

Cheshire East Council (CEC) Local Plan Consultation Draft

Introduction

Stockport Council (SMBC) has made representations on the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy at various stages in its preparation, most recently to inform the resumed Examination hearing sessions in September 2015. The purpose of this consultation response is to assess whether the issues raised at that stage have been resolved to the satisfaction of SMBC in the current Consultation Draft version of the Plan

The key issues previously raised by SMBC in the resumed hearing sessions related to:

- The site selection process behind plan allocations;
- The processes for considering release of land from the Green Belt; and
- The need for additional transport work to be progressed to inform plan preparation.

Site Selection Process

SMBC agrees the methodology undertaken behind Plan allocations is acceptable as it considers available brownfield sites first, then non Green Belt sites and finally Green Belt sites. SMBC also agrees that the overall CEC wide need for employment land over the plan period has increased from a minimum 300 to 380 ha of employment land with an increase in housing between 2010-2030 from 27,000 to 36,000 dwellings.

The processes for considering release of land from the Green Belt

The Inspector has previously commented that the revised Green Belt Assessment undertaken by Arup in 2015 for CEC (documents PS E034 and PS E034a) *“seems to reflect national policy and address most of the shortcomings of the previous Green Belt assessment. It provides a set of more comprehensive and proportionate evidence to inform, rather than determine, where the release of Green Belt land may be necessary at the site-selection stage...”* (Inspector’s Further Interim Views (RE A021) paragraph 46).

SMBC agrees that the methodology undertaken in the Arup study correctly assesses the available sites; with brownfield sites being considered first, then non Green Belt sites and finally Green Belt sites. Again the potential for release is correctly assessed against a number of weighted wider planning criteria and other factors including site availability; market achievability; suitability; compliance with Plan Vision and Strategic Priorities; consultation with Infrastructure providers and wider consultation responses.

SMBC also agrees Exceptional Circumstances exist for release of Green Belt land, as required under paragraph 82 of the NPPF. These are the need to allocate sufficient land for market and affordable housing development, combined with the significant adverse consequences of not doing so, as it is not practicable to fully meet the development needs of the area without amending Green Belt boundaries.

In each case of Green Belt release it is stated that there are no suitable alternative sites that make a lower contribution to Green Belt purposes than the parcel in question.

Transport

Paragraph 7 of SMBC's response to the resumed hearing sessions covering Matter 4 (Spatial Distribution of Development) and Matter 6: (Other matters and issues 6.1a (i)) set out the key transport concerns held by the Council (RM 4.052). These have now been considered against the latest proposed modifications to the plan.

SMBC and CEC have also signed a Memorandum of Understanding on 26th February 2016 (RE F021) with both Councils agreeing to undertake a refresh of the SEMMMS strategy (with partners such as Transport for Greater Manchester) and SMBC remains committed to working with CEC to ensure that development, whether at individual sites or cumulatively, does not undermine the SEMMMS Strategy.

SMBC welcomes the further work undertaken by CEC in relation to the NCGV specifically on transportation matters and the commitment to jointly commission a refresh of the SEMMMS Strategy.

The NCGV Transport Topic Paper (RE F015) begins to identify potential mitigation measures in respect of the NCGV, however SMBC considers that discussions need to continue with CEC to ensure that the measures are viable / feasible and adequate to address previously expressed concerns. SMBC notes the topic paper's acknowledgement that there is a requirement for considerable mitigation but retains concerns in terms of the detailed nature of these measures and their adequacy.

The two authorities are currently in the process of agreeing a brief for the SEMMMS Strategy refresh and will provide updates to the Examination as the work progresses. However, SMBC's position remains that it is necessary for the refresh to have progressed at least to a position where there is reasonable certainty that viable/feasible solutions exist before the CEC Local Plan Strategy is adopted. Otherwise there might be considered to be a risk around the deliverability of the plan.

Both strands of the transportation work referred to above will be progressed alongside and taking account of the proposed Poynton Relief Road.

Conclusions

SMBC agrees that the site selection process and the release of sites from the Green Belt follow sound methodology in ensuring that the growth needs of Cheshire East are properly addressed.

SMBC acknowledge that it is in the interests of all reasonable parties for CEC to have a Local Plan in place as soon as possible. However, SMBC remains concerned that the agreed SEMMMS Strategy refresh work and work specific to NCGV need to be progressed at least to a position where there is reasonable

certainty that viable/feasible solutions exist before the CEC Local Plan Strategy is adopted.

SMBC will continue to work with CEC to ensure that the commitments in the Memorandum of Understanding are met.