



# Examination of the Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Plan: Blocks 1 and 2 Hearing Sessions

Hearing Statement on Matter 2 (Vision, Strategic Objectives  
and Development Strategy)

On behalf of Ainscough Strategic Land Ltd

17<sup>th</sup> June 2024

## CONTENTS

|    |   |    |
|----|---|----|
| 1  | INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT .....                                | 1  |
| 2  | QUESTION 20 – VISION FOR THE BOROUGH .....                  | 3  |
| 3  | QUESTION 21 – VISION AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES.....          | 4  |
| 4  | QUESTION 23 – MEETING DEVELOPMENT NEED.....                 | 5  |
| 5  | QUESTION 24 – UNMET NEEDS IN NEIGHBOURING AREAS.....        | 6  |
| 6  | QUESTION 25 – GREEN BELT RELEASE .....                      | 7  |
| 7  | QUESTION 26 – RE-DESIGNATION OF FORMER GREEN BELT SITES ... | 8  |
| 8  | QUESTION 27 – DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY .....                    | 9  |
| 9  | QUESTION 31 – SITE SELECTION PROCESS .....                  | 10 |
| 10 | QUESTION 32 – REASONABLE ALTERNATIVES .....                 | 11 |
| 11 | QUESTION 33 – IMPLEMENTING THE VISION AND OBJECTIVES .....  | 12 |
| 12 | QUESTION 34 – VIABILITY & DELIVERABILITY OF DEVELOPMENT.... | 14 |
| 13 | QUESTION 36 – STRATEGIC POLICY DS6 .....                    | 15 |
| 14 | CONCLUSION .....  | 16 |

## 1 INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT

- 1.1 Asteer Planning LLP has been instructed by Ainscough Strategic Land (“ASL”) to prepare this Hearing Statement in relation to the Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Plan Review (“Plan Review”) and the Matters, Issues and Questions (“MIQs”) posed by the Inspectors.
- 1.2 The Statement relates to land at Galley Common in Nuneaton (“the site”), which ASL controls and is promoting for development comprising a mix of market and affordable housing and community infrastructure (Regulation 19 Reference No: 125). The site is separated into two parcels - Parcel A is adjacent to Plough Hill Road and extends to approximately 6.1 hectares and Parcel B extends to approximately 6.2 hectares. The site forms part of a wider land ownership which has the potential to be used for habitat and biodiversity enhancements, as well as multi-functional recreational / amenity space. A plan of the site was included within the representations submitted in October 2023 on behalf of ASL in response to the Regulation 19 consultation exercise.
- 1.3 ASL have a longstanding track record in bringing forward major strategic sites for development in partnership with the UK’s largest and most respected housebuilders. The site is deliverable and can be brought forward early in the next Plan Period.
- 1.4 This Statement responds directly to questions 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 31, 32, 33, 34 and 36 of the Inspectors’ MIQs for Matter 2 (Vision, Strategic Objectives and Development Strategy).
- 1.5 Overall, ASL are of the view that the Draft Plan in its current form is not sound and is not underpinned by a positively prepared or justified evidence base. Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council (“NBBC”) has sought to expedite the preparation of the new Local Plan for political reasons, which is leading to an unsound and ill-prepared plan being prepared for publication and submission. ASL considers that the Local Plan requires a fundamental reset, in terms of its evidence, spatial strategy and land allocations.
- 1.6 For context to our response to Matter 2, our overarching comments on the Plan Review relate to:
  1. **Cross Boundary Legal and Procedural Issues** – It is not clear that, at present, the Council has sought to discharge its Duty to Co-operate or sought to fully understand if any cross boundary need exists. We consider that there is a risk that the Local Plan will not be legally sound unless the Council sets out how cross boundary matters have been fully considered early in the plan-making.

2. **Deficient Evidence Base** – In its current form, ASL considers the Draft Plan evidence base has deficiencies that undermine the soundness of the emerging Local Plan. There are key evidence base documents that should be prepared and should inform the spatial strategy and proposed land allocations. These include (but are not limited to) an Urban Capacity Study, Review of the Settlement Boundary, Local Plan Viability Assessment and an updated Infrastructure Delivery Plan.
3. **Supporting Growth and Meeting Need** – ASL considers that NBBC should capitalise on its strategic location and support the Borough's potential to achieve greater economic and housing growth within the Local Plan. ASL considers that the relationship between housing and employment should be acknowledged and NBBC should plan for a positive economic growth scenario, with a spatial strategy that will support sustainable economic growth and address the affordability issues of the Borough in the long term. The Council should also be pro-active in supporting the growth potential of the wider sub-region.
4. **Review of the Settlement Boundaries** – The evidence base needs to be bolstered in relation to the issues the Borough is facing, including its housing requirement and the capacity of sites within the urban area. If the outcome of this evidence is an increase in housing need and a requirement to include additional sites in the Local Plan, this should include a review of the existing settlement boundaries around Nuneaton, as the Borough's primary location for growth. Sequentially, any review should consider deliverable sites within the open countryside before any amendment to the Green Belt is considered.

## 2 QUESTION 20 – VISION FOR THE BOROUGH

*Does the Plan set out an appropriate vision for the Borough based upon the evidence?*

- 2.1 Whilst ASL considers that the vision for the Borough that is set out in the Draft Plan is positive and not inappropriate, we have concerns that it is based upon an evidence base that has not been positively prepared. ASL considers that the Local Plan requires a fundamental reset in terms of its evidence before it progresses any further.

### 3 QUESTION 21 – VISION AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

***Are the vision and strategic objectives justified, have they been positively prepared, and do they accord with the evidence and national policy?***

- 3.1 Whilst ASL does not raise any specific issues regarding the vision and strategic objectives that are contained within the Draft Plan, we are concerned that they have not been informed by sufficiently robust evidence.
- 3.2 Strategic Objective 5 pertains to the delivery of new infrastructure via new development and investment. The delivery of this Objective is based on the 2021 Infrastructure Delivery Plan (“IDP”) which includes strategic allocations that are proposed to be de-allocated in the Draft Plan. As such, in order for Strategic Objective 5 to be delivered, it needs to be underpinned by an updated IDP allowing the delivery of plan-wide infrastructure to be delivered in the context of the allocations that are proposed to be carried forward.

## 4 QUESTION 23 – MEETING DEVELOPMENT NEED

***Do the vision and strategic objectives have regard to and provide for the development needs of the area as well as any identified unmet needs in neighbouring areas?***

- 4.1 The Vision and Strategic Objectives do not appear to have had any regard to the development needs of neighbouring areas. ASL considers that the Council needs to demonstrate how cross boundary matters have been fully considered in the plan making process to underpin the Local Plan strategy.
- 4.2 Although Coventry City Council are yet to declare their unmet need figure, this issue should still be considered by NBBC. It is understood that the adoption of this plan should not be delayed for Coventry but NBBC could anticipate additional growth and reflect this through their housing requirement. If it is that the Inspectors find the plan sound, then at minimum, an early review policy should be considered.

## 5 QUESTION 24 – UNMET NEEDS IN NEIGHBOURING AREAS

*Does the Plan address/meet any identified unmet needs in neighbouring areas. If not, why not?*

- 5.1 Within the Draft Plan evidence base, there is no indication of how any identified needs in neighbouring areas would be addressed by the Plan. ASL considers that the Council needs to demonstrate how cross boundary matters have been fully considered in the plan making process to underpin the Local Plan strategy.



## 6 QUESTION 25 – GREEN BELT RELEASE

***Is it necessary for the Plan to consider the release of Green Belt land to meet identified development needs?***

- 6.1 ASL considers that the Plan should adopt a sequential approach to allocating land to meet identified development needs, in which land allocations in the open countryside should be considered if an amendment to the settlement boundary is required, before any amendment to the Green Belt is considered. Therefore, if further development is required, all available sites in the open countryside, including land at Galley Common, should be considered before the release of any Green Belt.

## **7 QUESTION 26 – RE-DESIGNATION OF FORMER GREEN BELT SITES**

***Is there a need to re-designate previously allocated sites as Green Belt? If not, is this decision supported by robust evidence?***

- 7.1 The Draft Plan proposes to de-allocate a number of sites that were removed from the Green Belt in the current adopted Local Plan; but does not propose to return these sites to the Green Belt. This approach leads to inconsistent Green Belt boundaries that are neither permanent nor enduring, and which do not create logical or natural settlement boundaries around Nuneaton and Bedworth.
- 7.2 ASL considers that, should these sites be ultimately de-allocated, this land should be returned to the Green Belt to create logical Green Belt and settlement boundaries, and to support a sound Local Plan policies map, spatial strategy and allocations strategy.

## 8 QUESTION 27 – DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

***Does the development strategy in general, and Strategic Policy DS3 incorporate sufficient flexibility within it? Particularly with regard to the potential for unmet housing and employment need arising from neighbouring areas in the future.***

- 8.1 ASL considers that the development strategy does not incorporate sufficient flexibility within it.
- 8.2 In relation to housing need, Draft Plan Policy DS3 states that 9,810 homes (545 dwellings per annum) will be delivered during the Plan Period (2021-2039), which is based on the 2022 Coventry and Warwickshire HEDNA and the Towards a Housing Requirement for Nuneaton & Bedworth paper ("THR"), also published in 2022. This sets a significantly lower housing target than proposed in the 2022 Preferred Options consultation (646 dpa) and does not consider scenarios where housing need may point to a significantly higher requirement as a result of economic growth, a lack of affordability, or via any unmet need from neighbouring authorities.
- 8.3 Each of these factors needs to be considered in order to inform the housing target and ensure the development strategy is sufficiently flexible to deliver the Plan objectives.

## 9 QUESTION 31 – SITE SELECTION PROCESS

***Is the site selection process clear and suitably robust, supported by the SA and other evidence, with particular regard to the proposal to not allocate some sites that are allocated in the adopted Plan?***

- 9.1 ASL does not consider the site selection process to be clear and suitably robust.
- 9.2 The Housing Land and Employment Availability Assessment (“HELAA”, 2023) forms the basis of the site selection process and provides an assessment of all sites promoted or assessed as part of the Local Plan process.
- 9.3 The HELAA considers the entire Galley Common site being promoted by ASL as a development site and does not consider the sensitive landscape-led masterplan proposed (as presented within the October 2023 representations), which would retain a large part of the site (where topography is steep and benefits from long range views) as a new area of green infrastructure, biodiversity enhancement and multi-functional amenity space. The illustrative masterplan (which was included within ASL’s October 2023 representations) has considered the landscape, visual impact and character of the wider site to create a visually enclosed and limited development platform that forms a natural extension to Galley Common. As such, ASL consider that the HELAA, and therefore the site selection process, has fundamentally ignored this context, and drawn incorrect and unsound conclusions in relation to the sensitivity and deliverability of the site.
- 9.4 In order to be considered suitably robust, these inadequacies of the HELAA would need to be addressed via an updated assessment which considers each site holistically with regards to not only what it can deliver in terms of built development but also the value it can provide via its non-built benefits (i.e. landscaping, tree planting, buffering, etc).
- 9.5 Alongside improving the reliability of the HELAA, the evidence base which underpins it also needs to be strengthened. Central to this improvement to the site selection process is the need for a review of the settlement boundaries. This settlement boundary review should be based upon a realistic assessment of urban capacity and promote a sustainable approach to development, supporting growth in the primary settlements (namely Nuneaton). To identify the most appropriate sites, this should also include a review of sustainable sites within the open countryside, to allow these to be considered prior to any Green Belt release.

## 10 QUESTION 32 – REASONABLE ALTERNATIVES

***Have reasonable alternatives been considered and clearly discounted on the evidence?***

- 10.1 ASL does not consider that any reasonable alternatives have been considered and clearly discounted on the evidence as part of the plan process.
- 10.2 The evidence documents which are needed to deliver a robust site selection process have either drawn incorrect and unsound conclusions, or have not been produced altogether.
- 10.3 In order to fully consider alternative sites before they are discounted, there needs to be an update to the HELAA which takes a more holistic view of the development potential of sites. This needs to be undertaken alongside a Settlement Boundary Review that considers the potential of (and any reasons for discounting) other development sites that have not been allocated within the Draft Plan.

## 11 QUESTION 33 – IMPLEMENTING THE VISION AND OBJECTIVES

***Would the policies in the Plan, taken as a whole, effectively implement the vision and strategic objectives?***

- 11.1 ASL does not consider that the policies in the Draft Plan would effectively implement the vision and strategic objectives.
- 11.2 In relation to housing, we do not consider that the policies in the Draft Plan are capable of delivering either the Borough's vision of "offering quality housing to meet all our residents' needs", or Strategic Objective 4 to provide an "adequate level of suitable housing".
- 11.3 The two Policies which are most capable of delivering these objectives are Policy DS3 (Overall Development Needs) and Policy DS4 (Residential Allocations). Both of these policies need to be reconsidered if the Vision and Objectives set out in the Draft Plan are to be achieved.
- 11.4 Policy DS3 needs to consider scenarios where housing need may point to a significantly higher requirement, owing to economic growth, a lack of affordability or unmet need from neighbouring Authorities. An increased housing target would be more effective in achieving the Vision and Strategic Objectives set out in the Plan as this would:
- support economic growth through further development investment into the area which would improve the Borough while providing employment opportunities for people working on the new developments (Strategic Objectives 1 and 2);
  - deliver sufficient housing to meet the needs of existing and new residents, providing not only greater market housing for the residents, but also providing increased affordable housing to help address the significant need identified in the 2022 HEDNA (Strategic Objective 4); and
  - contribute to the delivery of infrastructure and facilities in the borough, as ensuring a greater quantity of development that is deliverable, would provide more opportunities to receive associated infrastructure investments.
- 11.5 Within Policy DS4 (Residential Allocations), there are no significant 'new' strategic housing allocations in the Draft Plan, when compared to the adopted Local Plan. The carrying forward of allocations from the adopted Local Plan does not provide the quantum or trajectory of housing to meet the requirements of either the proposed Plan Period, or the Vision / Strategic Objectives. New allocations are required to support a balanced approach to housing delivery across the Plan Period and ensure that an adequate supply

of housing is provided to meet the identified needs, Vision, and Strategic Objectives. Additional strategic sites and an amendment to the settlement boundary should be considered ensure that the Local Plan is sound and the Borough's overall strategic development needs are met throughout the entirety of the Plan Period.

## 12 QUESTION 34 – VIABILITY & DELIVERABILITY OF DEVELOPMENT

***Is the overall level, pattern and distribution of development set out in the development strategy viable and deliverable in general terms?***

- 12.1 ASL considers it essential that a robust assessment of the availability, deliverability and viability of proposed allocated sites is undertaken to underpin the Local Plan. This is critical to understanding the deliverability of sites identified in the Plan, and to holistically consider the viability of the Local Plan overall. It will also ensure that unrealistic sites are not identified that would fail to deliver during the Plan Period.
- 12.2 The allocation of viable and deliverable sites, particularly where infrastructure can be delivered onsite, will be critical to the delivery of the package of infrastructure required to meet the overall needs of the Plan Period. Sites such as Galley Common, which can contribute to the improvement and expansion of existing infrastructure, are critical to ensuring that the Local Plan viably delivers the infrastructure that will meet the needs of the population during the forthcoming Plan Period.



## 13 QUESTION 36 – STRATEGIC POLICY DS6

***Is Strategic Policy DS6 consistent with national policy? In particular, part three which relates to Green Belt purposes and openness?***

- 13.1 Whilst ASL has no objection in principle to Strategic Policy DS6, we suggest that the wording of the policy or the supporting text should be extended to acknowledge that proposals for inappropriate development in the Green Belt should only be approved where it has been demonstrated that there are no non-Green Belt sites, including suitable, available and deliverable sites in the open countryside such as the Land at Galley Common, which are capable of accommodating the development.

## **14 CONCLUSION**

- 14.1 ASL considers that the Draft Plan in its current form is unsound – not being positively prepared, justified or effective. The proposed spatial strategy and land allocations are underpinned by an evidence based that has not been positively prepared and reflects a Local Plan that is driven by political pressure. The Plan is therefore contrary to the guidance set out in paragraph 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 14.2 To make the Plan sound, an increased housing requirement, based on a robust set of relevant and up-to-date evidence, is needed. In order to meet a larger housing target, additional sites will need to be allocated for development, including the land at Galley Common in Nuneaton, which is suitable, achievable and available for a development comprising a mix of market and affordable housing and community infrastructure.