

## **'DRAFT LOCAL PLAN SUPPLEMENTARY CONSULTATION' RESPONSE**

# **SOLIHULL COUNCIL LOCAL PLAN REVIEW**

## **LAND AT BERKESWELL ROAD, MERIDEN**

### **ON BEHALF OF L&Q ESTATES**

**TOWN & COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990 (AS AMENDED)  
PLANNING AND COMPULSORY PURCHASE ACT 2004**

**Prepared by: Pegasus Group**

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## CONTENTS:

Page No:

1.	INTRODUCTION	1
2.	SECTION 2 – BACKGROUND	3
3.	SECTION 3 - HOUSING REQUIREMENT AND CURRENT LAND SUPPLY	6
4.	SECTION 4 – SITE SELECTION PROCESS	9
5.	SECTION 11 - MERIDEN	12
6.	SECTION 15 – OMITTED SITES	13
7.	CONCLUSIONS	14

## APPENDICES:

Appendix 1: Site Location Plan

Appendix 2: Landscape and Visual Statement with Green Belt Review

Appendix 3: Representations Report to Draft Local Plan

Appendix 4: Vision Documents

Appendix 5: Un-met Housing Need and Duty to Cooperate Report

## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 These representations are made by Pegasus Group, on behalf of L&Q Estates (formerly Gallagher Estates) in response to the Solihull Local Plan Review (2015 - 2028) 'Draft Local Plan Supplementary Consultation' January 2019. This representation relates to land at Berkswell Road, Meriden where L&Q Estates has an interest (see Site Location Plan at **Appendix 1**). These representations should be read alongside the accompanying:

- Site Location Plan (**Appendix 1**)
- Landscape and Visual Statement with Green Belt Review (**Appendix 2**)
- Previous duly submitted representations to Draft Local Plan November 2016 by Gallagher Estates comprising of:
  - Representations Report, February 2017 (**Appendix 3**)
  - Vision Document, dated Feb 2017 (**Appendix 4**)
  - Un-met Housing Need and Duty to Cooperate (**Appendix 5**)

1.2 This evidence is provided, in association with previous representations to the previous consultation of the Draft Local Plan that took place between November 2016 and February 2017, namely as set out above as **Appendices 3, 4 and 5**. It is requested that the February 2017 Representations which at the time were submitted on behalf of Gallagher Estates, now L&Q Estates continue to constitute duly submitted representations to promote the allocation of land at Berkswell Road, Meriden for residential development.

1.3 These representations respond to the 'Draft Local Plan Supplementary Consultation Preferred Options & Policy Directions' consultation document and accompanying published evidence, having regard to the national and local policy context. Where appropriate, these representations provide a response to the specific questions set out within this document.

1.4 The representations are framed in the context of the requirements of Local Plans, including the Allocations document, to be legally compliant and sound. The tests of soundness are set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), paragraph 35. For a development plan to be sound it must:

**Positively Prepared** – providing a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet objectively assessed needs, and is informed by agreements with

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other authorities, so that unmet need from neighbouring areas is accommodated where it is practical to do so and is consistent with achieving sustainable development;

**Justified** – an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence;

**Effective** – deliverable over the plan period, and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters that have been dealt with rather than deferred, as evidenced by the statement of common ground; and

**Consistent with National Policy** – enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in the Framework.

- 1.5 These representations also give consideration to the legal and procedural requirements associated with the plan-making process.

## 2. SECTION 2 – BACKGROUND

### Duty to Cooperate

- 2.1 The Supplementary Consultation notes acknowledges that planning for an areas need should be taken at the 'Housing Market Area' level, and it is noted further that in this respect Solihull is one of 14 local planning authorities that is within (in whole or in part) the HMA that includes Birmingham and surrounding Authorities. It is also recognised that the housing shortfall for the HMA will be one of the key issues to be addressed through the on-going and legal obligation under the duty to cooperate (DtC).
- 2.2 Paragraph 26 of the Supplementary Consultation acknowledges that the Draft Local Plan tested a contribution of 2,000 dwellings towards accommodating the shortfall occurring beyond the Borough.
- 2.3 Paragraph 27 of the Supplementary Consultation sets out that the representations to the Draft Local Plan in 2017 demonstrated a clear expectation from other HMA authorities (and other interested parties) that (a) there is no clear justification why 2,000 was chosen as the figure Solihull would make towards the HMA shortfall and (b) there is opportunity to make a greater contribution.
- 2.4 Paragraph 28 of the Supplementary Consultation acknowledges that to inform the Duty to Cooperate the 14 HMA authorities commissioned the Strategic Growth Study undertaken by GL Hearn (SGS). It is noted that one of the aims of the study was to look at options that may be required however it is more pertinent to note that the SGS concluded that on the basis of the current evidence, provision of between 205,000-246,000 homes is needed across the Birmingham HMA to 2031; and of between 256,000-310,000 homes to 2036 (from a 2011 baseline) to meet the Birmingham HMA's housing needs. This is out with that two authorities, namely North Warwickshire and Stratford on Avon which fall within the Coventry HMA, have agreed to make proviso for Coventry's unmet needs.
- 2.5 In considering the supply of the Birmingham HMA as a whole the SGS set out that this needs to be added on top of the figures above which would result in a **minimum provision taking account of Coventry's unmet need of 208,000 dwellings to 2031 and 258,500 homes to 2036.**

- 2.6 The work undertaken as part of the SGS in considering Housing Land Supply across the HMA has concluded that there is a deliverable land supply of 180,000 dwellings across the HMA to 2031, and 198,000 dwellings to 2036 based on sites and supply currently identified. Paragraph 1.23 of the SGS sets out that **“Based on current supply assumptions and taking into account proposed allocations in the emerging plans, there is an outstanding minimum shortfall of 28,150 dwellings to 2031 and 60,900 dwellings to 2036 across the Birmingham HMA”**.
- 2.7 In order to accommodate the shortfall, the further work undertaken by GL Hearn established that even with increasing densities there remains a need to identify sites capable of supporting the delivery of **over 15,000 homes to 2031, and a total of over 47,800 homes to 2036**. Given the scale of the unmet need and the strategic nature of the Study, the SGS focused on considering a number of strategic options. The SGS considered a number of Growth Options with the identification of Areas of Search for strategic development which can be considered and assessed in more detail by individual councils though the preparation of Local Plans alongside further small and medium sized sites.
- 2.8 The SGS identified 24 Areas of Search for strategic development which include for the Solihull Borough Site 19 Land around Balsall Common for a New Settlement of around 10,000 to 15,000 homes and Site 22 Land South of Birmingham Airport & NEC for an Employment Led Growth Option. The 24 Areas of Search for strategic development are appraised within the SGS.
- 2.9 The results of the assessment concluded that each of the 3 Employment Led Strategic Allocations (namely North of Wolverhampton/i54; East of Birmingham and South of Birmingham Airport/NEC) perform strongly in terms of the assessment criteria and offer the opportunity for some residential development alongside employment.
- 2.10 In relation to the work that is undertaken to assess the New Settlements, the SGS concludes that new settlements should also form part of the solution to meeting the housing shortfall, recognising that whilst they will require significant infrastructure, they can contribute positively to meeting longer-term development needs against a context whereby a significant proportion of the HMA housing need shortfall relates to the period beyond 2031; and they provide the

opportunity to secure significant funding support from the Government given their scale and impact.

- 2.11 The Area of Search for South of Birmingham Airport/NEC – Site 21, is one of the 4 Areas of Search that the SGS considers perform the strongest and is recommended to be taken forward for future assessment as a New Settlement. Paragraph 10.30 of the SGS sets out that there are clear choices to be made regarding what weight in decision making is attributed to different factors which warrant joint consideration by HMA partners.
- 2.12 It is of note that paragraph 10.49 of the SGS sets out that due to the significant lead in time to deliver large strategic sites, given the requirement for technical work, masterplanning, establishing the policy framework, progressing planning applications, and bringing forward development and infrastructure which can take 10years +, there is a need to progress further technical and feasibility studies considering the potential for strategic development in these areas now.
- 2.13 The need to bring forward a mix in size and types of sites is therefore key to meeting local housing needs.

### 3. SECTION 3 - HOUSING REQUIREMENT AND CURRENT LAND SUPPLY

#### *Establishing the Local Housing Need*

- 3.1 It is noted that the Borough Council set out at paragraph 45 that it is prudent for the present consultation that the 2014 based household projections are used and that this is on the basis that the current consultation will confirm this position in early 2019. The publication of the revised NPPF has confirmed this position and accordingly we agree with the approach that Solihull have applied to establishing the Local Housing Need Figure.
- 3.2 We also agree with the manner in which the Borough Council has applied the 40% cap from the 621 dwellings per year based on the 2014 household-based projections.
- 3.3 Reference is given at paragraph 47 of the Supplementary Consultation to paragraph 60 of the NPPF which indicates that the standard methodology should be used to arrive at the Local Housing Need “**unless exceptional circumstances justify an alternative approach**”. It is noted at paragraph 48 that in calculating the Borough’s own needs, the Council does not believe there are any exceptional circumstances that justify a departure from the methodology. This is dealt with at Question 1.

#### ***Question 1: Do you believe that there are exceptional circumstances that would justify the Council using an alternative approach, if so what are the exceptional circumstances and what should the alternative approach be?***

- 3.4 it is considered that the Local Housing Need (LHN) figure of 767 dwellings per annum based on the 2014 household projections published in 2016 should be the minimum LHN figure and that there are clear exceptional circumstances to justify an alternative approach which takes into account economic growth as we have previously set out in representations to the November 2016 Draft Local Plan (**Appendix 3**). This is based on the significant economic growth that is to take place at UK Central Hub which includes the release of the Arden Cross land from the Green Belt (140ha of Green Belt land) as part of the HS2 Interchanges; Birmingham Airport and the Councils support for a broad range of ancillary and complementary facilities including hotels, car parks and other appropriate facilities needed to serve the needs of air travellers using the Airport; the NEC



and the Council's support to enable a broad range of developments to enhance visitor offer, diversify facilities and increase international competitiveness; Jaguar Land Rover and its planned expansion with the proposed release of approximately 94 ha of Green Belt land – Proposed Employment Site 20 and the Council's support within the emerging LPR to encourage the development of the Birmingham Business Park within its defined boundaries to support its role as a prime employment location and enhances its important role as a high quality, managed business park.

- 3.5 It is considered that the economic growth associated with the UKC Hub Growth Area should be reflected with a higher level of housing to support this economic growth and hence it is considered that UKC provides the 'exceptional circumstances' to deliver a higher level of growth above the 767 dwellings per annum figure set out in this consultation. The economic growth case has previously been set out in the representations to the Solihull Draft Local Plan (Nov 2016-Feb 2017) consultation as included for completeness as **Appendix 3** and **4**.
- 3.6 In relation to the Housing Market Area the Draft Local Plan (Nov 2016) included a commitment to accommodate 2,000 dwellings from the shortfall that is occurring in the wider Housing Market Area. Paragraph 49 of the Draft Local Plan Supplementary Consultation sets out that using the same contribution, the overall housing requirement to be addressed in the Local Plan Review would, using the standard methodology be 15,039 dwellings over the period 2018 to 2035, or 885 dwellings per year.
- 3.7 Paragraph 50 of the Supplementary Consultation sets out at paragraph 51 that this rate of development represents a doubling of the average rate achieved over the last 10 years which would exceed the highest number of net completions achieved in a single year since 2001. It is noted at paragraph 51 that this Supplementary Consultation has a focus on reviewing the proposed allocations and whilst commentary has been provided on how the standard methodology would be taken into account; this consultation is not seeking views on any potential addition that the Council may take towards the HMA shortfall.
- 3.8 Previous representations to the Draft Local Plan (**Appendix 3**) set out at that time that a range of 20,000 to 24,000 dwellings would be required to be provided

over the plan period to meet the demographic and economic needs of the Borough.

- 3.9 It should be noted that the above figures do not incorporate any additional economic uplift to take into account the UKC initiative as set out above (or the suggested proposal within the SGS for an Employment Led Strategic Allocation in the same vicinity of Birmingham Airport and the NEC) which will deliver additional employment growth to the Borough on top of growth based on past trends.
- 3.10 Within these previous representations concerns were raised in relation to the underestimation of job likely to be created from UKC and accordingly that insufficient homes are provided in the LPR to meet the economic needs which could lead to commuting into the District and/ or business being dissuaded from locating in Solihull due to the lack of workforce available. It has also been set out in previous submissions that in relation to affordability that if all uplifts and proper employment figures are included, it will result in an increased dwelling requirement.
- 3.11 The economic scenario discussed in **Appendix 3** would lead to a significantly higher dwelling requirement than currently planned for in the LPR. Further submissions will be made in relation to this at the next consultation stage when it is hoped the Borough Council's position on Local Housing Need and the HMA will be clearer.

#### 4. SECTION 4 – SITE SELECTION PROCESS

4.1 The Borough Council set out at paragraph 63 that the vast majority of sites that have been put forward through the Call for Sites are sites located in the Green Belt.

##### Site Selection Process

4.2 The Draft Local Plan set out a sequential approach to direct growth to particular locations. Part of this process included setting an overall hierarchy and how the growth options identified at the earlier issue and options stage could contribute. Paragraph 65 of the Supplementary Consultation sets out that the hierarchy and site selection process have been further refined to support the present consultation and notes that all of the submitted sites have been assessed against it.

4.3 The site selection process is split into two steps, initially based on a 'site hierarchy' and secondly use of 'planning judgment to refine site selection'. The approach notes that it aims to test the appropriateness of sites rather than allocating numbers per settlement.

4.4 Clearly any judgement in respect of selecting sites needs to be objective, based on a clear and transparent methodology and applied consistently through the process. Any inconsistent judgements moving away from an objective assessment would not be robust.

4.5 The first step of the approach sets out a 'site hierarchy', using a scoring system of 1-10. Sites falling within 1-4 are considered 'Green' and should generally be considered suitable for inclusion in the plan. Sites scoring 8-10 are 'Red' and are considered unsuitable.

4.6 Sites between 5 and 7 however are considered to have potential, but the document notes that these are not 'impact free', and also notes that there is potential for these to impact on the purposes of the Green Belt. These potential sites are sub-divided as scoring 5 (potential inclusion – yellow) and 6 or 7 (unlikely inclusion – blue).

4.7 These 'potential' (yellow) and 'unlikely' (blue) sites then proceed to Step Two of the site selection process, which assesses against the refining criteria. The analysis in Step 2 is said to be used principally to confirm whether **potential**

**allocations (yellow) should be included as green or amber sites in the consultation, and whether 'unlikely' allocations (blue) should be included as amber or red sites in the consultation** (emphasis added).

4.8 The factors set out in Table 2 below identify the considerations that have been taken into account at Step 2. It is specifically noted that **higher performing sites in the hierarchy need more significant harmful impacts if they are to be excluded**, (emphasis added) and for sites not performing well in the hierarchy they will need more significant justification to be included.

FACTORS IN FAVOUR	FACTORS AGAINST
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SPATIAL STRATEGY.</li> <li>• ANY HARD CONSTRAINTS ONLY AFFECT A SMALL PROPORTION OF THE SITE AND/OR CAN BE MITIGATED.</li> <li>• SITE WOULD NOT BREACH A STRONG DEFENSIBLE BOUNDARY TO THE GREEN BELT.</li> <li>• ANY IDENTIFIED WIDER PLANNING GAIN OVER AND ABOVE WHAT WOULD NORMALLY BE EXPECTED.</li> <li>• SITES THAT WOULD USE OR CREATE A STRONG DEFENSIBLE BOUNDARY TO DEFINE THE EXTENT OF LAND TO BE REMOVED FROM THE GREEN BELT.</li> <li>• IF FINER GRAIN ACCESSIBILITY ANALYSIS<sup>38</sup> SHOWS THE SITE (OR THE PART TO BE INCLUDED) IS ACCESSIBLE.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NOT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SPATIAL STRATEGY.</li> <li>• OVERRIDING HARD CONSTRAINTS<sup>39</sup> THAT CANNOT BE MITIGATED.</li> <li>• SHELAA CATEGORY 340 SITES UNLESS DEMONSTRATED THAT CONCERNS CAN BE OVERCOME.</li> <li>• SITE WOULD BREACH A STRONG DEFENSIBLE BOUNDARY TO THE GREEN BELT.</li> <li>• SITES THAT WOULD NOT USE OR CREATE A STRONG DEFENSIBLE BOUNDARY TO DEFINE THE EXTENT OF LAND TO BE REMOVED FROM THE GREEN BELT.</li> <li>• IF FINER GRAIN ACCESSIBILITY ANALYSIS SHOWS THE SITE (OR THE PART TO BE INCLUDED) IS NOT ACCESSIBLE.</li> <li>• IF THE SITE IS IN A LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA THAT HAS A VERY LOW LANDSCAPE CAPACITY RATING.</li> <li>• IF THE SA APPRAISAL IDENTIFIES SIGNIFICANT HARMFUL IMPACTS.</li> </ul>

***Question 2: Do you agree with the methodology of the site selection process, if not why not and what alternative/ amendment would you suggest?***

4.9 The methodology that has been utilised for the site selection process has been considered in the Landscape and Visual Statement and Green Belt Review Paper included as **Appendix 2**.

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- 4.10 It is considered that there are inconsistencies in the Step 1 Assessment which has led to sites that should have scored lower being given higher scores.
- 4.11 The Landscape and Visual Statement (**Appendix 3**) considers the Strategic Green Belt Assessment (SGBA) approach as leading to inconsistencies when assessing settlement edge sites.
- 4.12 In addition, the consideration of 'Amber Sites' includes little new or additional detailed landscape analysis of the amber sites than presented in the summary sheets and again inconsistencies between the assessment of sites.
- 4.13 On the basis of the evidence contained within the Landscape and Visual Statement which includes a consideration of the landscape strategy for the site, as fully detailed within the Vision Document submitted in response to the Draft LPR in Feb 2017 (**Appendix 4**), it is considered that Land at Berkswell Road, Meriden (Site 197) should have been included in the Site Selection Assessment as a Green or Amber site as being a suitable site for residential development.
- 4.14 It is evident as detailed within the accompanying Landscape and Visual Statement that the methodology utilised in the site selection process has not been applied consistently and robustly across all of the sites that have been put forward.
- 4.15 The Landscape and Visual Statement that have been prepared also provides commentary on the inconsistencies that are evident in relation to the application and interpretation on the site assessment methodology on Green (proposed allocations) and Amber sites (sites currently been consulted on which the Borough Council consider to be the 'least harmful' of the omission sites).

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**5. SECTION 11 - MERIDEN**

5.1 Meriden has a good provision of local services to meet local needs as noted in the LPR.

***Question 30: Do you believe that Site 10 west of Meriden should be included as an allocated site, if not why not? Do you have any comments on the draft concept masterplan for the site?***

5.2 The proposed allocation of Site 10 is noted, and the indicative capacity of the site has increased since the DLR from 50 to 100 dwellings in the Supplementary Consultation. The site has a number of constraints and a comparative assessment has been made within the accompanying Landscape and Visual Statement (Appendix 2) between Site 10 and Site 197, Land south of Meriden (see **Appendix 2**).

## 6. SECTION 15 – OMITTED SITES

6.1 The Site Selection chapter explains the process the Borough Council has undertaken to assess submitted sites.

### **Amber Sites**

6.2 In relation to 'Amber Sites' these are set out as being the 'least harmful' sites which the Borough Council is seeking residents and stakeholders' comments on.

***Question 38: Do you have any comments on these amber sites, i.e. is it right that they should be omitted, or do you believe they should be included, if so why?***

See **Appendix 2**

***Question 39: Are there any red sites omitted which you believe should be included, if so which ones and why?***

6.3 Based on the inconsistency with the site selection assessment of sites that has been demonstrated fully within the Landscape and Visual Statements (**Appendix 2**) it is considered that there are three sites that should be removed from being assessed as Red sites and moved into Amber, namely land at Berkswell Road, Meriden.

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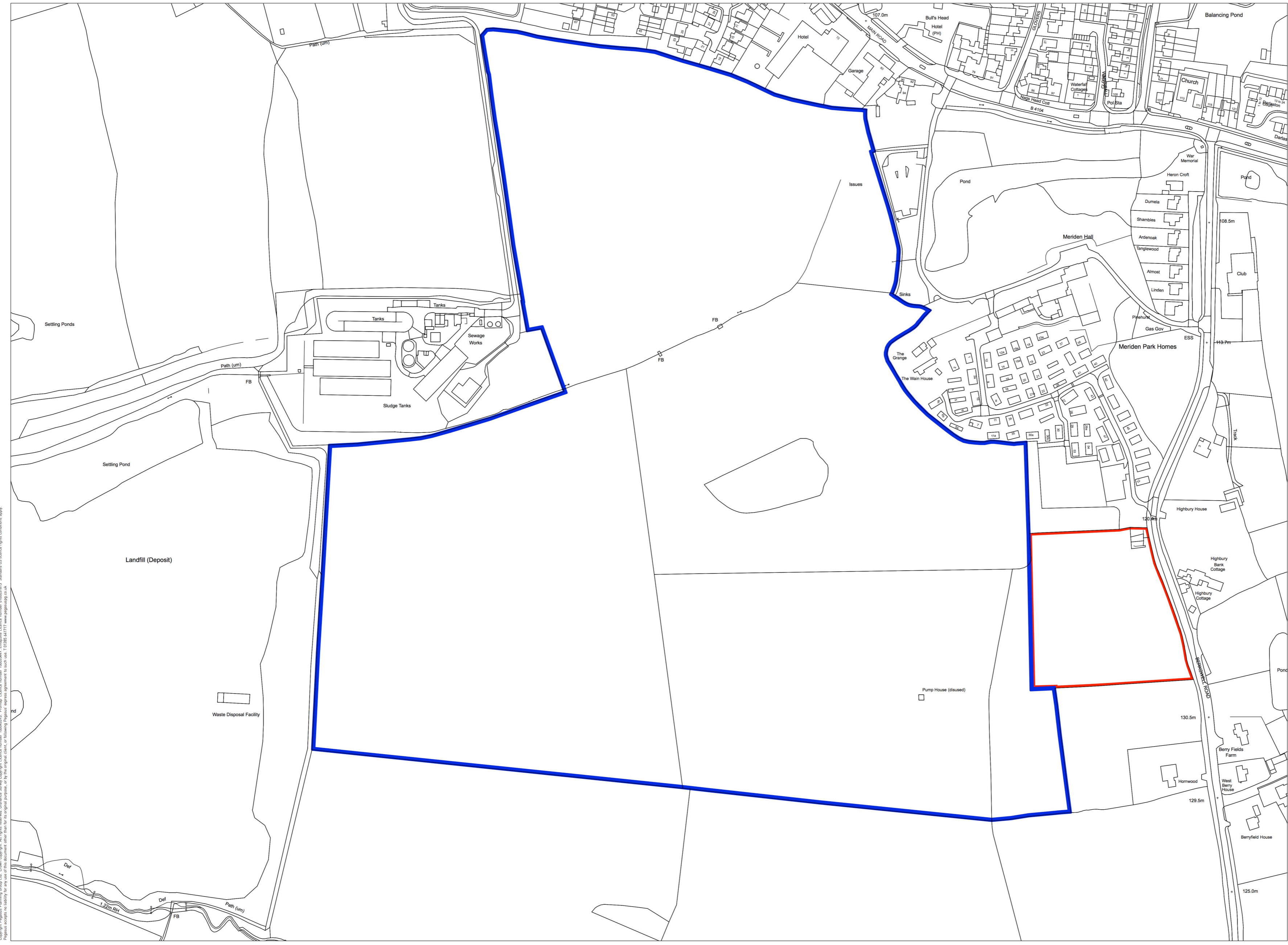
## 7. CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 L&Q Estates supports the Borough Council's decision to continue with the review of the Solihull Local Plan.
- 7.2 Land at Berkswell Road, Meriden is within the control of L&Q Estates and is developable and would contribute significantly towards meeting housing needs within the Borough. There are no known constraints that would prevent the site coming forward as proposed. The suitability of the site for development is fully detailed within the Vision Document previously submitted in February 2017 (**Appendix 4**) in response to the DLR. The evidence provided within the Landscape and Visual Statement and Green Belt Review (**Appendix 2**) demonstrated that in Green Belt terms the site is suitable for consideration as an 'Amber Site' or a 'Green Site' and should be reassessed objectively by the Council and considered as a suitable site for housing development. Land at Berkswell Road, Meriden would support the delivery of the Council's Preferred Growth Option that focuses development towards the most sustainable locations, including key rural villages.
- 7.3 L&Q Estates would welcome the opportunity to maintain a dialogue with the Council through the process of reviewing the Solihull District Local Plan.



## **APPENDIX 1**

### **SITE LOCATION PLAN**



# LAND OFF BERKSWELL ROAD, MERIDEN - SITE LOCATION PLAN



## **APPENDIX 2**

### **LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL STATEMENT: GREEN BELT REVIEW**

## **1. LOCAL PLAN REVIEW**

- 1.1. Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) adopted their current local plan, the 'Solihull Local Plan', in December 2013. SMBC is undertaking a Local Plan Review (LPR) to ensure that an up to date planning framework is in place that addresses potential issues.
- 1.2. The evidence base to the Local Plan includes several documents related to the strategic selection of sites and the Green Belt context to Solihull. These documents have informed the selection of strategic sites to be brought forward under the draft Local Plan.
- 1.3. Those referred to as part of this landscape and visual statement include:
  - Solihull Strategic Green Belt Assessment, Assessment Report (July 2016);
  - Draft Local Plan Supplementary Consultation (January 2019);
  - Draft Local Plan Supplementary Consultation: Site Assessments (January 2019); and
  - Draft Local Plan Supplementary Consultation: Amber Sites (January 2019).
- 1.4. Reference has also been made to additional sources of data and information, for example (but not limited to) Ordnance Survey mapping, aerial photography and landscape character studies.
- 1.5. Whilst Green Belt is not a 'landscape' policy as such, there is an inherent connection between Green Belt matters and those relating to landscape and visual issues, particularly in respect of considering landscape enclosure and defining the physical attributes of a landscape.
- 1.6. Principles related to the appraisal and assessment of landscape and visual matters are set out in the Landscape Institute (LI) and the Institute of Environmental Management (IEMA) Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition (2013)<sup>1</sup> and reference is made to this document as necessary.

## **2. TERMS OF REFERENCE**

- 2.1. In respect of the context set out above, Pegasus Group has undertaken a strategic review of an area of landscape located to the south of Meriden, at a point where the role and

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<sup>1</sup> Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition (April, 2013)

function of the Green Belt is paramount in protecting the openness of the wider countryside in this area and preventing further encroachment of the urban environment into the wider landscape.

- 2.2. The area of landscape under consideration is defined by the existing settlement edge of Meriden to the north and east; and countryside to the south and west.

### **3. GREEN BELT AND THE NPPF**

#### **NPPF**

- 3.1. The boundary between Solihull Metropolitan Borough and the adjacent area of Warwick District is broadly aligned with Birmingham Road and Main Road as it passes to the north of Meriden. Notwithstanding the administrative boundary, the landscape in this area is washed over by Green Belt, with Hampton-in-Arden, Dorridge and Knowle together, and Balsall Common further south-east, forming 'islands' of settlement pattern within the wider Green Belt coverage.
- 3.2. The Green Belt is at its narrowest where it forms a corridor between the settlement edges of Solihull and Knowle/Dorridge. The remaining Green Belt area is extensive, extending broadly down toward Leamington Spa. Across this area there is considerable variation in the character of the landscape, including variation in its inherent landscape value, and sensitivity.
- 3.3. The NPPF attaches 'great importance' to Green Belts. Section 13 of the NPPF (2019) addresses Green Belt matters, noting the fundamental aim of preventing urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. The Framework also notes that the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.
- 3.4. The Framework goes on to set out the long-established 'five' purposes of Green Belt, namely<sup>2</sup>:
  - to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
  - to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
  - to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
  - to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
  - to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

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<sup>2</sup> Para 134, NPPF (2019)



- 3.5. In respect of conserving and enhancing the natural environment, the NPPF states that plans should 'allocate the land with the least environmental or amenity value', noting the need to be consistent with other policies in the Framework<sup>3</sup>.
- 3.6. Overall the importance of Green Belt is clear, as are the connections to landscape and visual matters in respect of understanding the physical attributes, character and visual amenity of a given landscape.

### **Solihull MBC Landscape Character Assessment (2016)**

- 3.7. The 'Solihull Borough Landscape Character Assessment' (prepared by Watermans on behalf of SMBC) defines the character of the landscape in this area as 'LCA4, the Rural Centre'
- 3.8. LCA 4 is sub-divided into four sub-areas, the site is located within sub-area 4D. In respect of sub-area 4D, the character assessment acknowledges that the generally rural landscape has some smaller urban influences around the settlement edge. The LCA states that:
- 3.9. *"Red brick buildings and render are typical of the vernacular in the sub-area. Large ornamental gates are present particularly along Back Lane and seem incongruous with the rural landscape character."*
- 3.10. In relation to landscape sensitivity, the published assessment notes that this sub-area has clear legibility with a broad road network and consistent field patterns. It states that the landscape varies in condition from good to fair. There are a few detractors including electricity pylons to the north, construction noise and presence of HGVs to the west. Overall, the landscape character sensitivity of the sub-area is considered to be **high**.
- 3.11. In relation to visual sensitivity, the published assessment states that this sub-area consists of generally medium to short distance views that are medium level, wide and contained, deep and shallow, and horizontal and upward in orientation. Overall the published assessment considered the visual sensitivity of the sub-area to be **medium**.
- 3.12. The published character assessment states that the value of the area is considered to be **medium**.
- 3.13. In terms of landscape capacity, the published assessment states that this sub-area would typically have an overall **very low** landscape capacity to accommodate change. It states

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<sup>3</sup> Para 171, NPPF (2019)

that the sub-area would be able to accommodate very restricted areas of small scale new development, which would need to be of an appropriate type, scale and form, in keeping with the existing character and local distinctiveness of the area.

- 3.14. This forms a clear constraint to development and consequently the land cannot be considered as an area of 'the least environmental or amenity value'.
- 3.15. Other parts of the evidence base in relation to Green Belt utilise a 'red-amber-green' scoring system for sites. Further reference is made to the conclusions on landscape character in later stages of this landscape and visual statement when considering the Green Belt scoring system.

### **Solihull Strategic Green Belt Assessment (2016)**

- 3.16. This document sets out a strategic review of the Green Belt in Solihull. The document states that:
- 3.17. *"Once complete, this Assessment will form the basis for more detailed assessment of Green Belt land within the Borough. This more detailed assessment will include consideration of wider criteria including analysis of constraints, spatial strategy, site selection methodology and other policy considerations."* (Page 1)
- 3.18. The Solihull Strategic Green Belt Assessment - Assessment Report (July 2016) (SGBA) identifies a number of Broad Areas of Green Belt land. It also identifies a number of Refined Parcels, which adjoin or lie adjacent to built-up areas. The site is located within **Refined Parcel RP26 'Land south of Main Road, Meriden'**.
- 3.19. The SGBA scores RP's against the purposes of Green Belt, utilising potential scores of 0 to 3, with no weighting applied between the respective Green Belt purposes.
- 3.20. The numerical scoring applied in the SGBA is defined as follows:
- 0 - **does not** perform against the purpose;
  - 1 - is **lower performing** against the purpose;
  - 2 - is **more moderately performing** against the purpose; and
  - 3 - is **higher performing** against the purpose.
- 3.21. The Solihull Strategic Green Belt Assessment states that 'all purposes considered equal weight and consequently not able to rank against each other'. This suggests that, of the maximum 12 point scoring available, any sub-division of this should be weighted equally.

3.22. The assessment scores each Refined Parcel against four purposes of the Green Belt and in relation to BA04, it sets out the following:

GREEN BELT PURPOSE	BA04 SCORE
1 - CHECK UNRESTRICTED SPRAWL OF LARGE BUILT-UP AREAS	3
2 - PREVENT NEIGHBOURING TOWNS MERGING INTO ONE ANOTHER	3
3 - ASSIST IN SAFEGUARDING THE COUNTRYSIDE FROM ENCROACHMENT	3
4 - PRESERVE THE SETTING AND SPECIAL CHARACTER OF HISTORIC TOWNS	3
TOTAL	12

3.23. Overall the combined score for parcel BA04 identifies it as an area that is “higher performing” with an overall score of 12.

3.24. The BA04 has been assessed as a higher performing site generally due to its scale and the variation of the landscape across which this area of Green Belt washes over. The BA’s of a similar scale have all been scored as higher performing areas, the exception amongst the BA’s is BA01 that comprises two much smaller areas of land located to the south of Solihull that have been scored as a moderately performing area.

3.25. The site is located immediately adjacent to RP 26, a lower performing parcel of land adjacent to the edge of Meriden within the same LCA. The site shares many characteristics with the land within RP 26 including those settlement fringe characteristics that are influenced by both countryside and the development area. Additionally due to the scale of the site it has only a minimal effect towards maintaining the purposes of the green belt. If we were to score the site itself using the SGBA criteria the results would be as follows;

GREEN BELT PURPOSE	SITE SCORE
1 - CHECK UNRESTRICTED SPRAWL OF LARGE BUILT-UP AREAS	1
2 - PREVENT NEIGHBOURING TOWNS MERGING INTO ONE ANOTHER	1
3 - ASSIST IN SAFEGUARDING THE COUNTRYSIDE FROM ENCROACHMENT	1
4 - PRESERVE THE SETTING AND SPECIAL CHARACTER OF HISTORIC TOWNS	0
TOTAL	3

3.26. Overall the combined score for the site identifies it as an area that is “lower performing” with an overall score of 3.

Table 1, below, sets out a summary of the likely impacts on Green Belt purpose, in landscape and visual terms, using the criteria set out by the Solihull Green Belt Strategic Assessment when applied directly to the site and its immediate surroundings.



Green Belt purpose	Criteria	Summary
To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.	<p>Is ribbon or other development present?</p> <p>Is other development detached from the existing large built-up area?</p>	<p>There is some ribbon development present along Berkswell Road. The introduction of new development to the west of Berkswell Road in this location will not be uncharacteristic. Built development will not extend any further west than the existing built form to the north. On this basis, it is not considered that the proposed development will contribute to any unrestricted sprawl of built up area</p>
To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another.	<p>Does the area represent a 'gap' between major urban areas?</p>	<p>The nearest settlement is Berkswell which is located approximately 1.5km to the south. The site comprises an area of agricultural land on the south-western edge of Meriden and as such does not represent a 'gap' between major urban areas.</p>
To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.	<p>Is the area characterised by countryside?</p> <p>Does the area adjoin areas of countryside?</p> <p>Is ribbon or other development present within the area?</p>	<p>The area is broadly agricultural but is influenced by a number of detracting urbanising features, these include the quarry and sewage works to the west and caravan development to the east. The existing settlement edge of Meriden is also an influence. The proposed development is of relatively small scale, given the nature of the proposed development and its context, it is considered that it will safeguard the wider landscape from encroachment</p>
To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.	<p>Is the area within or adjoining a Conservation Area within a historic town? Are key landmarks or the historic core visible from within the area? Does the area contribute to the setting of the historic town?</p>	<p>The site lies outside of any Conservation Areas and is not located within a historic town.</p>

**Table 1: Impacts on Green Belt Purpose**

3.27. This analysis confirms that the scoring site itself would score the same as the adjacent of RP26.

3.28. If the site were removed from BA04 it would have no detrimental impact upon the area and would not result in any reduction in the function of the wider area. This can be checked against the SGBA scoring criteria as follows in table 2;

Green Belt purpose	Original score	Revised score removing site	Justification
1 - check unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	3	3	The BA would be clearly identifiable and the new Green Belt boundary would include a robust landscape buffer enclosing the existing and new development. In this area Meriden does not represent a large built up area and so development would not contribute to unrestricted sprawl.
2 - prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another	3	3	The BA would continue to perform as a strategic gap between major urban areas, including Birmingham, Solihull and Coventry.
3 - assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	3	3	BA04 will continue to safeguard the countryside from encroachment by the nature of its scale.
4 - preserve the setting and special character of historic towns	3	3	The BA will continue to include the Berkswell conservation area ensuring its setting is preserved.

**Table 2: Removal of the site from BA04**

3.29. From this analysis it can be considered that the site has a greater connection to the lower performing RP26 than it does the higher performing BA04, and that the exclusion of the site from BA04 will not be detrimental to the purposes of the Green Belt in this area.

### **Landscape and Visual Constraints and Opportunities**

3.30. Following both desk and field studies a number of landscape and visual constraints and opportunities have been identified. The constraints are considered to be:

- the local PROW network, including the Millennium Way recreational route (providing recreational opportunities for potential high sensitivity visual receptors); proximity to the listed Meriden Hall;
- the location of the site within the Green Belt, which will have some influence on the value of the local landscape; and

- the findings of the Solihull Landscape Character Assessment that identify the LCA within which the site sits as having generally very low capacity to accommodate change.

3.31. The opportunities are considered to be:

- Notwithstanding that the site is located within Green Belt, there are no overriding statutory landscape planning designations;
- Existing vegetation and green infrastructure throughout the site, including hedgerows, providing opportunities to enhance this through a comprehensive landscape strategy; and
- The opportunity to extend the existing woodland along the western edge of Meriden further south to provide enclosure to proposed development; and
- The opportunity to propose development within LCA Sub-area 4D in this location which is of an appropriate type, scale and form and in keeping with the existing character and local distinctiveness of the area, as set out in the Solihull Borough Landscape Character Assessment.

3.32. These constraints and opportunities have been used to guide the proposed development and analyse the site in terms of its performance on and potential impact on the purposes of the Green Belt (**as shown on Fig 4.1 of the Vision Document, February 2017**).

3.33. Due to the rural nature of the site, the visual constraints have been a leading factor in the development of the overall development envelope. The visual envelope is defined broadly as follows; from the north, by the built form and vegetation along the existing settlement edge of Meriden; from the east by the existing caravan development and mature tree cover along Berkswell Road and associated with Meriden Hall; from the west by the sewage works, quarry and associated vegetation; and from the south by the rising landform towards Berkswell. Views towards the more elevated parts of the site are likely from the wider landscape, including from the Millennium Way recreational route. These areas will however be viewed in the context of the existing settlement edge of Meriden. The lower areas of the site to the north are more enclosed, although retain a more 'parkland' character when viewed from the local public right of way network.

## **The Solihull Local Plan Review, Draft Local Plan Supplementary Consultation document (January 2019)**

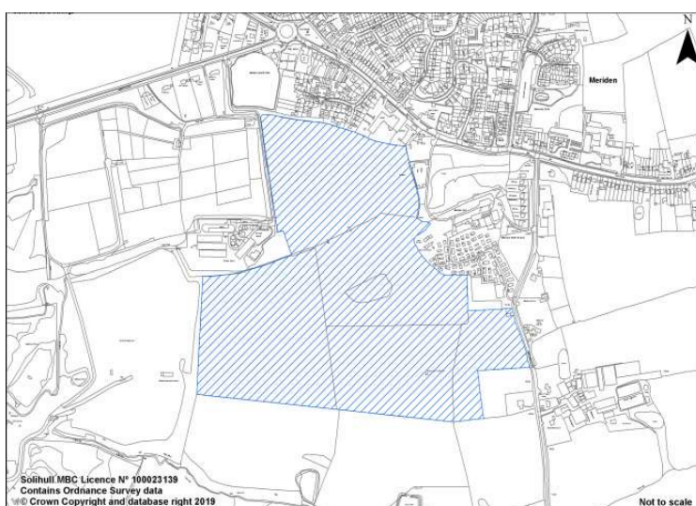
- 3.34. The Supplementary Consultation (including Site Assessments) is a non-statutory supplementary consultation to that undertaken previously for the Draft Local Plan (December 2016).
- 3.35. The site selection process of the Draft Local Plan (DLP) Supplementary Consultation is split into two steps, initially based on a 'site hierarchy' and secondly use of 'planning judgement to refine site selections'. The approach notes that it aims to test the appropriateness of sites rather than allocating numbers per settlement.
- 3.36. Clearly any 'judgement' in respect of selecting sites needs to be objective, based on a clear and transparent methodology and applied consistently through the process. Any inconsistent judgements moving away from an objective process would be not be robust.
- 3.37. The approach sets out a site hierarchy, using a scoring system of 1-10. Sites falling within 1-4 are considered 'Green' and should generally be considered suitable for inclusion in the plan.
- 3.38. Sites between 5 and 7 are considered to have potential, but the document notes that these are not 'impact free', and also notes that there is potential for these to impact on the purposes of the Green Belt. These potential sites are sub-divided as scoring 5 (potential inclusion – yellow) and 6 or 7 (unlikely inclusion – blue).
- 3.39. Sites scoring 8-10 are 'Red' and are considered unsuitable.
- 3.40.** These 'potential' (yellow) and 'unlikely' (blue) sites then proceed to Step Two of the site selection process, which assesses against the refining criteria. The analysis in step 2 is said to be used principally to confirm whether **'potential' allocations (yellow) should be included as green or amber sites in the consultation, and whether 'unlikely' allocations (blue) should be included as amber or red sites in the consultation** (emphasis added).
- 3.41. The factors set out in Table 3 below identify the considerations that have apparently been taken into account at Step 2. It is specifically noted that **higher performing sites in the hierarchy need more significant harmful impacts if they are to be excluded,** (emphasis added) and for sites not performing well in the hierarchy they will need more significant justification to be included.

FACTORS IN FAVOUR	FACTORS AGAINST
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SPATIAL STRATEGY .</li> <li>● ANY HARD CONSTRAINTS ONLY AFFECT A SMALL PROPORTION OF THE SITE AND/OR CAN BE MITIGATED.</li> <li>● SITE WOULD NOT BREACH A STRONG DEFENSIBLE BOUNDARY TO THE GREEN BELT.</li> <li>● ANY IDENTIFIED WIDER PLANNING GAIN OVER AND ABOVE WHAT WOULD NORMALLY BE EXPECTED.</li> <li>● SITES THAT WOULD USE OR CREATE A STRONG DEFENSIBLE BOUNDARY TO DEFINE THE EXTENT OF LAND TO BE REMOVED FROM THE GREEN BELT.</li> <li>● IF FINER GRAIN ACCESSIBILITY ANALYSIS<sup>38</sup> SHOWS THE SITE (OR THE PART TO BE INCLUDED) IS ACCESSIBLE.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● NOT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SPATIAL STRATEGY.</li> <li>● OVERRIDING HARD CONSTRAINTS<sup>39</sup> THAT CANNOT BE MITIGATED.</li> <li>● SHELA<sup>40</sup> CATEGORY 340 SITES UNLESS DEMONSTRATED THAT CONCERNS CAN BE OVERCOME.</li> <li>● SITE WOULD BREACH A STRONG DEFENSIBLE BOUNDARY TO THE GREEN BELT.</li> <li>● SITES THAT WOULD NOT USE OR CREATE A STRONG DEFENSIBLE BOUNDARY TO DEFINE THE EXTENT OF LAND TO BE REMOVED FROM THE GREEN BELT.</li> <li>● IF FINER GRAIN ACCESSIBILITY ANALYSIS SHOWS THE SITE (OR THE PART TO BE INCLUDED) IS NOT ACCESSIBLE.</li> <li>● IF THE SITE IS IN A LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA THAT HAS A VERY LOW LANDSCAPE CAPACITY RATING.</li> <li>● IF THE SA APPRAISAL IDENTIFIES SIGNIFICANT HARMFUL IMPACTS.</li> </ul>

**Table 3: Step 2 Refinement Criteria**

***Site reference 197 (Land south of Meriden)***

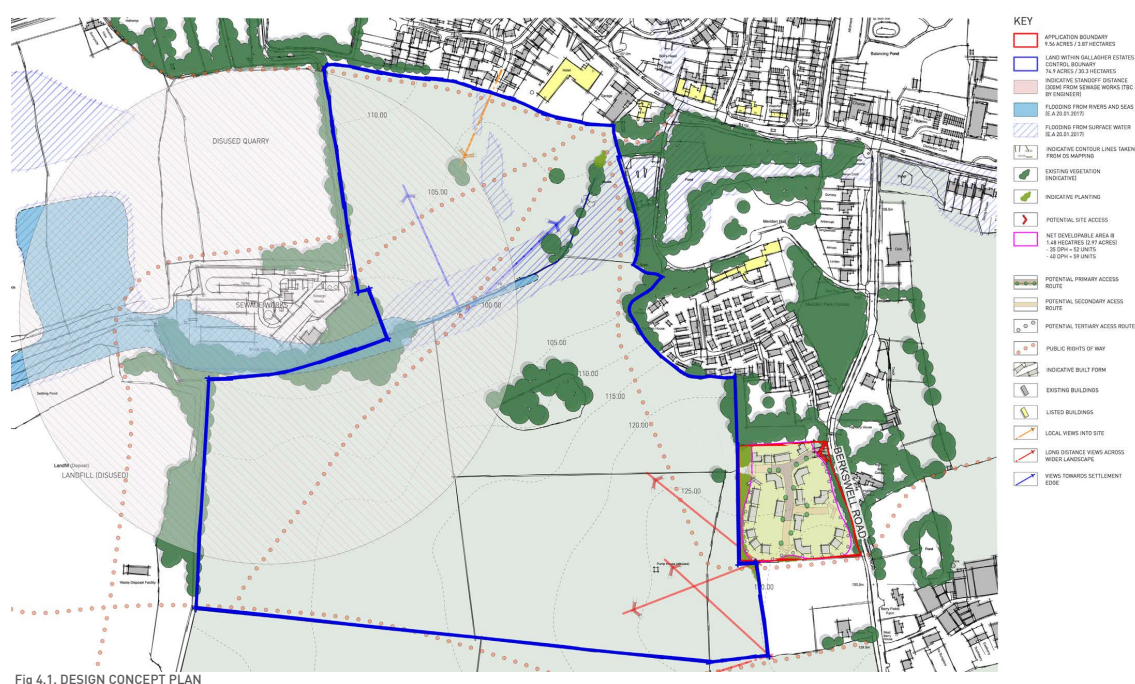
- 3.42. The site is identified as site reference 197 in the Supplementary Consultation Site Assessments. The assessment has wrongly placed the site in BA05, another highly performing broad area. The site is located within BA04, which is also a higher performing site.
- 3.43. The Site Selection Step 1 is assessed as Priority 7 – “unlikely for inclusion’ with Site Selection Step 2 identifying the site as R – “not to be included in the plan”. This assessment is based on the much wider parcel (see **Plate 1** below) and that scale development would be a significantly greater expansion in an area with on low capacity.



**Plate 1: Extract from Draft Local Plan Supplementary Consultation document (January 2019) Site Assessments Site 197 (Land south of Meriden)**

- 3.44. The site is a much smaller area than that assessed in the site assessment document and as such constitutes a small scale development in line with the guidance of the LCA for this area which advises that whilst the *"sub-area would typically have an overall very low landscape capacity to accommodate change"* that it would *"be able to accommodate very restricted areas of small scale new development, which would need to be of an appropriate type, scale and form"*.
- 3.45. The smaller proposed site (see **Plate 2** below) was submitted in February 2017 within the Land at Berkswell Road Vision Document and remains part our submission in relation to the site. If this proposed site had been considered within the site assessment document, with an SGBA score of 3, lower performing parcel of green field land in an accessible location step 1 would have identified the site as Priority 5, potential for inclusion.





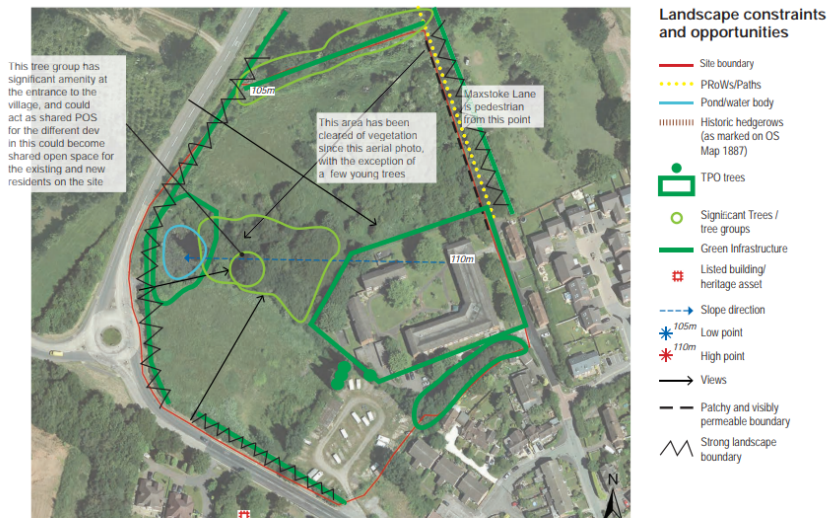
**Plate 2: Proposed Site (extracted from Vision Document Figure 4.1)**

3.46. Following this priority 5 rating, step 2 of the assessment would identify that the site is accessible would have defensible Green Belt Boundaries and could accommodate small scale development as deemed acceptable within the LCA guidance. This would allow the site to be brought forwards as a Green or Amber site.

3.47. Whilst there may be some evidence that the use of hedgerow field boundaries are less durable than more permeant infrastructure, the proposed new Green Belt boundary for site 197 would include a combination of existing vegetation and a robust landscape buffer along the western boundary of the site (as has been shown in the Indicative Masterplan provided within the previously submitted Vision Document **Appendix 4**).

**4. SOLIHULL DRAFT LOCAL PLAN SITE 10**

4.1. The Solihull Draft Local Plan (DLP) 2016 identifies Site 10 to the west of Meriden between Birmingham Road and Maxstoke Lane as a 50 unit allocation. The constrains of the site, included within the DLP, include areas of vegetation including TPO trees, water bodies and views from the public right of way (PROW) to the north of the site to the remaining woodland block on the site see **plate 3** below;



**Plate 3: Extract from DLP, Constraints and Opportunities for Site 10**

- 4.2. Original proposals for the 50 unit allocation contained development within the southern area of the site, retaining the northern area as open space protecting views from the PROW.
- 4.3. The concept masterplan for Site 10 within the current Supplementary Consultation document now indicated that the site can accommodate 100 units. This is adding a further 50 units to arguably the more sensitive area to the north of the woodland block a pond area. Of further concern is that to achieve this the 100 units will be at a density of 40+ dph, a high density for an otherwise semi-rural settlement. (See **Plate 4** below)

**SMBC Illustrative Emerging Concept Masterplan: Site 10 West of Meriden**



**Plate 4: Extract from DLP, Concept Masterplan for Site 10**

- 4.4. If the development area of Site 10's is extended to the north, it will extend the settlement edge further north-west beyond the line of existing development.



- 4.5. Additionally, this scale of development at such high density would appear incongruent with the guidance of LCA 4D which advises that the very low capacity of the area for change will accommodate very restricted areas of small-scale development.
- 4.6. Alternatively, the dispersal of development across two sites, the less sensitive southern extent of Site 10, and our small scale site at Berkswell Road would be more comparable to the LCA guidance by utilising smaller scale development sites that will more suitably balance the growth of the village. Furthermore, spreading the development across the two sites is likely to allow for more appropriate densities of dwelling for a settlement area of this semi-rural nature.

## 5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

- 5.1. This landscape and visual statement has been prepared in respect of land at ***Berkswell Road, Meriden***, and its classification in the Solihull MBC Draft Local Plan Supplementary Consultation (reference 197).
- 5.2. The site is located in the Green Belt, a matter which the NPPF attaches 'great importance' to, aiming to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. In respect of conserving and enhancing the natural environment, the NPPF states that plans should 'allocate the land with the least environmental or amenity value'.
- 5.3. As such there is an inherent connection between landscape and visual matters and Green Belt and a consequent need to give due consideration to matters of landscape character, sensitivity and value.
- 5.4. The published landscape character guidance for the Borough notes that the site is located within an area that is of ***high sensitivity***, with valued characteristics and very low capacity for development. The character guidance also notes that the LCA sub-area could accommodate very restricted areas of small scale new development, which would need to be of an appropriate type, scale and form, in keeping with the existing character and local distinctiveness of the area.
- 5.5. The visual and physical connection to the settlement edge and adjacency to the countryside are matters that are clearly evident from field work undertaken in the local landscape. Overall the nature of the local landscape character suggests that the environmental and amenity value of the area form a constraint to development that should be considered in any evaluation of the site.

- 5.6. A review of the Strategic Green Belt Assessment (SGBA) has assessed the site within BA04. The site lies adjacent to RP26 and the line drawn between the two appears to have been drawn following desk-based studies alone and forms an arbitrary boundary between areas with no defined features. Analysis of the site has determined that it shares many characteristics with RP26 and individually also is a lower performing parcel in terms of Green Belt function scoring 3 when assessed against the SGBA criteria.
- 5.7. Additionally, we have confirmed that the removal of the site from BA04 would not result in any reduction to the higher performance of the area within the purposes of the Green Belt. This is due to the very small scale of the site within the much larger BA04.
- 5.8. The Site Assessment Process has been undertaken on the wider site, which is acknowledged as being too large-scale for development in this area. The proposed site, submitted in February 2017 considers a far smaller site area in keeping with the guidance of the LCA. The smaller site, assessed as lower performing would identify the site as Priority 5, giving our site potential for inclusion.
- 5.9. If the site were scored as a lower performing parcel then it would become a site with potential for inclusion and therefore has potential for consideration as a Green or Amber site.
- 5.10. Furthermore, the existing Meriden allocation at Site 10 has been proposed to be expanded to 100 units. This extension to the development area would constitute a larger scale development that the LCA guidance advises the landscape has capacity to accommodate. Additionally, the proposed density is higher than appropriate for a semi-rural settlement area.
- 5.11. The opportunity to distribute development across two sites will generate a more appropriate balance of small-scale developments throughout the settlement of Meriden ensuring that scale and density are appropriate to the LCA.
- 5.12. The proposed Green Belt boundary (**as shown on Fig 4.1 of the Vision Document, February 2017**) would provide a robust and varied edge to the Green Belt utilising both existing vegetation and the creation of new landscape buffers.
- 5.13. In conclusion the site has been assessed in BA04 of the SGBA, but would sit as appropriately, if not more so, within the lower performing RP26. In this instance, the site could be brought forward, using the assessment criteria, as a Green or Amber site. If this was the case, the potential to utilise this site and Site 10 of the DLP to develop smaller residential areas of appropriate size and scale within the settlement of Meriden, which

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would be in keeping with the published Landscape Character Assessment making the site suitable for inclusion as an amber site.

## **APPENDIX 3**

### **REPRESENTATIONS TO THE LPR**

## **APPENDIX 4**

### **VISION DOCUMENT, FEBRUARY 2017**

## **APPENDIX 5**

### **UN-MET HOUSING NEED AND DUTY-TO-COOPERATE**