planning application was submitted for the development of up to 199 dwellings and 6,970, sq. metres (75,000 sq. ft) of Class B1 business premises with open space, new accesses from the Great North Road, roads and associated infrastructure (LPA Ref. 17/00108/OUT). The planning application was referred to the Council's Planning Committee in October 2016 with support from officers as to the principle of residential use of the site and all technical issues were able to be appropriately resolved. However, contrary to the professional officer advice, the application was refused by members of the Planning Committee due to consideration that the proposal was a departure from the development plan and contrary to a number of policies within the emerging Local Plan. A copy of the officer report is attached as Appendix 2 and the decision notice as Appendix 3.

- 2.4 In presenting the application the officers explained *'It would have been prejudicial to the outcome of this application to propose to allocate the land in the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036: Consultation Draft 2017'* (para 7.14). This explanation is considered perverse. If the site is appropriate and acceptable in its own terms for residential development then there was no reason why it could not be the subject of a proposed allocation in an emerging plan at a time when other sites were being added to the Local Plan.
- 2.5 Following the refusal the application is now the subject of an appeal to the Secretary of State. In June 2018, officers took a further report to the Planning Committee regarding the defence of the refusal reasons and a copy of the report is attached as Appendix 4, along with the further clarifications set out in the late representations, Appendix 5. The purpose of the report was to review the reasons for refusal, particularly in light of the submitted Local Plan and highlight the material changes in planning policy. Once more the report demonstrated support from officers, but the planning committee members decide to defend the appeal, contrary to officer advice.
- 2.6 It is stressed that since refusing the 2016 application the Local Plan has progressed to the Submission version and within this Little Paxton has been elevated from its designation as a Key Service Centre to part of the St Neots Spatial Planning Area, where residential development will be supported with no limitations over the scale of development. Further, the Council has amended the definition of the built up area in the Submission plan to include *'Existing commitments for residential, community, retail and employment uses on sites which are physically/functionally related to the settlement'*. Consequently the proposed residential development of the Riversfield site no longer conflicts with the new Local Plan in terms of the scale of development or encroachment beyond the built up area.
- 2.7 At the Planning Committee meeting in June a member of the Committee specifically asked officers whether the proposed development conflicts with the new Local Plan. The officer clarified that the residential development of the site is compliant with the new Local Plan as a committed site within the Little Paxton built up area and within the St Neots Spatial Planning Area, where there is no limit on the scale of development.

3.0 Conclusion

- 3.1 For the reasons explained above the Riversfield land does not need to be allocated for housing development and it can potentially come forward as a windfall development. However, as paragraph 196 of the National Planning Policy Framework clarifies ~~the~~ the planning system is plan led. The Council's failure to allocate the Riversfield site for residential development is not considered sound and the proposed allocation of the site will bring tangible benefits by

providing clarity and certainty for the land and the delivery of units that will assist in meeting the housing need, and this has the ability to reinforce the delivery of housing in Huntingdonshire in the early years of the plan period.

