

Darlington Local Plan

Inspector's Matters, Issues and Questions for Examination

Response on behalf of Bellway Homes Durham

Matter 4 – Housing development

This Hearing Statement has been prepared by ELG Planning on behalf of Bellway Homes Durham who have a number of interests in Darlington. These representations relate solely to the Land at Elm Tree Farm (site 392) and responses have been made by others in relation to Bellway's other interests.

Q4.9. Is the proposed Elm Tree Farm housing allocation, with an indicative yield of 150 dwellings, justified? In particular:

a) *Would the development be suitably located in the context of policy SH1?*

Yes, it is considered that the development is suitably located in the context of policy SH1. As set out below, the site is located in a sustainable location on the north edge of Darlington and is within easy walking distance of a range of shops and services. In terms of the indicative yield, we consider that the site is capable of accommodating up to 163 dwellings, as illustrated by the current planning application proposals.

b) *Would the requirements of appendix B, along with relevant policies in the Plan, be effective in achieving sustainable development on the site?*

Bellway fully support the identification of Land at Elm Tree Farm (Site ref: 392) as a housing allocation under Policy H2 of the Darlington Submission Local Plan. Indeed, Bellway submitted a detailed planning application in 2018 following positive pre-application discussions with the Council. The planning application (ref: 18/00988/FUL) is for:

"Demolition of existing farm buildings and the erection of 163 no. dwellings, together with landscaping and other associated works"

Whilst, the planning application remains pending, all outstanding technical issues have been addressed and, as far as we are aware, there are no issues preventing the application from being positively determined at the next available planning committee other than the Council's reluctance to release sites in advance of the adoption of the Local Plan.

- Bellway Homes Durham raised a number of issues at Submission Draft stage over a number of the site requirements listed at appendix B and their consistency with the pending planning application where there are no outstanding technical issues. However, it does not appear that the Council have considered the representations as they have not provided a response in the Summary of regulation 19 representations and Council response (Document ref: PD07). As such, Bellway's response/suggested changes are set out in the table below for clarity.

Issue	Bellway Response	Suggested Change
Site Capacity	<p>The pending planning application is for 163 no. dwellings and as there are no outstanding issues it has been demonstrated that the site is capable of suitably accommodating the number of dwellings proposed. A copy of the latest proposed site plan can be found at Appendix A. Bellway would therefore request that policy H2 and the Housing Allocation Statement are updated accordingly.</p>	<p>Amend indicative site capacity to 163 no. dwellings.</p>
a.	<p>The pending planning application includes vehicular and pedestrian access from Sparrow Hall Drive and therefore complies with this requirement.</p> <p>It has been demonstrated through the planning application that the pedestrian and vehicle access from Sparrow Hall Drive is acceptable and there are no outstanding objections from the Council's highways engineers.</p>	<p>No change</p>
b.	<p>It is acknowledged that this requirement states, "<i>older farm buildings should be retained and converted where possible</i>" and whilst Bellway do not support this statement, they do acknowledge the flexibility it provides in the wording.</p> <p>However, the retention of the existing farm buildings has never been proposed by Bellway home since the schemes inception and nor has it been raised by planning officers at any point during the pre-application discussions or the determination of the current planning application itself.</p> <p>None of the existing buildings are designated or non-designated heritage assets, they do not fall within or near to a Conservation Area and they are of no historic interest in their own right. Indeed, there is no reference to the buildings within either of the Heritage Assessments that form part of the evidence base in support of the Local Plan (Document refs: SD29 & 30). There is also no reference to retaining the farm buildings in any of the Council's SHLAA assessments of the site. Indeed, in the Council's response to representations made at Preferred Options stage (Regulation 18) they acknowledged that the farm buildings hold no statutory protection but suggested that it is "good planning" to retain and conserve old buildings where appropriate. As such, the Council have acknowledged themselves that there is no planning policy basis or evidence base to require the retention of the buildings as part of any development proposals for the site.</p> <p>The former farmhouse itself is unremarkable and has been considerably altered and extended overtime. To the rear of the former farmhouse are a number of brick built and modern barns, none of which are of any particular merit. In addition, there are no consultation responses or objections from the Council's Conservation Officer or Historic England raising any issue with the demolition of the existing buildings as part of the planning application. As such, the pending planning application has already demonstrated that there are no good planning reasons for their retention and it is not something that has never been requested by the LPA themselves.</p>	<p>Remove requirement</p>

	<p>As such, this requirement should be removed from the Housing Allocation Statement to bring it in line with the pending planning application and evidence base.</p>	
c.	<p>The Green Lane historic track falls outside of the allocation boundary and will therefore not be affected by the development proposals.</p> <p>It is therefore unclear as to why this requirement is needed to make the policy effective.</p>	Remove requirement
d.	<p>Bellway do not agree with the Council's suggestion that the site is within an area of high landscape sensitivity. Indeed, the Council's own assessment 'Landscape Sensitivity of Potential Housing Sites' prepared by LUC (Document ref: SD31) concludes that the site is of medium to low landscape sensitivity. Development requirement d. is therefore inconsistent with the Council's own evidence base.</p> <p>The site is well related to the existing residential development to the south and east and is well contained with strong boundary tree and hedgerow planting which will be retained and enhanced as part of the development. The development proposals have also been designed to provide an area of open space along the western boundary which includes additional planting to ensure that the development delivers a biodiversity net gain. A detailed Landscaping Scheme (Appendix A) has been submitted with the pending planning application which provides details of the proposed additional tree and hedgerow planting across the site.</p> <p>It is therefore considered that the development proposals do not have an adverse impact on the landscape and no issues have been raised by officers during the planning applications determination in this regard.</p> <p>Moreover, the site is surrounded by the proposed Skerningham Strategic Allocation which will result in the site being entirely surrounded by residential development.</p>	Remove requirement
e.	<p>The pending planning application has been supported by a full suite of ecological assessments including a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, Bat Survey Report, Great Crested Newt Report and Biodiversity Net Gain Report. The conclusions and recommendations of the reports have been deemed acceptable and robust by the Council's ecology advisor.</p>	No change
f.	<p>The Elm Tree Farm site is not within the Skerningham Strategic Allocation as identified on the draft Local Plan Proposals Map and is subject to a separate site reference and Housing Allocation Statement. The delivery of the Elm Tree Farm site is in no way linked to Skerningham and as outlined throughout these representations, is a deliverable proposition for housing development subject to a pending planning application that is ready to be determined. It should therefore not be included within the Skerningham Masterplan Framework</p>	No change

	(Figure 6.1) and we object on this basis. The pending planning application for the Elm Tree Farm site will not affect or prejudice the delivery of the Skerningham Strategic Allocation.	
g.	The detailed proposals which are currently under consideration include a significant amount of open space within the site, including along the western boundary and central area opening up towards the attenuation basin. These areas will provide recreational opportunities for the residents of the proposed development along with existing residents in the wider area.	No change

Bellway would therefore request that the above amendments to the Housing Allocation Statement are made, to ensure that the policy is consistent with the pending planning application (which has no outstanding issues). This will ensure that the policy associated with the site allocation is effective and therefore sound.

As previous representations have demonstrated, the site at Elm Tree Farm represents a suitable, sustainable location for residential development, with no physical or environmental constraints that would restrict its development. Bellway fully support the sites allocation under Local Plan Policy H2. This is on the basis it represents an excellent, appropriate opportunity for the release of a sustainable site adjacent - and well related to - an existing residential area, which is capable of making a strong positive contribution towards the housing development required in the Borough within the first five years of the Plan.

Moreover, the scheme is significantly more advanced than the majority of other draft allocations and it has been demonstrated that the site is a deliverable proposition, with no outstanding technical concerns, that will help meet the market and affordable housing needs of the Borough in the short term.

c) Are the assumptions in the housing trajectory (appendix A) about the site justified, including that that 150 dwellings will be completed by 2036? Has the Council provided clear evidence that development will begin in 2022 and that 90 dwellings will be completed by 2025?

Bellway are very keen to get on site and the only issue holding that up is the granting of the detailed planning permission. The submission of a detailed planning application in advance of securing an allocation in the emerging Local Plan demonstrates Bellway's commitment to bringing the site forward at the earliest opportunity.

Subject to the timely granting of planning permission, Bellway would look to start on site as soon as possible and would envisage around 90 completions by 2024/2025.

For the reasons outlined above and within representations to earlier stages of the plan, the allocation of Land at Elm Tree Farm (site 392) for residential development is fully justified, consistent with national policy and therefore sound.

APPENDIX A:

PROPOSED SITE LAYOUT PLAN & LANDSCAPE SCHEME

