NORTH SOMERSET SITE ALLOCATIONS PLAN EXAMINATION

MATTER 5

LOCAL GREEN SPACE AND STRATEGIC GAPS

POSITION STATEMENT

ON BEHALF OF

MOOR PARK (NORTH SOMERSET) LTD
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1. **Introduction**

1.1 This Position Statement sets out a brief response on behalf of Moor Park (North Somerset) Ltd (MP) to the Inspector’s questions in relation to Matter 5.

1.2 It should be read in conjunction with MP’s submissions to:

- North Somerset Site Allocations Plan Consultation Draft (April 2016) (MP1)
- North Somerset Site Allocations Plan Publication Version (December 2016) (MP2)
- Position Statements relating to other matters identified by the Inspector for consideration at the Examination.
2. **Issue 5.4**

*Has the identification of Strategic Gaps (SG) been the subject of SA? Have the proposed boundaries been tested? How would the SG perform in terms of tests for sustainability?*

2.1 There is no evidence that the identification of SGs has been the subject of SA. There is no reference to them, or their essential purpose to protect the open character of land between settlements, in the Sustainability Appraisal Framework Objectives (SD7, Table 1, page 10). The effect of SGs on the delivery of sustainable development is therefore untested.

2.2 The importance of subjecting the SGs to SA has been accentuated following the revisions to the Core Strategy adopted in January 2017. The Examination Inspector (Inspector Bore) found as follows in relation to the Core Strategy’s provisions for housing:

> Although the submitted policies which are the subject of this report have been changed to take into account the increased housing requirement, their wording is otherwise largely unchanged and this is the main factor that makes them unsound in the circumstances. Policies relating to development in settlements are couched in restrictive terms and there is insistence on development within settlement boundaries, which the Council has indicated will not (on the whole) be changed within the life of the plan. This would make it very difficult in practice to meet the raised housing requirement. It is necessary therefore to introduce some additional flexibility into the submitted policies. This must be enough to give the plan greater resilience and ensure that the housing requirement is met and a 5 year housing land supply is maintained, without substantially altering the nature of the spatial strategy embodied in the policies. (para. 28)

This will involve being more positive about sustainable development at each of the settlements, with less restrictive and more positive wording. It will also involve accepting a certain amount of development of an appropriate scale outside, but adjoining, the settlement boundaries which can come forward not only from plan-led allocations, but also through its MMs. While this may be a challenging prospect for some, it will enable the local planning authority to maintain influence over the location
of new housing development. If such flexibility is not built in to the plan, the outcome, less attractive from the Council’s perspective, will be a series of appeal decisions based around housing land supply arguments, with a consequent loss of local planning authority control. (para. 29)

2.3 The main modifications made by the Inspector introduced flexibility to the policies by allowing for housing development to come forward outside but adjoining settlement boundaries at Weston-super-Mare (Policy CS28), Clevedon, Nailsea and Portishead (Policy CS31), and the Service Villages (Policy CS32)\(^1\). He also deleted reference to the strategic gaps between the Weston Villages and Hutton and Locking since he took the view that such gaps and their boundaries were matters for consideration through the current Plan, but added a reference to green corridors.

2.4 Given their location, the proposed SGs pull in the opposite direction from the flexibility introduced by the Inspector into the revised Core Strategy policies specifically to promote a more positive approach to sustainable development at each of the settlements and to facilitate meeting the raised housing requirement. Since the SGs have not been subject to SA, and the SA does not include the objective to meet the growth requirements of the Core Strategy, the effects of the SGs on the sustainability of the Plan’s provisions has not been tested.

2.5 Although the Council has produced a Strategic Gaps Background Paper, as is clear from the document, its essential purpose has been to review the strategic gaps that were identified in the consultation draft plan published in March 2016 in response to criticisms of the approach used in their definition that were made through representations. As is stated in the Executive Summary, the review was undertaken in Summer 2016. It therefore predated the Core Strategy Inspector’s report and findings of the need for greater flexibility to deliver sustainable development outside the settlement boundaries at the main settlements.

2.6 The evidence base relating to strategic gaps is therefore not an appraisal of their sustainability. Moreover, it has not been informed by the provisions and objectives of the revised Core Strategy with the modifications introduced by the Inspector to introduce greater flexibility to enable him to find it a sound document. Those modifications have direct

\(^1\) Report on the Examination into the Soundness of the Consequential Changes to Policies CS6, CS14, CS19, CS28, CS30, CS31, CS32 and CS33 of the North Somerset Core Strategy, 8 November 2016, Appendix, CC-MM02, CC-MM04, CC-MM05)
consequences for the definition of strategic gaps in the SAP. However, the implications for the sustainable development provisions of the revised adopted Core Strategy have not been tested. As such, there is no evidence to confirm that the SGs as defined in the current Plan are compatible with the sustainable development strategy of the revised Core Strategy, and as such are sound.

2.7 There has been no robust testing of the proposed SG boundaries. The evidence in justification has been produced retrospectively in response to criticisms made in representations to the consultation draft plan. Moreover it pre-dates the revised provisions of the Core Strategy intended to facilitate the delivery of a greater quantum of sustainable development.

2.8 There is no testing of boundaries against the Core Strategy objective to allow for sustainable development outside settlement boundaries at the main settlements. There is a complete absence of consideration of different boundary options that exclude land immediately adjacent to settlement boundaries to allow for sustainable development opportunities in accordance with revised Core Strategy settlement policy objectives. Indeed, the only change that has been made in response to the review is to increase the restrictions through an extension of the designation between Weston-super-Mare and Hutton.

2.9 The SGs perform poorly in terms of tests for sustainability. Since they generally constrain land adjacent to settlement boundaries of the larger settlements (three of the five proposed designations restricting further growth at Weston-super-Mare), they run counter to the sustainable development strategy of the Plan to focus most development at the principal settlement in the district. The effect of the SG’s will be to preclude further development to the south of Weston-super-Mare, and therefore in locations where it is best placed to take advantage of the substantial investment in new physical, social and community infrastructure. Given that development to the west is constrained by the sea, to the north by higher land comprising Worle Hill and associated Worlebury Golf Club, and to the east by the M5, it provides very few sustainable development options for accommodating additional growth requirements.

2.10 The potential consequence is to direct more necessary growth to less sustainable settlements and locations of higher environmental sensitivity. Not only are such locations less well supported by social and community facilities, but the employment-led approach to
development which underpins the sustainable development strategy of the Core Strategy and with which the SAP must be in conformity, is less likely to be upheld.
3. Issue 5.5

Do the SG listed at para 4.52 of the SAP, and shown on the Policies Map deliver CS Policy CS19?

i Has the Council considered whether SG should be included around service and infill villages?

ii Are the SG between Locking and Weston s Mare, and Nailsea and Backwell justified?

iii Would it be necessary to amend the SG between Yatton and Congresbury if the need for a development of a medical centre within the SG was demonstrated?

3.1 Policy CS19 does not 'require' the designation of SGs. It simply allows for their protection to help retain separation. Whilst it identifies locations as 'appropriate for possible designation' (para. 3.242), it confirms that it is the responsibility of the SAP to identify them. This was endorsed by the Inspector Bore when considering remitted Policy CS19, who found there to be no need to revisit Policy CS19 since the Core Strategy did not set the boundaries of strategic gaps. (para. 45). It would therefore not be inconsistent with Policy CS19 if the SAP did not identify any strategic gaps having investigated possible locations for designation. In investigating possible locations through the SAP, it is now necessary to take into account the flexibility introduced to the strategic settlement policies to be more positive about sustainable development and to make them less restrictive (see para. 2.2 above). This will auger against designation in all but the most sensitive locations and where it is clear that normal policies of countryside protection will not suffice.

3.2 Delivery of Policy CS19 does not therefore require the designation of SGs. It simply requires investigation of locations for possible designation. Since the SAP has carried out such investigation, it is policy compliant. Moreover, as the Core Strategy makes clear, strategic gaps could be incorporated into the Masterplanning process (para. 3.242). Therefore, they do not necessarily have to be identified in the SAP.
3.3 The SG between Locking and Weston-super-Mare is not justified. The extent of the land included within the SG between Weston-super-Mare and Locking as currently designated is certainly not justified. Inclusion of such an extensive tract of land is contrary to the strategic objective to deliver sustainable development. By over-designating the land area included within this SG, it restricts employment-led development at Weston-super-Mare.

3.4 The area between Haywood Village, the Helicopter Museum and Weston Business Park is designated as ‘green infrastructure/setting’ on the Weston Villages Masterplan Framework that has been adopted as SPD². It is therefore already subject to policy protection as part of a strategic development framework for which it is to provide part of the open space requirements. It is not open countryside that is at risk from ad hoc development, and therefore does not require the protection of strategic gap.

3.5 The area between the Haywood Village, the Helicopter Museum and Weston Business Park is further protected by the safeguarded land for Final Approach and Take Off (FATO) of Helicopters that is identified in the Weston Villages SPD³. That cordon sanitaire benefits from statutory Development Plan protection by dint of Policy DM31 of the Sites and Policies Plan (Adopted July 2016). Policy 31 resists planning permission for development that would prejudice the safe operation of Bristol Airport and ‘other safeguarded aerodromes’, and provides as follows:

Parameters, including requirements for uncongested areas, associated with the flight activity of the Helicopter Museum will be addressed and integrated with development proposals at the Weston Villages in line with the Weston Villages SPD and expert guidance.

The safeguarded corridor to allow safe and environmentally acceptable flight activity at the Helicopter Museum is shown on the Policies Map.

3.6 There is therefore no justification for including land to the north of the Helicopter Museum within a SG. Moreover, Persimmon Homes has leased the land to the Helicopter Museum, which uses it for static aircraft museum pieces. It therefore has an urban function, comprising part of the green space provisions associated with the Haywood Village.

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² North Somerset Council, Weston Villages Supplementary Planning Document, Adopted June 2012, paras. 79-81
³ Ibid, para. 2.25
development. It is already adequately protected by statutory and non-statutory planning policies.

3.7 There is no justification for including land immediately to the south of Weston Business Park in a SG. As explained in MP’s Position Statement in response to Issue 3.1, Weston Business Park, including its land to the south, were historically part of Weston Airfield on which Haywood Village is now being developed. In physical and land-use terms, they are part of the urban area of Weston-super-Mare, a position that is now consolidated by development of Haywood Village. As is again outlined in response to Issue 3.1, in planning policy terms Weston Business Park is one of the Weston-super-Mare’s principal ‘existing’ and ‘proposed’ employment locations.

3.8 Land immediately to the south of Weston Business Park is sandwiched between the existing business park and Oaktree Residential Park. The land does not contribute in any way to maintaining the separation between Locking and Weston-super-Mare. A much wider swathe of land that lies further south-east between Oaktree Residential Park and Locking entirely protects the separation of Locking and Hutton from Weston-super-Mare and provides an appropriate and sufficient SG. If the land immediately south of Weston Business Park were to be developed, it would not encroach into the buffer of land between Oaktree Residential Park and Locking, which measures 592 metres at its widest point and 252 metres at its narrowest.

3.9 It is germane that, through the allocation of 5.3 hectares of additional land at Moor Park in Schedule 2 of the SAP, which it is assumed includes the undeveloped eastern part of the existing Weston Business Park site, the Council accepts that development in an easterly direction to the line of the A371 will not prejudice any gap between Weston-super-Mare and Locking. Land immediately to the south between the existing business park and Oaktree Residential Park, will not extend development further east beyond the A371 or the eastern limit of the business park.

3.10 The plans included at Annex 4 and Annex 5 to MP2 clearly demonstrate how development on the land between the existing business park and Oaktree Residential Park that is currently the subject of an application for outline planning permission⁴, would not reduce the buffer to the south east between existing development and Locking. It is further illustrated

⁴ Application Ref: 16/P/0329/O
on the plan on page 2 of the appended promotional leaflet *(Appendix 1_Moor Park_Promotional Leaflet)*. The plan on page 3 of the same leaflet, which reproduces the masterplan forming part of the application, demonstrates how the flood alleviation and sustainable drainage proposals associated with the scheme means that built development is curtailed well short of the eastern site boundary. As is illustrated on the plan on page 2, this enhances the green margin (within the red line area) around the east and south of the site, and clearly demonstrates that there will be no encroachment on any substantive gap between Locking and the Weston Business Park / Oaktree Residential Park.

3.11 A more detailed analysis of the gap between the existing business park and development to the south and Locking is shown on the appended drawings *(Appendix 2_Strategic Gap Analysis)*. This demonstrates that the gap, at its minimum distance, is approximately 252 metres. Development of land to the south of the business park would not compromise this distance at all.

3.12 The focus of the Council’s evidence base in SD13 is on the residual gap between Locking Parklands and Locking. At this point the gap is extremely narrow, little more than the width of the A371. As stated in SD13, this is the narrowest part of gap in terms of the distance between existing/proposed settlements, it reducing to approximately 50 metres between the land proposed for educational facilities at Parklands Village and Locking Village. Nevertheless, it is clearly deemed sufficient to maintain the separateness of settlements. As outlined in paragraph 3.11 above and confirmed by the Plan at Appendix 2, the gap between Locking and Moor Park to the west is five times as great.

3.13 With regard to the assessment of the SG between Weston-super-Mare, Locking and Parklands Village set out in SD13, it is considered to be flawed in a number of respects. The weaknesses are reviewed briefly below

**Location of land in relation to the settlements**

3.14 The gap that it is sought to protect is very extensive. Inclusion of much of the area is unnecessary to maintain separation between settlements, and for reasons outlined earlier in this statement, is both contrary to sustainable development principles and unnecessary to do so since the land is already adequately protected.
3.15 If a SG between Weston-super-Mare and Locking is necessary, then it need only relate to the immediate corridors between Locking Parklands and Locking and land east of the Oaktree Residential Park and Locking.

**Sense of the Gap**

3.16 There is little sense of gap between Haywood Village and Weston Business Park. The latter is perceived as part of the existing urban area of Weston-super-Mare from many locations. It is only to the east and south-east of the business park that the complexion of land use becomes rural and the two settlements become distinct.

**Sense of leaving or arriving at a settlement**

3.17 The sense of leaving Weston is at the Weston Business Park roundabout where the orientation of the A371 changes, and the complexion of land uses on either side changes from urban to rural. When approaching from Locking, the perception is that the Weston Business Park is the gateway to Weston since it represents a significant change in land use character from rural to urban business park and is seen in the context of the existing and new urban development to the north and west.

3.18 The Council’s assessment of the arrival and departure point from Weston-super-Mare is therefore considered to be incorrect. It is at the Weston Business Park roundabout, and this endorses their planning policy position that safeguards the existing business park and allocates additional land to meet Weston-super-Mare’s employment land requirements. This being the case, if the SG is deemed to be necessary, it is only appropriately applied to land south east of the business park since that is the point at which Weston-super-Mare ends.

**Sense of place, perception of the separate identify of settlements, actual and perceived proximity of settlements**

3.19 The Council’s assessment acknowledges the great significance of the part of the SG between Locking Village and Parklands Village owing to the very narrow gap between them (SD13, para. 5.6). However, it notes that the area south of Haywood Village is broken by areas of intervening development, including the helicopter museum/employment premises and Oaktree Park (SD13, para. 5.7).
3.20 The distinction acknowledged above reflects a difference in the character of land use. The area between Haywood Village and Oaktree Residential Park has a distinctly urban character and, for reasons outlined earlier, has been integrated with the urban area of Weston-super-Mare through the development of the urban extension at Haywood Village. It is only to the east of Oaktree Residential Park and south-east of Weston Business Park that the character of land use and settlement changes from urban to rural.

3.21 The village of Locking therefore has a separate identify from Weston-super-Mare, which the land between Haywood Village and Oaktree Residential Park does not. Locking village has a sense of place entirely distinctive from Oaktree Residential Park which has been incorporated into the urban development of Haywood Village.

Landscape setting of the settlements or parts of a settlement

3.22 The area between Haywood Village and Oaktree Residential Park has few landscape features and is dominated by built development. It therefore does not provide a landscape context for either Weston-super-Mare or Locking and has an urban rather than rural complexion. To the east is agricultural land with trees and hedgerows.

Distance

3.23 As adduced in earlier evidence, the gap to the east of Oaktree Residential Park and south-east of the Weston Business Park is five times greater to the nearest part of Locking than the gap between Locking Parklands and Locking. If the latter is sufficient to provide strategic separation, the former is more than adequate.

Topography

3.24 There is little distinction in topography between Haywood Village and Locking.

Vegetation

3.25 The area between Haywood Village and Oaktree Residential Park is largely devoid of vegetation. To the east are hedgerows along field boundaries.
Landscape character/type

3.26 There is a clear landscape distinction between land to the east of Oaktree Residential Park and south-east of Weston Business Park, and that between Oaktree Residential Park and Haywood Village.

Existing uses and density of buildings

3.27 None of the land between Haywood Village and Oaktree Residential Park is in agricultural use. This is acknowledged in the assessment which classifies the park homes site, helicopter museum and adjoining employment building as ‘adjoining’ uses (SD13, 5.16). This clearly endorses the urban complexion of the land between Haywood Village and Oaktree Residential Park.

Inter-visibility

3.28 There is direct and unobstructed inter-visibility between Haywood Village and the helicopter museum/Weston Business Park. To the extent that Locking Village is visible, it is perceived as a separate settlement nestling in more verdant surroundings beyond the foreground urban development comprising the hanger buildings associated with the helicopter museum/business park defining the urban edge of Weston-super-Mare.

3.29 The perception from Haywood Village is that the countryside begins to the south-east of the business park.

Overall Conclusions

3.30 For all of the foregoing reasons it is concluded that there is no justification for including land between Haywood Village, Weston Business Park and Oaktree Residential Park in the SG. It has an urban character and is perceived as part of the urban area of Weston-super-Mare, the edge of which is to the east of Oaktree Residential Park and south-east of Weston Business Park. This should be reflected in an adjustment to the settlement development boundary.
3.31 If there is any justification for a SG to maintain the separation between Weston-super-Mare and Locking, it should be restricted to the significant land area south of the A371, east of Oaktree Residential Park and south-east of Weston Business Park. If a 50 metre gap between Parklands Village and Locking is sufficient to constitute and maintain strategic separation, then a gap that is at least five times greater provides indisputable protection to Locking. There is no credible justification for including land between Weston Business Park and Oaktree Residential Park in the SG. It serves no purpose in maintaining the separateness of Weston-super-Mare and Locking. Moreover, in physical and land-use terms, it is already part of the urban area of Weston-super-Mare and is therefore inappropriately included in the SG and would be contrary to the sustainable development policies of the Plan to do so.
List of Appendices

1  Moor Park_Promotional Leaflet

2  Strategic Gap Analysis
“Moor Park: A locally distinctive mixed use development of new homes and businesses, designed to purposefully reflect historical, existing and future industrial and employment context.”

This leaflet has been produced because deciding the future of Moor Park is of importance to close-by neighbours along with the wider communities of Locking and Weston-super-Mare.

The leaflet sets out merits underpinning the validity of application 16/P/0329/0, these outweigh policy directives. North Somerset has insufficient identified housing land and these proposals can assist, most sustainably.

It proposes 115 homes and 4800m² commercial floor space with cafe, creche, offices, gym and a 60 bed hotel, wrapped around the existing Business estate.

contact: mail@cliftonemerydesign.co.uk

Existing entrance from A371

Proposed entrance from A371 (artist’s impression)

The application is ...

Job Creating
Complies with employment led strategy, min 1.5 jobs per home.
180 jobs created within walking distance of homes.
160 construction jobs on house building, 65 jobs constructing commercial properties.

Sustainable
Creating new jobs next to new homes.
Located between the two housing developments of Haywood and Locking Parklands Villages so contributing to their viability.
On Sustrans cycle route and major bus route.
All local amenities in easy proximity.
Utilising land unsuitable for modern farming and was previously built on.
Safeguards approx. 60 existing jobs.

Mixed Use
The estate is converted old airport buildings, no toilets/un-insulated/non compliant workplace standards.
Persimmon demolished the ex airport building to make way for Haywood Village.
For Moor Park, without the progress of both new housing/businesses, the existing business estate is not viable. It cannot realistically remain a safeguarded employment site.
This application is balanced & economically viable providing new homes and commercial together, preventing the estate falling behind local development.

Ideally Located
Adjacent to A371 and roundabout.
Strengthens natural synergy created between amenities offered at Haywood Village, Locking Parklands and Locking.
Contributes additional community supporting services.

Deliverable Now
115 homes hamlet sized development so can be completed quickly.
Existing major infrastructure is in place.
“A sustainable location; easy access to pretty much everything one needs for everyday”
The application area comprises:

A. Brownfield land; approx. 3 acres. Proposed housing on brownfield land, unusable today due to:
   - perceived nuisance from industrial uses to neighbouring Oaktree residents; and
   - its location makes it unviable for commercial use

B. Previous Airport Land; approx. 6 acres. Proposed housing on previously developed airport land, upon which the Coastguard (offices, store, yard) stands today, as evidence of its brownfield status

C. Brownfield land; approx. 3 acres. Proposed commercial uses, on previously developed brownfield land, adjacent to the A371.

The plan below shows the retained and improved Moor Park Business Estate approx. 8 acres, 115 homes (inc. 2 bed flats and 2/3/4 bed houses) and 4800m² commercial floor space with cafe, creche, offices, gym and a 60 bed hotel.

The lack of a 5 year housing land supply means that development boundaries are out-of-date and not to be regarded as a constraint on residential development. Recent Appeal decisions, for example at Sandford, have confirmed that.

It is part of the original airport that Persimmon Homes is developing now, on land that was classified as brownfield.

It is sandwiched between Oaktree Residential Park and Moor Park Business Estate.

It has been the subject of repeat representations to Council, at every opportunity, for the applicant site’s inclusion.

Strategic Gap

The Strategic Gap policy carries no weight at this time since the Site Allocations Plan is insufficiently advanced. In any event, it would be regarded as not up to date in view of the housing land supply shortfall.

Extensive wide swales, ponds and woodland have been specially designed to cushion open space near the site.

Noise - Unresolved

Environmental Officer’s report received Feb ‘17 so unresolved at time of printing. Council’s and applicant’s experts are collaborating on any noise mitigation.

The proposed land uses will not impinge on the Helicopter Museum’s existing amenity, future growth & success. Moor Park Business Estate’s current tenants are not adversely affected by spasmodic helicopter noise.
Moor Park’s successful regeneration from dereliction to employment today

Opportunities to...

Deal with water management: via a self contained scheme designed for the existing and proposed development to eliminate flood risk.

Upgrade Laneys Drove.

Continue the regeneration of Moor Park Business Estate to prevent its dereliction and keep jobs.

Provide homes to alleviate North Somerset Councils shortage.

The applicant site has the advantage over others that...

1. are without adequate infrastructure
2. have few local amenities
3. offer no additional local employment
4. harm sensitive environments.

February 2017