

# HEARING STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF TAYLOR WIMPEY UK LTD (ID. A5098)

Shropshire Local Plan Examination Matter 3: Development Strategy

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## MATTER 3: DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

This statement has been prepared on behalf of Taylor Wimpey Strategic Land ('TW') in respect of their interests in 'Land at Cross Road, Albrighton'.

### *Issue*

*Whether the Development Strategy is justified, effective and consistent with national policy.*

#### **1. How do the strategic policies in the Local Plan accord with paragraphs 20-23 of the Framework?**

3.1 The Inspectors highlight aspects of national policy that relates specifically to the scope and content that should be covered by the strategic policies of the Local Plan. Paragraph 23 of the NPPF states that, amongst other things, strategic policies should, "... *include planning for and allocating sufficient sites to deliver the strategic priorities of the area...*" in line with the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

3.2 One of the key 'priorities' for the Plan is the delivery of affordable housing, as defined in Policy SP2 (criterion 3). As highlighted in their Regulation 19 Pre-submission response, and explained in their response to question 3 below, TW does not consider that the Plan is adequately addressing the affordable housing needs of the area during the plan period, despite clear opportunities to increase the delivery of affordable housing were the Plan to allocate additional sites in sustainable locations, including settlements such as Albrighton. On this matter, as addressed in the following section, the Plan is failing to deliver sufficient affordable housing, and so is not consistent with paragraph 20 or 23 of the NPPF.

#### **3. What is the basis for the overall spatial strategy and broad distribution of growth set out in Policy SP2? What options were considered and why was this chosen?**

3.3 TW has submitted representations to the Regulation 19 Pre-Submission consultation stage which raised soundness concerns regarding the approach taken to determining the overall scale of growth to be planned for up to 2038. This hearing statement therefore focuses on more recent evidence published by the Council in the Housing Topic Paper (HTP) [GC4i] which provides information on the Council's reasoning behind the scale and distribution of growth which forms the basis for the spatial strategy set out in the submitted Plan under draft Policy SP2.

### **Overall Strategy**

3.4 The HTP (at paragraphs 2.8-2.11) includes, under the section titled '*What is the Proposed Spatial Strategy for the level and distribution of residential development across Shropshire?*', some commentary that tries to explain the basis for the overall spatial strategy in the submitted Plan.

3.5 Part of this commentary (at paragraph 2.10) refers to paragraph 3.6 of the Plan as providing the explanation for draft Policy SP2. The HTP highlights the five separate factors provided in

paragraph 3.6 that the Council claims to underpin the draft policy. TW wishes to highlight a number of soundness concerns regarding these factors, as follows:

- *“b. Increase the delivery of family and affordable housing...”*

3.6 TW disagrees on this point. As TW has shown in evidence submitted to the Regulation 19 consultation (paragraphs 3.1.11-3.1.16) the housing requirement element of the spatial strategy does not sufficiently address the pressing need for affordable housing in Shropshire, which remains at 799 dpa as defined in the SHMA, Part 2, September 2020, Table 35 [EV097.02], or 17,578 affordable homes over the plan period (22 years). In addition, figures set out in SHMA Part 2 report (Table 37) show that recent delivery of affordable housing has averaged 343 dwellings between 2014 and 2019, or 21% of completions on qualifying sites. If this were to continue, then this would equate to 294 affordable dwellings delivered each year up to 2038, still less than 50% of the total annual affordable need. Rather than hiding behind the position that affordable housing need merely represents what ‘ought to be’ delivered [EV097.02, para 4.156] the Council should go much further in addressing the scale of need amongst households in the District as part of the spatial strategy. Similarly, the adoption of an ‘affordable housing target’ of 350 dpa, or 7,700 dwellings will do little to increase the provision of affordable housing in the area and not provide housing for families in need now.

- *“d. Support the diversification of our labour force” and “e. Support wider aspirations, including increased economic growth and productivity.”*

3.7 TW disagrees with both these points also. As shown by TW in its evidence submitted at the Regulation 19 consultation stage, the spatial strategy ignores recent trends on changes in the local dwelling stock (1,632dpa) and by basing a growth strategy at level below this trend ultimately risks undermining attempts to increase and diversify the workforce in the area and supporting wider economic growth aspirations locally.

3.8 Similarly, under the next section, ‘How was the Spatial Strategy for Shropshire arrived at?’, Figure 1 of the HTP provides a summary of the process following by the Council in arriving at the overall growth strategy within Policy SP2. Additional text is provided which seeks to expand on this summary, set out at paragraphs 2.22-2.53. However, this merely provides a summary of the timeline and the documentation that has informed the various consultation stages carried out by the Council, but with little explanation of the issues raised and outcomes of the consultation process. Consequently, the reader remains none the wiser as to the basis for the overall spatial strategy taken forward in the Plan based on the information provided in the HTP.

3.9 Based on the foregoing analysis, the explanation put forward by the Council as to the basis of growth strategy set out in draft Policy SP2 is not justified on the evidence or positively prepared.

### **Distribution of growth**

3.10 TW raised a number of soundness concerns at the Regulation 19 Pre-submission consultation stage with regards to the distribution strategy put forward by the Council (see paragraphs 3.1.41-

3.1.50). These soundness concerns related largely to the approach taken to the distribution of growth to centres, notably ‘Key Centres’. Having reviewed the new information set out in the HTP on the Council’s approach to distribution of development (see paragraphs 2.54-2.103), TW maintains its soundness objections to the Plan on this Matter. This is explained further below.

3.11 It is important to note that the distribution strategy taken forward by the Council has been driven, to a large extent, throughout the plan-making process by a ‘proportional split’ approach originally based on three broad categories (Shrewsbury; Market Towns and Key Centres; and Rural Area), but which added in ‘Strategic Settlements’ following the *Strategic Sites* consultation stage. Given the evolution of the approach, TW has prepared a summary of how the proportional splits have changed at the different consultation stages, based on figures taken from the various consultation documents and incorporating the breakdown in proportions presented in their Reg 19 submission (see Table 3.6 and 3.7). The figures are presented below (Figure 1):

Figure 1: Shropshire Local Plan - Proportional split in housing distribution, by consultation stage

	Regulation 18				Regulation 19			
	Issues and Options			Preferred Scale and Distribution of Development	Preferred Sites	Reg 18 Pre-Submission Draft	Reg 19 Pre-Submission Draft	HTP
Settlement Category	Option A (Rural Rebalance)	Option B (Urban Focus)	Option C (Balanced Growth)	‘Urban Focus’	‘Urban Focus’	‘Urban Focus’	‘Urban Focus’	‘Urban Focus’
Strategic Centre	25%	30%	30%	30%	30%	28%	28%	28%
Principal Centres	40%	45%	40%	24.50%	24.40%	24.40%	24.40%	24.30%
Key Centres				18%	18%	16.70%	16.70%	16.70%
Rural Area	35%	25%	30%	27.50%	27.50%	31%	26%	26%
Strategic Settlements							5.00%	4.50%
Preferred Housing Target				28,750	28,750	30,800	30,800	30,800
Source:	IO, question 4	IO, question 4	IO, question 4	PSDD, Table 2	PS, Section 3	R18PSD, Appendix 5	R19PSD, Appendix 5	GC4i, Figure 3

3.12 The data presented above highlights issues with the Council’s approach to determining the distribution of development which require further explanation. Notably, the Council’s preferred strategy (‘Urban Focus’) provides for 45% of the housing requirement to be directed to Principal and Key Centres. Nonetheless, TW observes that as the plan has progressed the proportional contribution of dwellings directed to the Principal and Key Centres has declined by 4% (or 1,232 dwellings) down to 41% at the pre-submission and submission stage (comprising 24.3% at Principal Centres, and 16.7% at Key Centres). This compares to the proportion of development to be directed to rural areas, which has increased (by 1%) from 25% to 26%. Whilst the separate percentage changes could be considered small, it represents a 5% adjustment away from the ‘urban focus’ preferred strategy identified under Option B at the Issues and option stage.

3.13 The primary reason for this ‘adjustment’ is the assignment of 4.5% of the housing requirement to the ‘Strategic Settlements’ (Former Ironbridge Power Station; and Clive Barracks, Tern Hill) following the Strategic Sites consultation held during July to September 2019, as shown in Figure 3 of the HTP. Given that the rural area proportion has increased, the assignment of growth to the

Strategic Settlement must therefore have been drawn from the Centres. However, the Council has provided no explanation or evidence as to why growth at the Centres (which are higher order settlements) should be reduced in proportionate terms, whilst growth in the rural areas (lower order and dispersed settlements) should be increased. Similarly, there is no explanation or evidence provided to demonstrate that this approach would be consistent with an ‘urban focus’ strategy and the policy objective (under Policy SP2) of, ‘...*maintaining and enhancing the role of Centres and supporting key services and facilities and maximise their economic potential...*’, including Key Centres. For example, has the Council assessed alternative options which would see a reduction in the proportion of growth directed to the rural area and open countryside and maintained or increased at the Centres? Without sufficient explanation or evidence being made available, the distribution strategy put forward by the Council is not justified or consistent with national policy (which requires plans to be underpinned by relevant, accurate, and up to date evidence<sup>1</sup>).

**4. Should Policy SP2 define the scale of development expected in the various urban locations and rural settlements?**

3.14 No.

3.15 Policy SP2 does not currently make explicit the scale of development expected in the various urban locations and rural settlements. This is generally consistent with national policy which only requires the Council to establish a housing requirement (singular) for their whole area<sup>2</sup> which they propose in Policy SP2.

**14. Is Policy SP7 positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy? How have the residential guidelines been derived? Do these policies duplicate parts of other policies?**

*Policy SP7 Managing Housing Development*

3.16 No, Policy SP7 is not positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy. TW has set out its explanation for why Policy SP7 is not soundly-based, with particular reference to criterion 3 of the policy, in its Regulation 19 consultation response (see paragraph 5.1.8-5.1.14).

3.17 To reiterate TW’s position, the Council is seeking (through criterion 3) to establish a ‘policy presumption’ against exceeding the residential guidelines set out in Appendix 5 of the draft Plan. However, the Council has not shown anywhere in its evidence that exceeding the residential guidelines in any of the settlements, including Albrighton, is likely to lead any adverse harm in planning terms. In any event, this is an issue that is best served and more appropriately addressed at the planning application stage in response to individual proposals. Criterion 3 is therefore arbitrary and not justified on the available evidence. In addition, the criterion is not positively

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<sup>1</sup> NPPF 2021, para 31

<sup>2</sup> NPPF 2021, para 66

prepared, because the policy undermines the requirement for strategies to seek to meet, as a minimum, local needs in a way that is consistent with achieving sustainable development.

- 3.18 In addition, as recognised in national policy<sup>3</sup>, plans and policies should contain policies that are written so it is ‘*evident how a decision maker should react to development proposals*’, and that policies should ‘*serve a clear purpose*’. However, the first sentence of criterion 3 states:

*“The residential development guidelines for settlements set out in Policies S1-S20 are a significant policy consideration.”*

- 3.19 This wording is a ‘statement’ and not a policy ‘criteria’ that assists the decision-maker in determining individual planning proposals. It is therefore not effective or consistent with national policy. Furthermore, TW considers that criterion 3 would introduce considerations that are already addressed under separate policies elsewhere in the Plan, and so its inclusion in the Plan is also unnecessary.

- 3.20 On this basis, TW maintains the view that criterion 3 is unjustified, inappropriate, and unnecessary, and should be deleted from the Plan.

*Residential Development Guidelines - How have they been derived?*

- 3.21 TW raised soundness concerns in their response to the Regulation 19 Pre-Submission consultation regarding the Council’s approach to establishing *Residential Development Guidelines* (RDGs) in the Plan for named settlements and other locations across the areas, with particular reference to Albrighton settlement (see paragraphs 4.1.2-4.1.18 of TW’s representations).
- 3.22 As highlighted above, TW notes the Council has published a Housing Topic Paper (HTP) which includes some commentary relating to the basis of the RDGs. This is most clearly stated at provided at paragraph 2.73 of the HTP, and some additional comment at paragraph 6.29.
- 3.23 Paragraph 2.73 of the HTP highlights that the RDGs were first consulted on at the Preferred Scale and Distribution of Development stage in 2017 [EV004.01]. The Council pointed to Appendix 3 of this document as providing evidence justifying the level of growth to be assigned to each settlement under the RDGs. TW cannot see any information in the 2017 consultation document that provides explicitly evidence to explain how the individual guidelines have been established.
- 3.24 TW further notes that paragraph 2.73 and 6.29 both refer to a number of ‘considerations’ that the Council claims has informed their decision-making. However, the explanation provides no further detail on this matter and neither does the HTP point to any specific evidence base to show how the RDGs have been derived.
- 3.25 It therefore remains unclear how the residential development guidelines have been derived. On this basis, the guidelines are clearly arbitrary given the Council has not adequately justified the

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<sup>3</sup> NPPF 2021, para 16

growth levels for the settlements. They also serve no clear purpose. Because of this, the RDGs are not soundly-based and so should be deleted from the Plan.

- 3.26 The arbitrary nature of the guidelines is further exacerbated due to a number of factors that have been ignored or given insufficient consideration by the Council in setting the guidelines, notably at Albrighton. The Council has assigned Albrighton with a guideline figure of 500 dwellings (see Figure 3 of the HTP). However, in line with the TW’s concerns highlighted above, the Council provides no clear evidence to substantiate this figure. These additional considerations are referred to in TW’s Regulation 19 Pre-submission response, but it is worth highlighting them here.
- 3.27 In this regard, TW has highlighted at least three other relevant factors that should be given greater consideration for allocating growth to Albrighton, but which have been largely ignored. **Firstly**, the potential to exploit the links to the RAF Cosford employment-led proposals which are in very close proximity to Albrighton (as detailed in paragraph 4.1.2-4.1.4 of TW’s Reg 19 response)
- 3.28 **Secondly**, past housing delivery since 2006 – the latest annual monitoring figures published by the Council<sup>4</sup> continues to show that Albrighton has delivered the lowest number of new dwellings of all the named settlements (Strategic Centre; Principal Centre; and Key Centres) in Shropshire (also see paragraph 4.1.7-4.1.8 and Table 4.1 of TW’s Reg 19 response). Set out below is completions data updated to the end of March 2020.

**Figure 2 Net Dwelling Completions in Shropshire, proportions by settlement - 2006 to 2020**

Settlement	Completions (2006/07 – % of Total Completions 2019/20)	Settlement Type	
Rural Area	5983	33.08	
Shrewsbury	4816	26.63	SC
Shifnal	1321	7.30	PC
Oswestry	1027	5.68	PC
Bridgnorth	763	4.22	PC
Whitchurch	604	3.34	PC
Market Drayton	557	3.08	PC
Ludlow	492	2.72	PC
Wem	441	2.44	KC
Ellesmere	418	2.31	KC
Cleobury Mortimer	309	1.71	KC
Minsterley & Pontesbury	272	1.50	KC
Broseley	219	1.21	KC
Church Stretton	216	1.19	KC
Highley	213	1.18	KC
Much Wenlock	129	0.71	KC

<sup>4</sup> Shropshire Council Authority Monitoring Report (AMR) Base Date: 31st March 2020

## REPORT

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Craven Arms	109	0.60	KC
Bishops Castle	108	0.60	KC
<b>Albrighton</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>0.49</b>	<b>KC</b>
Total:	18085	100.00	

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Source: (Table 9, 10, 11, and 12 - Shropshire Council Authority Monitoring Report (AMR) Base Date: 31st March 2020; doc. EV012); SC – Strategic Centre; PC – Principal Centre; KC – Key Centres

- 3.29 It is therefore entirely logical, given the available evidence, the housing target or guideline for Albrighton should be considerably higher than currently proposed. The lack of any clear consideration of these factors is symptomatic of the overall lack of clarity in the Council's overarching approach based on seeking to establish development limits that have been badged as 'guidelines'. The lack of evidential basis for the RDGS means the approach is not soundly-based (not justified). Without clear evidence being provided which shows how the figures have been derived, the Residential Development Guidelines should be deleted entirely from the Plan. If the RDGs are to remain part of the Plan, then the Council should revisit them in light of all relevant factors, not simply those relating to local need but also evidence in the context of wider-than-local ('strategic') needs and policy objectives.