

HEARING STATEMENT

Matter 3 – The Spatial Strategy
and the distribution of development

On behalf of Campfield Farms Ltd

October 2024

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1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1. This Hearing Statement has been prepared on behalf of Campfield Farms Ltd (Respondent ID803), and in respect of Matter 3 of the Ashfield Local Plan (ALP) Examination.
- 1.2. Campfield Farms Ltd is promoting development of Land off Cauldwell Road, Sutton-in-Ashfield ('the Site') for strategic scale development. The Site formed a draft allocation in the Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan (2020 – 2038) (November 2021) as one of two new settlements proposed within the draft spatial strategy. Draft Strategic Policy S7 (Meeting Future Needs – New Settlement: Land at Cauldwell Road, Sutton-in-Ashfield) comprised the draft allocation as shown on the draft Policies Map for a mixed-use New Settlement to deliver 1,000 dwellings. However, the proposed allocation was not carried forward to the Regulation 19 iteration of the ALP, and the submitted ALP does not propose the Site be allocated.
- 1.3. Matter 3 of the ALP Examination concerns the following issue:

Whether the Spatial Strategy and the distribution of development are justified, and can be accommodated without releasing land from the Green Belt? If not, do exceptional circumstances exist that would justify altering the Green Belt boundary?
- 1.4. As per our Regulation 19 representations, we do not consider the submitted ALP's spatial strategy is sound. It is not positively prepared, is not justified, and is contrary to national planning policy.
- 1.5. Our Regulation 19 representations raise a number of specific concerns in respect of the submitted ALP's proposed spatial strategy and allocations. We have sought to avoid repeating matters raised with these here.

1.6. It is recognised that the ALP reached the Regulation 19 stage before 19 March 2024. Consequently, under the transitional arrangement of the current NPPF (NPPF December 2023) the ALP will be examined in relation to the NPPF September 2023. References to 'NPPF' within this statement are to the NPPF September 2023, unless otherwise specified.

2 MATTER 3 QUESTIONS

Q.3.1 – Is the spatial distribution of development across the borough justified and what factors influenced the Spatial Strategy, for example physical and environmental constraints and the capacity to accommodate development?

- 2.1. A proposed new settlement at Land at Cauldwell Road, Sutton-in-Ashfield ('the Site') formed an important aspect of the ALP's proposed spatial strategy at the Regulation 18 stage ('the 2021 Draft Local Plan') incorporating delivery of c.1,000 new homes.
- 2.2. The 2021 Draft Local Plan was accompanied by Sustainability Appraisal ('the 2021 SA') (document CD.04).
- 2.3. The 2021 SA assessed the proposed preferred option (Option 10 – two new settlements with one in Hucknall's Green and one at Cauldwell Road with further moderate Green Belt release around Hucknall), as well as reasonable alternatives which had been identified. Such reasonable alternatives included Option 3 – dispersed development, which would later form the basis for the submitted ALP's spatial strategy.
- 2.4. The 2021 SA explained why Option 3 was rejected at the Regulation stage in Table 5.5, as follows:

"This option would rely on the development of smaller sites (i.e. sites of less [sic] than 500 units) dispersed across the District. This approach has not been selected as it does not represent an option which would best meet the identified housing needs and would result in sites coming forward in less sustainable locations.

“The small-scale nature of the sites under this option would not provide the economies of scale necessary to deliver infrastructure in the district in line with the identified vision in the plan. Furthermore, there would be inadequate opportunities to build on existing transport links, again due to the dispersed nature of the sites and their scale”.

- 2.5. Given the findings of the 2021 SA it is difficult to see how the dispersed development option could subsequently constitute a justified spatial strategy for Ashfield.
- 2.6. It is notable that the 2021 SA assessed Option 10 (the preferred option and one which included *inter alia* allocation of the Site) positively. There was no suggestion that this option, through which the ALP would have sought to have meet housing needs in full, would entail any form of fundamental harm to any environmental, social, or economic factors; or that there were any constraints which rendered it undeliverable. On the contrary, the 2021 SA found that the option would result in a range of positive effects.
- 2.7. There is evidently a potential spatial strategy, alternative to that proposed by the submitted ALP, which was found to have a number of positive impacts in relation to sustainability objectives, and would meet housing needs in full, which is available to the Council. Given this, the ALP cannot be justified in pursuing a spatial strategy which fails meet the community's development needs.

Q3.3 – Why was the submitted approach to disperse development chosen and is it an appropriate strategy having regard to reasonable alternatives?

- 2.8. The submitted ALP's spatial strategy is not considered to be appropriate having regard to the alternatives available – alternatives that, as set out in our response to Q.3.1 were capable of meeting development needs in full, and consequently would mean render the submitted ALP capable of being found sound.

- 2.9. Even if one were to take the view that element of Option 10 would be of undue harm to the purposes of the Green Belt, Option 10 could have been altered in such a way that loss of Green Belt land was avoided / minimised, and yet allocation of non-Green Belt strategic growth sites (such as the Site) still formed part of the spatial strategy. Even if this would still result in a shortfall of housing compared to needs, such a shortfall would be considerably less than the submitted ALP and with no additional impact on the Green Belt.
- 2.10. Please see our Regulation 19 representations, and in particular Section 3 of these, in which we have set out concerns vis-à-vis the submitted ALP's spatial strategy and the consideration of reasonable alternatives.
- 2.11. We would expect that the reason for the selection of the spatial strategy would have been informed by sustainability appraisal, given the importance of this in plan-making, as confirmed at paragraph 32 of the NPPF. However, paragraphs 5.5.80 – 5.5.84 of the 2023 SA read as simply reporting a decision reached by the Council in respect of the spatial strategy, rather than as justification for such an approach based on sustainability merits.