

Council's Response to Mr Meechan's email dated 22 November, 2018

Re: Site Allocation DR1 and the Green Belt Review parcel Assessment for DRO/GB/42

Introduction

- 1.1 This note sets out the Council's response to Mr Meechan's email to the Inspector in which he raises concern over the accuracy of the Council's response to a question posed by the Inspector earlier that day in relation to the allocation site DR1; and whether if it was accepted that removal of this site from the Green Belt reduces the strategic gap between Dronfield and Unstone Crow Lane then would that change the overall assessment score for this site.

Clarification

- 1.2 Mr Gartland provided a clear response to this question on behalf of the Council confirming that the south-eastern extent of the Green Belt Study parcel (DRO/GB/42) extends towards Unstone Crow Lane further than the nearest part of the existing settlement of Dronfield. Thus the parcel would, if allocated, diminish the gap between these settlements.
- 1.3 The information in the parcel assessment under purpose 2 for this site (DRO/GB/42) is therefore incorrect and this change would result in the site scoring Red against Purpose 2. Mr Gartland then went on to explain the reasons why the Council would, in all likelihood have come to the same conclusion in terms of proposing the site for release from the Green Belt. The implications of this change are set out below along with an outline of the approach the Council would have taken had the parcel assessment been accurate in the first instance.

Implications

- 1.4 The scoring of the DRO/GB/042 site as Red would result in this parcel not progressing to Stage C for consideration. This would then require the Council to consider any other better scoring (Amber) sites around Dronfield in the less sensitive (Green Belt Functionality Study) area. There are two such sites. These are DRO/GB/047A, Hallows Golf Club and DRO/GB51 and DRO/GB/52 combined) at Hilltop Way/Dronfield Bypass. Under the Green Belt Review methodology, these Amber sites would progress to Stage C Assessment.
- 1.5 The above sites (DRO/GB/047A; 051 and 052) were considered by Lichfields in the Green Belt Review Part B Stage C Assessment of Constraints. This was a high level, desk top assessment in terms of prohibitive, restrictive, limiting or availability constraints. DRO/GB/047A scored Amber and Green on all potential high-level constraints. DRO/GB/051 and 052 scored Red on restrictive constraints due to the absence of an existing access and Red in relation to availability constraints for the same reason.
- 1.6 At the point of conclusion of the Green Belt Study (assuming the removal of DR/GB/042 from Stage C), site DRO/GB/047A would be left for the Council to consider.

- 1.7 The Council undertook a more detailed assessment of the above sites and the results of this are set out at Appendix C of the Green Belt Topic Paper. DRO/GB/047A was ruled out for consideration on availability and deliverability within the Plan period reasons and scored Red. DRO/GB/051 and 052 were considered to be unsuitable for allocation on the basis that there was no evidence to support the provision of a suitable access and scored Amber.
- 1.8 The implication of the removal of DRO/GB/042 from the Stage C assessment therefore means that with the other, better scoring (at Stage B) sites being discounted, there would be no Green Belt sites allocated to the south of Dronfield in the area of the Green Belt where the Green Belt Functionality Study concluded that the Green Belt was less sensitive to change. This would result in the overall level of housing allocated at Dronfield being reduced and the housing need, attributable to the settlement not being met. Significantly, it would also result in a departure from the Local Plan's Spatial Strategy.
- 1.9 Under the situation set out at 1.7 above, and given that the Council is seeking to secure the sustainable development pattern associated with the Local Plan's proposed Spatial Strategy, it would have been appropriate for the Council to consider whether there were deliverable sites in the less sensitive part of the Green Belt, which performed better in terms of not compromising Green Belt purposes amongst those scoring Red in the Stage B assessment. As set out above, this would result in DRO/GB/42 being selected.
- 1.10 The Council considers that the exceptional circumstances related to the balance of harm to Green Belt Purposes against the desirability of the sustainable Spatial Strategy and delivery of homes in accordance with that Strategy are sufficient to justify the retention of the allocation. This is based upon the consideration of the extent to which the site fails to meet the Green Belt purposes for which it scored Red and the extent to which any such harm could be mitigated, for example, through landscape treatment. The Council considers that the site causes harm to Purpose 2 because the geometry of the site results in a corner of a field projecting into the area between Dronfield and Unstone Crow Lane, this could be adequately mitigated by the requirement for the allocation to include substantial planting in this corner of the site which would ensure no material intrusion into this gap between the settlements.
- 1.11 In summary, whilst the Council regrets the error contained within the parcel assessment for DRO/GB/42, it is considered that the proposed allocation remains justified for the reasons set out above.