

INSPECTOR'S NOTE NO. 13: FURTHER SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSES TO ACTION POINTS

Thank you for the opportunity to respond on the above on behalf of Bellway Homes and Story Homes. Our residual concerns relate to housing land supply and development limits (for Bellway) plus the Great Burdon allocation (for both builders) as follows:

APFSQ1. Does the Council's response to AP14 about the number of planning permissions that have lapsed mean that any of the assumptions about housing land supply as set out in the Council's responses to (a) AP12 (plan period 2016 to 2036) or (b) AP13 (five-year supply 2021 to 2026) need to be changed?

Our assertions in earlier sessions of the EIP have been confirmed by the Council's data. The lapse rate is around 14% and it is not acceptable to simply say there is flexibility or a buffer already built in. There should be a lapse rate applied to the outline / detailed consents contained within the 5-year housing land supply (now said to be 1670 units – hence 233 units). The Council's reticence may well be because the supply is likely to drop close to or below 5 years, but that is even more reason for it to be applied and an accurate starting point established.

APFSQ3. Would the Council's proposed main modification to the housing allocation statement for site ref 20 Great Burdon, along with the proposed changes to the policies map, ensure that the Plan would be effective in securing an appropriately landscaped boundary with the rural gap and retaining the openness and green infrastructure functions of the green wedge?

Our clients have engaged positively with the Council in relation to the detailed boundary of the Great Burdon housing allocation. There has previously been a Statement of Common Ground agreed between the parties. We have also noted the proposed modifications to the Local Plan.

Point o) states that there is a need for a landscape buffer to the northwest to protect the Great Burdon Rural Gap but on the revised policies map the Rural Gap is along the River Skerne Corridor on the west of the site away from the proposed area of development. We think that the Council may actually mean that this is the Green Wedge amendment. This would tally as point p) refers to the Green Wedge but the description is in the west of the site where the Rural Gap actually is.

Since the last session of the Examination our clients have produced the two attached plans to clarify matters and for ease of reference for the Inspector and participants at the EIP session. The Green Wedge amendment should, in our view, specifically follow the gas easement referred to in an earlier session. The plans show how the landscape belt in between the gas easements could be appropriately accommodated to ensure that a sufficient gap can be achieved to meet the policy objectives. The revised boundary and masterplans would retain the openness and green infrastructure functions of the rural gap between Darlington and Great Burdon, as required by modified Policy ENV3 (A1). They also maintain the integrity and GI functions of the green wedge (A2). The allocation should consequently extend west to adjoin and dovetail with the revised Green Wedge boundary. The plans clearly demonstrate our suggestion, and we can elaborate further during the session, once the modifications are clarified and as required by the Inspector.

AP21 Development Limits

We have not seen any evidence of proper assessment of the development limits around Darlington urban area, only a methodology but no results or findings. There is no way of establishing why a boundary was drawn in the locality of someone's land or site, especially when sustainability is not in question and adjacent sites have planning consent. This remains of great concern to Bellway Homes and the Plan is unsound until it is rectified. We reserve the right to comment further.

James Hall, Barton Willmore 12/08/21