

Addendum to Agenda Item 5 – Land between Royston Road and Cambridge Road, Barkway, Planning ref. 18/01502/OP

On 8 September 2022, the Council received the Inspector's Final Report on the Examination of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 – 2031. Receipt of the Inspector's Report marks the end of the examination.

The Inspector's Report concludes that subject to a number of main modifications, set out in the Appendix to the report, the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 – 2031 is sound, legally compliant and capable of adoption.

The Inspector's Report can be viewed on the Council's website.

With regards to decision making and determining planning applications this now means that the policies and site allocations within the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 (Emerging Local Plan) can be given very significant weight.

Please find highlighted below some of the paragraphs within the Inspector's Final Report which are particularly relevant to the above application.

- Paragraphs 58-69 refer to the housing requirement identified for meeting North Hertfordshire's housing need.
- Paragraphs 124 to 133 refer to the settlement hierarchy including "Settlements for Growth" of which there are five villages, including Barkway.
- Paragraphs 164 to 496 cover Issue 4: Whether the proposed housing allocations are justified, effective, consistent with national policy and positively prepared.
- Paragraphs 457 to 470 refer specifically to Barkway. These paragraphs state:

"457. Generally to the south of Royston are Therfield, Reed, Barkway and Barley. Barkway is identified in Policy SP2 – as modified through MM010/FM039 – as a 'settlement for growth'. The other three are Category A villages in the hierarchy. Like Royston, all these settlements are in the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt.

458. As submitted, the Plan proposes three housing allocations in Barkway. However, Site BK1 has now been built and is among the sites I have already concluded should consequently be deleted from the Plan. Sites BK2 and BK3 are located to the northern part of the settlement.

459. Site BK2 is anticipated to deliver around 20 dwellings. Part of it is a public open space. Policy BK2 says that part of the site should be retained as open space. However, to ensure the effectiveness of the policy in this respect, it is necessary to remove the open space area from the site allocation. The Council will therefore need to alter the allocation as shown under the label MM388 during the public consultation on changes to the Plan. As a consequence, it is also necessary to remove the requirement to retain part of the site as open space from the policy. Main modification MM215/FM111 does this and is needed for effectiveness.

460. *Periwinkle Close and the houses on Site BK1 form a built edge in the northern part of Barkway. Two fields lie to the north. As submitted, the Plan proposes that the southern part of the field immediately to the north of the built edge should be 'white land' within the settlement boundary, and Site BK3 is proposed to deliver around 140 new homes to the north of this strip of 'white land'. The intention here is that the 'white land' is reserved for a new school if one is necessary at some point in the future – there is no clear evidence of such a need during the Plan period.*

461. *This arrangement gives rise to the question of the visual cohesion of the village. If, in the event, the 'white land' proves to be not necessary for education purposes, the new housing on Site BK3 would be separated from the main body of the village's built area by these fields. However, I do not see that as a problem. The 'white land' would appear as a green gap in the village. That is not an uncommon sight in villages. Moreover, the new housing would not be visually adrift from the village. From Cambridge Road, the social club and village hall would connect them. In northward views along Royston Road, the two pairs of semi-detached houses adjacent to the northwest corner of Site BK3 are clearly visible as one travels up the gentle incline. Because of this, there is already a sense that the 'white land' and the site are fields within the built envelope of a village. The exclusion of these dwellings from the settlement boundary does not alter this visual effect.*

462. *The difficulty here is that notwithstanding the County Council's ownership of the 'white land', there is nothing in the Plan to prevent its development for housing or any other use, in principle at least. In the circumstances, I agree with the Council that the most appropriate and effective solution is to include the 'white land' within the boundaries of Site BK3 and to add to Policy BK3 a requirement that approximately 1.5 hectares of the site be reserved for primary education. Main modification MM216/FM112 modifies the policy accordingly. For the effectiveness of that policy, it will also be necessary for the Council to amend the site boundary as shown under the label MM389 during the public consultation exercise. These changes will increase flexibility here in terms of precisely where the housing and reserved land are situated and will improve the scope to ensure the most appropriate arrangement of the two.*

463. *During the examination, the Council proposed to delete Policy BK3, therefore removing the site from the Plan, and to consequently alter the position of Barkway from a settlement for growth to a Category A village in the hierarchy. The primary concern here relates to education provision. The primary schools in Barkway and Barley have federated. Consequently, the first two years of primary education is now provided in Barkway, and the remaining primary years education is delivered in Barley.*

464. *The Council's point here is that Site BK3 may not definitively trigger a requirement for a new school on the reserved land. In the light of this, and given the new schooling arrangement, its development would lead to increased traffic movements between the two villages. I accept that if the new housing proposed on Site BK3 does not lead to the need for a new school on the reserved land, that is an inevitable outcome. That is not ideal, and this factor does reduce the sustainability credentials of Site BK3 and Barkway more generally.*

465. *However, it seems to me that it is quite common for those living in rural communities to have to travel by car to a neighbouring village for schooling. The distance involved here is not great – somewhere in the region of two to two and a half miles – and the number of additional school trips likely to be generated by Site BK3 would be reasonably limited. I have been told that a minibus service*

operates between the two school sites. That would undoubtedly help in this respect. Indeed, as I see it, it is necessary to require that both this site and Site BK2 contribute towards sustainable travel between them. Main modifications MM216/FM112, MM215/FM111, MM219/FM114 and FM115 add suitable wording to the policies and supporting paragraphs and are needed to ensure that Policies BK2 and BK3 are justified and effective.

466. Although the smallest of the Settlements for Growth, Barkway still retains some of the services and facilities associated with this tier of the hierarchy. It is not distant from Barley which has other community facilities. On this point, paragraph 55 of the NPPF says: "To promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. For example, where there are groups of smaller settlements, development in one village may support services in a village nearby." As I see it, that is precisely what the new housing on Site BK3 would achieve.

467. I recognise that Site BK3 would bring housing close to Newsells Park Stud which is to the north of the site. Newsells Park is one of the largest stud farms in Europe – it encompasses some 1,200 acres, is a major 'global player' in the industry and a significant employer in the area. Because of the soil quality, the paddocks closest to the site are of particular importance to the stud farm operation. I note the concerns raised by Newsells Park about the effects of introducing new housing on Site BK3 on mares and foals in these top paddocks.

468. It seems likely to me that there would be some increase in noise and other disturbances. However, Site BK3 is separated from the paddocks by a rather wide footpath with high hedges to either side. The houses and horses would not be cheek by jowl. That said, to minimise noise and disruption the separation between the two should be maximised. Main modifications MM216/FM112 and MM220 require measures to minimise the impact on Newsells Park Stud in terms of the proximity of built development, noise and increased activity. This is an appropriate and necessary measure. As is often the case, much will depend on the detail – for example in relation to the location and orientation of houses, and the position of internal roads and car parking. The Council will retain control of these aspects, and this main modification suitably equips the Council to resist any scheme that would cause unacceptable harm to the operation of the stud.

469. I note the points about people using the footpaths and bridleways in the area intruding onto the stud's private land and causing problems. But this Plan cannot control or mitigate for the behaviour of people using the public rights of way network. To reject the allocation of Site BK3, or any other, on the basis that the people living there would trespass or otherwise misbehave would be unwarranted.

470. Overall, I consider it unnecessary for soundness to delete Site BK3 or to amend Barkway's position in the settlement hierarchy. The main modification (MM010/FM039) identifying it as a settlement for growth therefore remains justified, effective and necessary".

A verbal update will be provided at the committee meeting, as part of the officer's presentation.