

NORTH SOMERSET SITE ALLOCATIONS PLAN EXAMINATION

HEARING STATEMENT- MATTER 3

EMPLOYMENT

ON BEHALF OF ANCHOR

MAY 2017

Pegasus Group

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PLANNING | **DESIGN** | **ENVIRONMENT** | **ECONOMICS**

MATTER 3 - EMPLOYMENT

3.1 Does the SAP provide for the distribution and delivery of employment land as required in CS Policy CS20?

3.2 Are Policies SA4, SA5 and SA6 in accordance with Government policy and the CS?

- i. Are there any employment sites within Schedules 2 or 3 which should be excluded or amended in order to make the Plan sound?**
- ii. In Policy SA6, what does the term “economic use” cover?**
- iii. Would the policies allow for an extension to an existing employment site such as Stowell Concrete at Yatton?**
- iv. Should more employment land be allocated at Nailsea in order to secure employment led development?**

Item 3.2 Headline Question - wording/construction of SA4, SA5, SA6 in relation to Government Policy

- 1.1 Bullets 4 and 5 of Policy SA4 are not effective.
- 1.2 The word ‘or’ needs to be added between bullet 4 and bullet 5 to indicate that if the test of bullet 4 is met, there is no requirement to consider bullet 5. If there is no realistic prospect of the land allocated in Schedule 2 coming forward, the effect on the loss of the land in question to planned supply is irrelevant. There is no need for a double test.
- 1.3 Further, bullet 4 should be amended as follows to be consistent with NPPF:22
 - *It can be demonstrated that ~~the planned B Class use is not suitable and that there is no realistic prospect of the site coming forward for its planned use~~*
- 1.4 Bullet 4 of SP4 should clarify the local tests that will be applied to this assessment, such as a specified period of unsuccessful marketing.
- 1.5 Bullet 5 of SP4 captures any degree of adverse impact on the range and quality of employment land. It is a very high test and one which should be amended to reflect NPPF:157, bullet 5 on the need for Local Plans to allocate land to promote¹ development² and flexible use of land. On this basis allocations are a promotional tool, yet the NPPF requires flexibility. Consideration of the significance of any

¹ Not ‘control’

adverse impact is therefore required. No such consideration within the terms of the Development Plan would be required on the basis of the current wording.

- 1.6 As per NPPF:22 there should be positive wording added to the bottom of SA4 in respect of the treatment of application satisfying the fourth and fifth bullets. NPPF:22 speaks of such applications being treated on their having regard to market signals and the relative need for different land uses to support sustainable local communities.
- 1.7 Policy SA6 present a different series of tests to bullet 4 and 5 of SA4. Consequently, the Council treats the loss of undeveloped land allocated for economic development uses different from land currently in economic development use. We see no such distinction in the relevant paragraphs of the NPPF. It is not clear for instance why SA6 introduces a marketing test for existing employment premises but does not raise this in respect of land that is promoted (allocated) for employment use. This is inconsistent. This is not justified, nor effective is not effective. This could be corrected by fusing the later parts of SA4 with SA6.
- 1.8 Even if this is achieved we would currently consider there to be a lack of effectiveness in respect of a lack of guidance in respect of the length of marketing period. This should be established in the Plan. Likewise, the phrase 'or other means agreed with the Council' is not justified and lacks specificity. The relevant tests should be established in the Development Plan. NPPF:154 requires 'clear' policies but as constructed SA6 is opaque.
- 1.9 As per our comments on SP4 we observe in SA6 terms such as 'not harm' (bullet 1) and 'not adversely impact'. We consider these to be too inflexible and direct the inspector to our comments in paragraph 1.6.

Question 3.2 (item i) Soundness of Schedule 2

- 1.10 Anchor considers that the allocation of 1.6ha of land at Gordano Gate is not justified within the Site Allocations Plan. The allocation is divided into two parts; one area between Sainsbury's, Homebase, Premier Inn and Wyndham Way and another at Harbour Crescent.
- 1.11 Anchors focus is the land at Wyndham Way but the planning history of the Harbour Crescent area is a clear demonstration the workings of the commercial land market in Portishead. Here a speculative building of office suites was constructed in 2008 but was ultimately unsuccessful in attracting occupiers and went into receivership.

A subsequent marketing exercise in 2013 was also unsuccessful in attracting any B-use investor.

Site Specific Marketing and Employment Space Availability

- 1.12 The land at Wyndham Way was originally safeguarded for B-Class employment uses in the 2007 Local Plan. Ten years on, the site is still no closer to being developed for B-Class Uses.
- 1.13 A planning permission for bulky goods retail (furniture store) was permitted in February 2013³ (following an earlier consent in 2010) and confirms the Council's acceptance of this land delivering uses other than B-Class uses.
- 1.14 The third paragraph of Page 4 of the delegated report for 12/P1255/ states that "Although traditional B1 office development on the site might have led to more jobs, it would seem, on balance that this is unlikely, given the length of time the site has been vacant, together with existing economic analysis for Portishead". This conclusion was based on the evidence submitted in support of the application, including marketing.
- 1.15 The permission has not been implemented because due to a business decision by the current owner that a furniture store would not be viable in this location and that the only viable option as a business would be to locate to Cribbs Causeway.
- 1.16 The enclosed **CBRE Marketing Report** (February 2017) confirms that they were instructed by the site owners in October 2013 to find new interest and subsequently commenced marketing of the site, using all the usual methods. Despite this, no purchaser wishing to invest in B uses has been identified.
- 1.17 The enclosed **Portishead Employment Space Availability Report by Hartnell Taylor Cook** confirms that, based on the existing market conditions, there is negligible demand for a site such as this one, due to perception of traffic congestion, compatibility with surrounding uses, site constraints and viability.
- 1.18 Furthermore, there are adequate existing buildings and consented sites available to meet 'occupier requirements'/demand to 2026. These occupier requirements/demand are based on past trends of up-take in Portishead which are a well-established indicator of what can be expected in the future.

³ Ref 12/P1255/O

- 1.19 The main driver for designating a site as safeguarded for B-Class Uses is to ensure that sufficient sites are available to provide jobs and contribute to the economy.
- 1.20 At present, and for the past 10 years since the allocation, the site has contributed nothing to the economy, and has provided no jobs. The marketing evidence and assessment confirms that it is unlikely to do so within the plan period. The allocation as currently drafted should therefore not be rolled forward indefinitely. Anchor considers that a more flexible allocation, covering a wider range of uses, should be presented in the Plan.
- 1.21 The Economic Impact Assessment Report enclosed confirms an assisted living scheme is estimated to have substantial economic benefits. It estimates the following:
 - the proposal would provide an estimated 11-15 full time equivalent (FTE) jobs. Not only is this substantially more than the zero jobs that are currently provided on-site, or estimated to be provided should the site continue to be safeguarded for B-Class Uses, it is also potentially more jobs than may be provided for by certain B8 type uses under the existing allocation;
 - The proposal is estimated to provide an annual GVA contribution of £550,000-£714,000 per annum;
- 1.22 The Council's Economic Development team suggest that the site is suited for offices/light R&D and that there is demand for start-up units, or units of around 2,000 sq ft up to around 20,000 sq ft. However, the operation of the market demonstrates that the aspiration for a B use investor is just that. NPPF:154 requires Local Plans to be realistic.
- 1.23 According to Hartnell Taylor Cook whilst there has been recent uptake in Portishead, rents are half of what they used to be and it has taken other spec office schemes 10 years to fill, and therefore they question the confidence in the market to deliver a spec office development in this location.
- 1.24 Hartnell Taylor Cook also suggest that there is competition from the other North Somerset towns of which there is a good supply of land/floorspace at WsM, Clevedon and Portbury (if you want to be on the M5 corridor).
- 1.25 We therefore submit that the Site Allocations Plan relies on land coming forward for speculative business use development to 2026 where there is extensive

evidence that the 'B-use' market will not invest. The degree of limitation on the use of land at Gordano Gate is therefore not justified and the allocation will be ineffective delivering an aspired to outcome that is not realistic. On this basis, the safeguarding of the allocation is a not consistent with national policy re NPPF:22. Over allocation/control of land for 'B' uses will harm the realisation of other objectively assessed needs for development within North Somerset. Given the evidence pertaining to this area it is necessary to include greater flexibility in a site allocation policy pertaining Gordano Gate. A site allocation indicating the acceptability of a wider range of uses, with the optional inclusion of design parameters will positively enable sustainable development in this location.