

LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATIONS CAMBRIDGE CITY and SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE

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19 January 2017

Mrs Caroline Hunt
Planning Policy Manager
South Cambridgeshire District Council

Dear Caroline

South Cambridgeshire Local Plan Examination – Hearing Session relating to Policy H/9: Affordable Housing

The Inspectors have provided the following for your attention:

Following the hearing session held on 1 December 2016 (Day 35) at the Council's offices, I consider it appropriate at this stage to raise a concern with regard to Policy H/9: Affordable Housing.

Question (i) of Issue SC5B.3 referred to the requirement that any development that increases the number of homes on a site by 3 or more would have to provide 40% of those homes as affordable housing. The policy would therefore conflict with the Written Ministerial Statement November 2014 (as amended in March 2015) [WMS] which introduced a higher threshold of 10 units or less (and which have a maximum combined floor space of no more than 1,000 sqm) beneath which affordable housing contributions should not be sought. This element of the WMS was subsequently upheld by the Court of Appeal Judgement of May 2016¹ following a successful High Court challenge.

Notwithstanding the viability issues which were considered at the hearing, it will also be necessary in light of the Court of Appeal Decision to consider local circumstances.

It is acknowledged that the District encircles Cambridge in its entirety, has 106 villages and currently no market towns. Affordable housing need is dispersed across the District and part of this need can be met through small windfall developments in Group Villages where Policy S/10 of the draft plan allows windfall developments of up to eight dwellings within village frameworks. We are also aware that currently the low threshold allows many schemes that do come forward in the villages to provide affordable housing on site or through commuted sums. This helps to make affordable homes available for people who want to remain in their home village.

There is clearly a considerable need for affordable housing of nearly 10,000 homes across the plan period, including an existing need for nearly 3,000 homes at the start of the plan period. The

¹ The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government v West Berkshire Council & Reading Borough Council CI/2015/2559

Council has also estimated that the application of the WMS national threshold would have resulted in the loss of 95 affordable homes across the District in the last 4 years.

However, there is no evidence before us to demonstrate that the circumstances of South Cambridgeshire are significantly different from many other rural areas. It is evident that the problems of rural areas were considered during the drafting of the WMS which allows for a threshold of 5 dwelling units in designated rural areas and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. We are not aware of any such designations within the District. In such circumstances, the application of the threshold of 3 or more dwelling units across the District represents a substantial departure from the WMS. The figure for affordable housing delivery will therefore need to be revised downwards as a consequence of the changes to the national affordable housing policy in order to be consistent with the minimum thresholds in the WMS following the Court of Appeal judgement unless there are local circumstances which are sufficiently compelling to justify a departure from national policy.

We would welcome your comments with regard to this matter. It may be of assistance to you to review the relevant sections of the Inspector's report into the Cornwall Plan which is available via the Council's website.

Laura Graham and Alan Wood
Inspectors

I look forward to your response. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries.

Kind regards

Gloria Alexander

Gloria Alexander
Programme Officer