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Dear Sir/Madam

South Staffordshire Local Plan Review (2018 – 2039): Publication Plan Consultation (November 2022)
Land off Offoxey Road, Bishops Wood on behalf of Offoxey Road Limited

Introduction

Cerda Planning Ltd. has been instructed by Offoxey Road Ltd. (hereafter Offoxey) to prepare these representations to the South Staffordshire Local Plan Review Publication Plan (Regulation 19) consultation. Offoxey has an interest in land off Offoxey Road, Bishops Wood, hereafter the Offoxey site (SHELAA 2021 Ref. 096), a site immediately adjacent to the south-western corner of the settlement boundary.

These representations follow those made at the Regulation 18 (Preferred Options) stage and to some degree repeat points made at this earlier stage. Nevertheless, for completeness, the Regulation 18 representations are appended to this submission.

The representations are made in the context of the requirement for Local Plans to be legally compliant and sound. The tests of soundness are set out at paragraph 35 of the Framework. In brief, a plan will be sound if it is:

- a) **positively prepared**; providing a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet the area's objectively assessed needs; and is informed by agreements with other authorities, so that unmet need from

neighbouring areas is accommodated where it is practical to do so and is consistent with achieving sustainable development;

- b) **justified**; an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence
- c) **effective**; deliverable over the plan period, and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters that have been dealt with rather than deferred, as evidenced by the statement of common ground; and
- d) **consistent with national policy** enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in this Framework.

These representations continue to raise concerns with the plan's soundness. More specifically with the plan's strategy, both in terms of the overall level of housing growth proposed (particularly having regard to the scale of unmet need within the Greater Birmingham and Black Country Housing Market Area) and the distribution of homes within the plan area. Concerns are also raised with the Council's evidence base prepared to date, specifically in the robustness and fairness of the site assessment work which has informed the decisions made on the draft allocations.

To this end, these representations set out that in order for this plan to be adopted, it must be subject to main modifications to, amongst other things, increase the overall level of housing growth over the plan period and rebalance the equity of distribution by settlement. The nature of the district is such that further land must be released from the Green Belt to accommodate this additional growth.

Whilst such modifications will be subject to further consultation, we submit again at this juncture that the Offoxey site continues to represent a sustainable option to help address the identified deficiencies in the soundness of the plan through the delivery of around 80 new homes (including up to 30% affordable), plus other key benefits for the wider village of Bishops Wood in a highly sustainable location that both aligns strongly with the Council's aims of delivering sustainable housing growth and boosts the supply of housing that is deliverable within the early part of the plan. An assessment of the site's performance against key planning criteria is set out within these representations. Supporting technical work is also included.

In terms of the format of these representations, these are split into various sections which consider the following main issues:

- Site location and context
- Housing Need within the Housing Market Area
- The Spatial Strategy - Delivery from the proposed allocations;
- The Site Assessments;
- Green Belt
- Development Principles

- Conclusion and case for allocation of the Offoxey site.

The following documents are attached as appendices to this representation:

- Transport Appraisal
- Ecological Assessment (Phase 1)
- Flood Risk and Drainage Strategy
- Concept Plans
- Utilities Statement

Executive Summary

The significant issue of unmet need within the GBBCHMA poses a significant challenge for the HMA authorities. Only very limited progress towards solving the issue has been made to date. The recent collapse of the Black Country Plan and the emerging unmet need position arising in Birmingham City to 2042 compounds the problem further. Whilst the South Staffordshire Plan proposes a contribution to the unmet need based on a need identified in 2018, we assert that this level no longer represents an appropriate one on which to base a contribution.

Rather, we contend that the HMA unmet need position is worsening. The consequence of this is that South Staffordshire's contribution needs to grow proportionately at the very least.

There is, accordingly, a need for this plan to play its part in addressing this growing unmet need through the allocation of more homes, which for this predominately Green Belt authority, will mean the release of additional Green Belt sites to provide the certainty of delivery that is required.

The spatial strategy as presented acknowledges the suitability of Tier 4 settlements to accommodate housing growth but does not propose any allocations. Moreover it places a significant reliance on windfall housing delivery without any realistic prospect of that coming forward due to the Green Belt nature of the district.

We assert that the Offoxey site, to the south of Bishops wood, which by the council's own evidence is the most suitable site within this settlement to deliver growth (and indeed already has the benefit of a resolution to grant), can assist the council in proving a greater number of homes within the District through a proportionate extension on the southern edge of the village in a low performing Green Belt location. Beyond the new homes including those which are affordable, it can also deliver key benefits to the wider village, not least the infrastructure to make significant improvements to resolving existing surface water flooding issues to the north of the site and a new convenience store to improve the settlement's ability to sustain itself.

Site Location and Context

As set out above, the Offoxey site lies immediately adjacent to the south-west edge of the defined settlement boundary of Bishops Wood. More specifically, it lies to the north-west of the junction of Offoxey Road and Ivetsey Bank Road, with the rear gardens of existing houses adjoining the northern and eastern boundaries of the site. In addition, St. John's C of E First school, with access from Whiteoaks Drive, adjoins the north-western corner of the site. A private dwellinghouse, adjoins the southern boundary of the site. The site area extends to approximately 4.14 hectares (10.23 acres) and can be seen on the attached plan at the rear of these representations.

The site comprises the eastern part of a large field which is currently in use for arable cultivation and is contained in the main by low hedgerows along the highway boundaries and to the rear of the domestic curtilages and to the primary school. The boundaries along those edges of the site are in the main, as a consequence, robust and defensible.

In addition, the council will also be aware that part of the Offoxey site has already received a resolution to grant for 8no. affordable homes under 19/00952/FUL. It is by consequence a site which the Council finds entirely suitable for residential development.

Housing Need

Applying the standard method, South Staffordshire's housing need for the 2022-2039 period is set at 4,097 dwellings. Completions in the district since the start (2018-2022) of the (now extended) plan period now total 992 dwellings. In addition, a contribution of 4,000 dwellings is included towards the unmet needs of the Greater Birmingham and Black Country Housing Market Area (GBBCHMA) within which South Staffordshire is located. The total number of dwellings proposed is therefore 9,089 over the plan period although we acknowledge that the existing permissions, allocations, safeguarded land estimates, and new allocations set out table at paragraph 5.21 total in a little in excess of this figure.

Inherent to the draft plan is a continued acknowledgement that one of its key roles is to assist in meeting the significant unmet needs (para 5.8) of the GBBCHMA (*our emphasis*). Principally, the unmet needs arise from Birmingham City and the Black Country Authorities and the draft plan acknowledges this.

The plan continues to include a contribution to the unmet HMA need of 4,000 dwellings across the plan period. We support the contribution *in principle* but continue to raise significant concerns as to the level of contribution.

The plan makes it clear that this contribution was set in 2018 based on the findings of the jointly (all GBBCHMA authorities) commissioned GBBCHMA Growth Study (2018) which identified across the HMA:

- to 2031, a minimum shortfall of some 28,000 homes and a maximum shortfall of 69,000.
- to 2036, a minimum shortfall of some of 61,000 homes and a maximum of some 116,000.

In very simple terms therefore, South Staffordshire's proposed 4,000 home contribution set in 2018 represented:

- a 14% contribution to the HMA wide shortfall based on the 'best case' shortfall scenario to 2031; and
- a 6.5% contribution to the HMA wide shortfall based on the 'best case' shortfall scenario to 2036.

Our assertion is that the HMA wide shortfall to 2036 (and beyond) has increased which, along with an extension to the plan period (the plan now runs to 2039) on which the contribution was based, means that proportionally, 4,000 homes is simply too few. This issue goes to the heart of the plan.

The 2018 Growth Study followed the adoption of the Birmingham Development Plan in 2017, the examination of which identified a *Birmingham city only* shortfall of 37,900 homes (to 2031). It is important to recognise that this 37,900 home shortfall figure is the only figure that has actually been tested and found sound at local plan examination.

Taking the Birmingham City unmet need position as a starting point therefore, based on the contributions set out in plans within the HMA which have either been submitted for examination, examined or adopted, the total 'contribution' to unmet need arising from Birmingham alone to 2031, amounts to just 11,280 dwellings (North Warwickshire – 3,790, Solihull - 2,105, Stratford – 2,720 and Lichfield 2,665).

Notably, only two of these plans have actually been adopted (North Warwickshire and Stratford) with, at the time of writing, both Solihull's and Lichfield's plans facing significant delay (with Solihull's plan requiring main modification to find a further c.1,700 homes). Thus, just 6,510 homes towards this 'plan identified' 37,900 home Birmingham City shortfall to 2031 actually have the benefit of an adopted plan behind them to facilitate their delivery. The residual 'Birmingham City unmet need', (using the Plan identified figure as the starting point) therefore stands at c.31,400 homes at the time of writing.

In terms of the total wider HMA shortfall (which includes Birmingham City and the unmet needs acknowledged in the now collapsed Black Country plan), it remains a somewhat fluid position complicated in part by the fact that the timeframe upon which the evidence for the Black Country Plan is based is different (2020-2039) to the 2018 (2011-2031/2036) Growth Study and *does* include the standard method. Nevertheless, in crude terms there is an identified shortfall of 37,900 homes from Birmingham and c. 29,000 homes from the combined Black Country Authorities, a total shortfall (partly to 2031 and partly to 2039) in excess of c. 67,000 homes. If we deduct from this the 6,510 homes that have the benefit of an adopted plan behind them, it leaves a shortfall of c.60,500 homes.

Setting that aside for the time being and focusing on the position solely to 2031, various position statements on behalf of the HMA authorities have been published since the initial 2018 growth study. These statements set out

the progress made in tackling the shortfall, the latest being in September 2020 to which an addendum was published in December 2021. The addendum to the latest statement claims that the total shortfall to 2031 stands at just 6,302 (up from 2,957 as reported in 2020) dwellings largely as a consequence of a significant increase in Birmingham's supply. The conclusion is based purely on a consideration of the minimum baseline need however, with the other higher growth scenarios that the original 2018 growth study identified being disregarded. Significant too, is the fact that the application of the standard method is missing. It also ignores the position to 2036 (and beyond).

This latest position statement is the subject of much industry criticism, notably Turley's 'Falling Short' report (August 2021), Barton Wilmore's 'Mind the Gap' (March 2021) and Lichfield's 'The Black Country's next top model' (January 2021).

Gathering the above together, contrary to this latest position statement, we assert that when applying the standard method (which is now uncapped in Birmingham City) the shortfall to 2031 across the HMA, even in the minimum 'best case' baseline scenario, stands at some 36,000 homes. A more realistic position is likely to be in the region of at least 40,000. Accordingly, the scale of unmet need to 2031 remains in our view, substantial and the lack of time within which to deal with it presents a major challenge for the HMA authorities.

If we compare this latest 'best case' 2031 shortfall (36,000) to that identified by the 2018 growth study (28,000), we can see that 4,000 homes now represents an 11% contribution as opposed to 14%. To maintain a 14% contribution, the figure would need to increase by c.1,000 homes to 5,040 homes.

If we look beyond, 2031 as we must given this plan extends to 2039, then looking the evidence presented in the aforementioned reports by Turley et al. unmet need in the HMA is likely to be in the region of 70,000 homes by this time. Indeed, Birmingham City alone have identified through their recent Issues and Options consultation, shortfall in identified capacity of 78,000 homes (2020-2042) before Green Belt release is considered.

Working conservatively with an unmet need of 70,000 homes by 2039 therefore, if we compare this latest 'best case' 2039 shortfall to that identified by the 2018 growth study (61,000) to 2036, we can see that 4,000 homes now represents a 5.7% contribution as opposed to 6.5%. To maintain a 6.5% contribution, the figure would need to increase by c.550 homes to 4,550.

That said, we continue to maintain that given the strong spatial connection that South Staffs has with the Black Country, a higher percentage contribution would be appropriate particularly in light of the Black Country Plan's recent collapse and the further delays to the plan making process that will result for the the 4 Black Country authorities concerned.

A contribution of 8% for example to the 2039 best case estimate would result in an overall contribution of 5,600 homes towards meeting the HMA's unmet needs, 1,600 more than are currently planned for.

We maintain therefore that for this plan to be justified and effective, there needs to be a greater contribution towards meeting the unmet needs arising within the GBBCHMA. Owing to the way in which existing settlements within South Staffordshire are constrained by the Green Belt, it follows that additional Green Belt land on the edge of settlements will need to be found to accommodate this additional and much needed housing growth. Policies DS4 – Development Needs and DS5 – The Spatial Strategy to 2039 requires revision to this effect therefore.

Spatial Strategy

Para 5.20 sets out how the representations from the Regulation 18 preferred options consultation have informed the Spatial Strategy in this Regulation 19 version of the plan.

By way of some context, the Preferred Options plan identified ‘Option G’ as the preferred option for housing growth. This option would, in general terms, provide for the following: infrastructure-led development with a garden village area of search (along the A449 corridor) beyond the plan period. In addition, new housing delivered during the plan period would be focused in Tier 1 to 4 villages (60%) and urban extensions (to the north of the Black Country conurbation) and rural villages (40%).

As is stated in the SHSID report which informed the preferred option plan, Option G proposed growth in the villages dispersed across the first four tiers of the settlement hierarchy, with a larger proportion of housing growth being focused on the Tier 1 and 2 villages where more obvious opportunities to achieve infrastructure improvements through new development exist, having regard to other environmental constraints. It should also be noted that the diagram on p.43 of the SHSID report in relation to Option G clearly shows that, at that stage, there was the *‘potential for limited growth’* in Bishops Wood within the emerging housing strategy for the Local Plan Review.

Nevertheless, despite the identified potential for limited growth in the settlement, the plan now removes the proposal to identify small site allocations in Tier 4 villages, on the basis that current monitoring information suggests these allocations are not required to meet the national requirement for 10% of housing growth to be delivered on sites of less than 1 hectare.

Despite this, the spatial strategy continues to rely on a windfall allowance in order to deliver some 6% (600 homes) of its overall housing requirement. Indeed, this allowance is increased by 150 homes from the Preferred Options plan. Policy DS5 – The Spatial Strategy confirms that limited windfall housing growth is possible and will be supported across the district’s settlements in Tiers 1-4 of its hierarchy. The policy is explicit in stating that housing growth will not be suitable for the Tier 5 settlements or the wider rural area.

What is in doubt however, is whether this level of ‘windfall’ development is realistic, particularly given the district’s high percentage of Green Belt. We assert that there can be no guarantee that windfall homes will come forward in

those numbers. Indeed, noting that none of the proposed allocations within the plan are within any existing settlement boundary indicates that any windfall development that comes forward will need be outside any settlement boundary where (for the most part) it will be in the Breen Belt. The reality is therefore, that the only windfall development (beyond single plots or conversions) that will be possible will be rural exception proposals. The delivery of c. 600 homes as rural exception schemes seems highly unrealistic.

Accordingly, we maintain that there is a need for the proposed housing strategy to allocate further sites across the district, particularly in the lower tiers of the hierarchy where little to no development is proposed.

Moreover, if the housing need is increased to take account of the requirement to proportionately maintain the contribution to the GBBCHMA shortfall, then the total identified 'allocations' is short of the identified need by a minimum of c.550 homes. As such, we would assert that this is too great a gap to be made up by a further windfall allowance and that further allocations will be required across the district. In order that a more equitable distribution of dwellings is made across the district, it is considered that further, appropriate allocations can be made to those Tier 4 villages where there are no significant policy objections or constraints to development.

It is contended that Bishops Wood is one such settlement that is appropriate to receive a small-scale allocation and that site 096 is the most appropriate location to provide for that allocation having regard to all planning policy and technical considerations.

Accordingly, we would contend that **Policy DS3 – The Spatial Strategy to 2038** requires some redrafting to ensure that the delivery of the homes presently identified for allocation through the Local Plan review should be much closer to the identified minimum need having full regard to the requirement to increase the contribution towards the unmet needs arising from GBBCHMA overspill.

An allocation would also be the most appropriate way of delivering additional affordable homes in the village. With the site having a potential capacity of up to 80 dwellings, with an allowance of 30% for affordable homes development, this would enable the site to secure the provision of 24 new, affordable homes boosting the Council's overall affordable housing needs within the Plan period. It is submitted that this is the only viable vehicle for delivering more affordable housing in Bishops Wood.

More generally we continue to raise concerns with the spatial strategy insofar as it places a significant reliance on major allocations coming through in the Tier 1 and 2 villages of Penkridge (1209 homes) and Codsall/Bilbrook (679), Wombourne (245) together with strategic urban extensions around the edge of the West Midlands conurbation (2,871). In total, these 7 sites account for some 5,000 homes which is some 95% of the new allocations. Any delays in the delivery of these sites will inevitably have significant impact on the ability for the council to maintain a 5 year supply of housing land.

As such, it is considered that this is another compelling reason for the spatial strategy to look to the lower tier settlements for further housing growth through allocation.

Site Assessment

As stated, Bishops Wood sits within Tier 4 of the settlement hierarchy along with six other villages, and villages within the tier are identified as being those with less facilities, typically with a small store or public house, access to public transport and sometimes with educational facilities (e.g. a primary school). The latest Rural facilities and services audit 2021 indicates that the accessibility to the various services and facilities across the seven villages within Tier 4 is broadly similar, with Bishops Wood having a pub; village hall; church and a first school. In addition, it has a 30 minute public transport service to a supermarket on weekdays, and a 40 minute service to a supermarket at weekends.

Chapter 2 of the Housing Site Selection Topic Paper 2021 has regard to identifying and narrowing down sites for consideration as potential housing sites and refers to the various ‘call for sites’ consultations over the years and acknowledges that the Council’s Strategic Housing & Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) is used to identify a shortlist of sites. In order to do so, the SHELAA uses a series of classifications to categorise sites which are provided in a table in para.2.2 as follows:

S1	Sites currently suitable for housing and deliverable within 5 years
S2	Sites currently suitable for housing and developable between 5 and 10 years
S3	Sites currently suitable for housing and developable 10+ years
NCD1	Sites potentially suitable for housing but not currently developable because of a policy designation (eg Green Belt/Open Countryside/Employment Land/outside current Spatial Strategy/Safeguarded Land Policy)
NCD2	Sites potentially suitable for housing but not currently developable because of other constraints
NS	Sites which are unsuitable because of constraints which cannot be overcome.

The Offoxey site had previously been proposed as a housing site in an earlier ‘call for sites’ exercise and the SHELAA 2021 identifies the land as being within Locality 2, along with settlements such as Brewood, Coven and Wheaton Aston, along with other more isolated sites and sites adjacent to other settlements.

The site itself is designated as ‘*Site 096, Land off Offoxey Road and Ivetsey Bank Road*’, with a net site area for SHELAA assumptions of 2.48 hectares and a potential capacity using SHELAA assumptions of 79 units. The site is stated as being within the Green Belt and is not brownfield land. The land is shown as not being deliverable 2018-2023, nor developable 2023-2033. Nevertheless, the site is not shown to have any key constraints to development and it would appear that the Council has arrived at its conclusions on deliverability based solely on the site’s location

within the Green Belt - *'potentially suitable but subject to policy constraints – Green Belt and Core Policy 1'*. This is also the same for the other two sites in the SHELAA assessment which adjoin Bishops Wood, sites 097 and 099.

However, what is interesting to note is the difference in the relevant SHELAA category that the Council has assessed each of the three sites in Bishops Wood by. Both sites 097 and 099 have been given the 'NS' rating which, referring to the table above, indicates that they are *'sites which are unsuitable because of constraints which cannot be overcome'*.

Site 096 however, has been given the rating of 'NCD2' being a *'site potentially suitable for housing but not currently available because of other constraints'*. In this instance, it has been assumed that these 'other constraints' relates to the current designation of site 096 within the Green Belt which, as will be acknowledged from the exercise undertaken in these representations, is considered that its potential to create harm to the Green Belt is lower than initially reviewed. We submit therefore, that if the only constraint to the potential allocation of the site is its Green Belt location, the site should logically be moved into the *NCD1* category given that the *only* apparent imposition upon it being allocated is that land designation. Additional information provided in support of these representations confirms that there are no other constraints that would prevent the allocation and subsequent development of the Offoxey site.

As para.2.3 of the Topic Paper states, the SHELAA will only consider the allocation of sites which are either suitable (i.e. S1,S2 and S3) or could be made suitable through the removal of a policy or physical constraint (i.e. NCD1 and NCD2). In this regard, we assert that subject to its removal from the Green Belt, the site represents an excellent opportunity to deliver sustainable development that will deliver much needed new homes as well as some key benefits to the wider settlement. Of equal significance is the fact that notwithstanding our critique of the Council's evidence base as set out, the Offoxey site is the only logical place to deliver any growth for Bishops Wood, with sites 097 and 099 discounted.

Chapter 5 of the Topic Paper reviews the site assessment findings for each settlement and urban edge locations in the district following the filtering process and the village of Bishops Wood is considered in greater detail at section 5.19. Para.15.19.1 acknowledges the place of the village as a Tier 4 settlement and that, at a strategic level, there will be limited levels of growth in the Tier 4 villages, however, it does acknowledge that such settlements may have a role in contributing to the requirement for 10% of new allocations on sites of 1 hectare or less and that limited development may help to support local infrastructure opportunities. Para.15.19.2 states that there are no existing planning permissions or allocations likely to deliver dwellings in the settlement post April 2018 at the beginning of the Plan period.

The summary for Bishops Wood in respect of additional Green Belt allocations for the village concludes at para.15.9.6 that two of the three sites that were proposed (097 and 099) are affected by constraints, principally highways related. Site 096 is not so conflicted. It goes on to note that, based on current monitoring evidence, the

Council will be able to deliver 10% of its housing allocations on small sites in Tier 1-3 villages without requiring additional allocations in less sustainable Tier 4 settlements.

Finally, there is acknowledgement of the potential for part of site 096 coming forward as a rural exceptions site for affordable housing due to an existing planning application on the site, allowing it to remain within the Green Belt. At this time, planning application, No.19/00952/FUL, for 8No. affordable housing units remains undetermined, however, it is also noted that there is a resolution to grant approval for this proposal, subject to the signing of a S.106 Agreement, thus confirming the site's acceptability as a good location for housing development.

Green Belt

Owing to the fact that 80% of the district is in the Green Belt there is something of an inevitability to the requirement to release some land from the Green Belt in order to meet growth needs.

In July 2019, the Council published a Green Belt Study (undertaken by Land Use Consultants on the Council's behalf) which, as noted at para.2.27 of the main report, confirms that just under 80% of the administrative area of the district is designated as Green Belt, with a significant part of the remaining area lying within the open countryside in the north-western part of the district. As such, outside of the urban areas of the main towns and other villages, the potential for accommodating the future housing needs as set out in the development strategy for the Local Plan Review must be set and assessed against this restrictive policy background. The Green Belt Study is a major part of the background information supporting the preparation of the Local Plan Review.

Perhaps not unexpectedly, therefore, the settlement of Bishops Wood is itself inset within the Green Belt, with a development boundary drawn tightly around the existing built-up area of the village, encompassing all of the existing development with the exception of the primary school site adjoining the north-western corner of the site in question and a few outlying dwellings. As such, and as can be seen on the Inset Plan for the village, it is apparent that there are no opportunities for potential development sites within the settlement boundary, perhaps other than for the redevelopment of existing plots but only for one or two other dwellings. As such, for the village to accommodate any additional growth, it would inevitably need to be brought forward on land that is currently designated as Green Belt.

The village of Bishops Wood was included as part of the larger Parcel S32, being defined as a much larger parcel of land of the area between Wolverhampton and Stafford and covering some 7,308 hectares and considered in Appendix 2 (Stage 1 Contribution Assessments) of the Green Belt Study. In addition, a single site in Bishops Wood was also assessed at this stage, namely, Parcel S35 which related to the area comprising the St. Johns First

School. The assessment of this site in respect of each purpose for including land within Green Belts (NPPF para.138) was as follows:

1st purpose : to check unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas - *weak / no contribution*

2nd purpose : to prevent neighbouring towns from merging – *weak / no contribution*

3rd purpose : safeguarding the countryside from encroachment – *weak / no contribution*

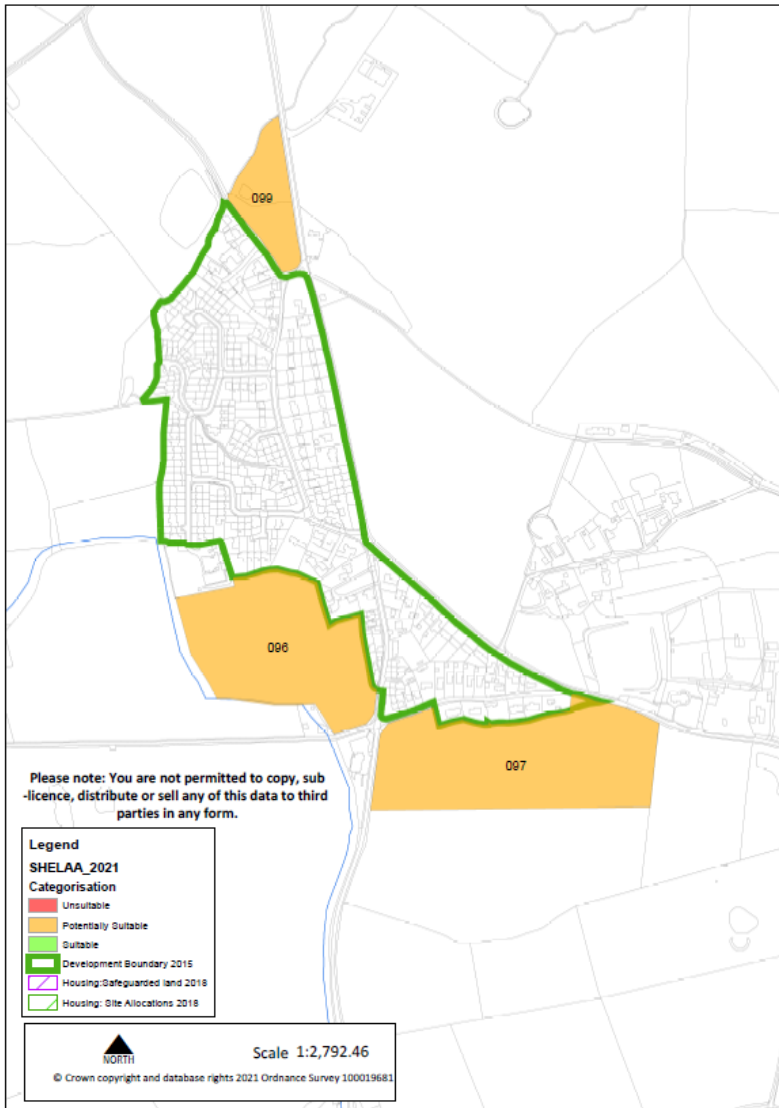
4th purpose : to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns – *weak / no contribution*

5th purpose : to assist in urban regeneration – *strong*

The larger Parcel 32 area was broken down into a series of thirteen Sub-Parcels for further assessment in Appendix 3 (Stage 2 Harm Assessments) of the Green Belt Study and, of these, Sub-Parcel S32A relates to the area around the village of Bishops Wood, the description of the Sub-Parcel being '*farmland surrounding the inset village of Bishops Wood, together with low density dwellings and community amenities in the south-east of the sub-parcel*'. The area encompassed by Sub-Parcel 32A is some 111 hectares.

It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, to note that the site which is the subject of these representations is situated in land designated as Green Belt within Sub-Parcel 32A, being all of the land outside the Settlement Boundary for the village and also the land extending into Shropshire to the west and south-west. In addition, of course, it also includes the land encompassing the other two sites promoted previously under the SHELAA (site refs. 097 and 099) as can be seen on the plan for the village below.

Bishops Wood SHELAA map



In terms of the assessment of the harm caused to the Green Belt in the light of the five purposes, the Study advised as in respect of Sub-Parcel 32A follows:

- 1st purpose : to check unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas - *weak / no contribution*
- 2nd purpose : to prevent neighbouring towns from merging – *weak / no contribution*
- 3rd purpose : safeguarding the countryside from encroachment – *strong*
- 4th purpose : to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns – *weak / no contribution*
- 5th purpose : to assist in urban regeneration – *strong*

The Sub-Parcel is then broken down into two further parts, namely S32As1 & S32As2, where As2 relates to the southern part of SHEELA site 099 where the assessment considered that this site would have a ‘*moderate*’ impact upon harm to the Green Belt.

In terms of Sub-Parcel S32As1, relating to the *'release of any uncontained land within the sub-parcel'*, being all of the other land around the village within the Sub-Parcel with the exception of S32As2, and which includes the site that is the subject of these representations, the assessment of the harm that would be caused to the Green Belt was considered to be *'moderate – high'*.

That said, and it will be apparent from studying the diagram of Sub-Parcel 32A on page 448 of Appendix 3 to the Green Belt Study, that the area falling under the s1 designation is so large and encompasses a significant area around the village that to include it all within the same *'moderate – high'* harm rating without some consideration of the characteristics of individual sites against the harm that those sites may create harm to the Green Belt, is inappropriate.

The evidence base in the Green Belt Study that has been used as a tool for site assessment of the Green Belt around Bishops Wood is, in our opinion, flawed. The Council has indicated that *all* of the land around the village has the same rating but has also acknowledged that site 096 performs better than all other land around the settlement. In our own assessment of site 096 referred to in these representations, we consider that the site performs better in Green Belt terms than the Council's own evidence would suggest.

From Appendix 3 of the Green Belt Study in respect of site 096, it is not possible to understand how the potential harm that the site, or indeed the nearby 097, was assessed and the impact it might have upon the Green Belt around Bishops Wood, nor for the remaining, wider areas around the village for which no previous 'call for sites' submissions had been made. At the very least, it is considered that a fuller assessment of sites 096, 097 and 099 should have been undertaken and the results for Sub-Parcel S32A provided in Appendix 3.

In this regard, and in light of no formal and detailed assessment of the Offoxey site being available to establish the potential Green Belt harm that would arise as a consequence of the site's development, Cerda has undertaken its own site specific Green Belt assessment as follows. In applying the five purposes for including land with the Green Belt, and in the light of the assessment criteria stated in Section 6 (Stage 2 Methodology) of the Green Belt Study main report, our own observations in relation to the assessment of the Harm that the development of the site 096 only would cause to the Green Belt are as follows.

1st Purpose (*to check the unrestricted sprawl of urban areas*): The Offoxey site is, of course, located on the edge of a village rather than an urban area per se. With the manner that the village has developed over time, with the extension of the built-up area out to the south-east of the main part of the village, the site in question is bordered by existing development on its northern and eastern boundaries and its development, in whole or in part, would provide a 'rounding off' of the built form in this part of the settlement, would represent a logical infill scenario and would not extend the settlement in an irregular or untidy way. The development of site 097 would extend the built-up area of the village in a southerly direction into the open countryside. We contend, therefore, that as far as the site is concerned in relation to the harm that would be caused to the Green Belt, it would only have **low** harm in respect of this purpose.

2nd Purpose (to prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another): For the reasons given in respect of the 1st purpose, the development of this site would not lead to the merging of any nearby town or even other settlement. Our assessment is, therefore, that site would only have **very low** harm in respect of this purpose. The nearest major settlement to the site is Albrighton in Shropshire, approximately 5 kms (3.1 miles) to the south-west.

3rd Purpose (to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment): The development of almost all Green Belt land would inevitably result in countryside encroachment, however, as we have noted in respect of the 1st purpose above, the site is contained by existing built development to the north and east. The extent that the western edge of the site may extend into the open countryside could be contained by the 'rounding off' effect that the development of the site would have by not extending it beyond the western side of the existing village to the north. In this sense, we would assert that any 'encroachment' through the development of this site, either in whole or in part, would only result in the 'rounding off' of the settlement. As noted in respect of the 1st Purpose, the development of site 097 would extend the built-up area of the village in a southerly direction and encroach into the open countryside to a much greater extent than other parcels of land around the village. Therefore, we would contend that the site would have **moderate** harm against this purpose.

4th Purpose (to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns): the site in question is not located next to any historic town, although it is acknowledged that it does adjoin a property containing two statutorily listed buildings within the curtilage of the property along part of the southern boundary, as such, there would be **very low** harm to the Green Belt in relation to this purpose.

5th Purpose (to assist in urban regeneration): The Green Belt study acknowledges the extent of the Green Belt across the District and, in table 3.2, acknowledges that there are only 13.11 hectares of land on the Brownfield Register across the District. On balance, given this statistic, it is contended that this purpose should not perform part of the assessment criteria as, in all likelihood, a significant area of Green Belt land will be required to fulfil the Local Plan Review's housing requirements over the plan period. Nevertheless, for ease of assessment, it is considered that **low-moderate** harm would result to the Green Belt in respect of this purpose.

Section 7 of the Green Belt Study has regard to the Stage 2 Findings and, as noted previously, the rating for Sub-Parcel S32As1 is **moderately-high**, that is, '*where land makes a moderate contribution to one of the Green Belt purposes and a weak contribution to the others, but where its release would significantly weaken the adjacent Green Belt (for example by isolating an area of Green Belt that makes a stronger contribution)*'.

In applying our own assessment for the site in question, it our assertion that the overall score for the site should be **moderate** in terms of the level of harm upon the Green Belt, that is, '*where land makes a relatively weak contribution to two of the Green Belt purposes and a weak contribution to the others, but where its release would partially weaken the adjacent Green Belt (for example by increasing containment of adjacent open land, or by creating a*

less consistent boundary line), would be attributed if all of the site in question were to be developed for housing. If only part of the site were to come forward, then it is considered that the overall score for the site would be **low-moderate**, *'where land makes a relatively strong contribution to one of the Green Belt purposes, but where its release would create a simplified, more consistent boundary and would not weaken the adjacent Green Belt.'*

On balance, and in the light of our own assessment of the harm that the development of the site in question only (096), and not including the remainder of Sub-Parcel S32A1, would have upon Green Belt, the scoring would equate to that given in the Green Belt Study for Sub-Parcel S32As, both having a **moderate** score if all of the site were to be developed, but a **low-moderate** score if only partly developed. In summary, therefore, we would assert the Council's assessment offsite 096 in terms of its strategic Green Belt purposes is flawed and does not represent an appropriate basis for justified and effective plan making.

Development Principles

In support of these representations, some initial development proposals have been prepared to show how the Offoxey site could be developed if it were to be allocated for housing in the Local Plan Review. At this stage, the proposals are understandably only at the concept stage and a 'constraints/opportunities' plan together with an illustrative 'parameters' plan, both prepared by the project architects, Geoff Perry Associates, together with various technical reports, have been prepared to address certain matters as follows, which are appended to these representations:

Highways : A Transport Appraisal has been prepared by Hub Transport Planning Ltd., a summary of the findings of which are as follows:

Access

Vehicular access to the development site is proposed off Ivetsey Bank Road with appropriate visibility splays to be provided at the access junction in line with the prevailing speed limit of 30mph; however, it is considered likely that the site access proposals will be complemented by some additional traffic-calming measures and revisions to existing junction layouts within the village.

As part of the access strategy, footways will connect to the existing provision in the village, whilst there will also be a new pedestrian entrance to the village school along with a drop-off area.

The site access junction will be designed to accommodate all vehicles that will require access, including large refuse vehicles.

Local Highway Network Capacity

Observations carried out during peak periods on the local highway network have indicated that the junctions across the village operate well within capacity, with minimal queues and delays during the morning and evening peak periods.

The proposed residential development will have a low trip generation of less than one vehicle per minute during the peak periods, and it is considered that the site access junction will operate well within capacity at all times.

Further afield, the impact across the wider highway network is expected to be minimal but would be assessed in due course once the scope of assessment has been agreed with the Local Highway Authority.

Sustainable Travel Options

The proposed development site is close to local services and facilities, which include a first school, the village hall, public houses and places of worship. All of these are within acceptable walking or cycling distance from the site and access is available via the existing footway and highway network in the vicinity of the site.

The proposed development will also deliver a village shop to meet the day-to-day needs of both existing and future residents.

There are no dedicated national cycling network routes in the immediate vicinity of the site, however the local roads are considered safe and suitable for cycle trips across the area.

Existing bus stops are located within an easy walking distance and provide connectivity to Stafford and Wolverhampton, including the morning and evening peak hours for commuting.

A Travel Plan will also support the development site and will seek to promote sustainable travel from the development, including the provision of public transport vouchers for residents.

Ecology : A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of the site has been undertaken by Greenscape Environmental Ltd., an executive summary of the findings of which are provided at section 1 of their report and are re-stated here as follows:

Purpose of the Report

The survey report has these principal aims:

- To provide an initial assessment of the ecological value of the site in local context.
- To provide details supporting further surveys that may be required.
- To identify potential ecological constraints relating to the proposed development of the site, and recommend measures to avoid, reduce or manage negative effects, and to provide a net ecological gain.

Methodology

The ecological appraisal included a desktop study, reviews of other surveys previously conducted in the area by Greenscape Environmental, and a site visit undertaken at the site, OS grid reference SJ83540936 on 17th November 2021.

Key Impacts and Mitigation Measures

The desktop study included a search for nearby designated sites and previously recorded protected species. It was considered that the site could provide potential habitat for ground-nesting birds, and the boundaries may provide commuting habitat for bats and newts, and these should be the main focus of the ecological appraisal.

The site comprises approximately 5.3 ha of arable land, surrounded on three sides by formal hedgerow and fence boundaries. The site is of low ecological value, and a rotating crop does not allow the development of a sward that may be suitable for ground nesting birds.

There are five bodies of water within 500m which have been taken into consideration. Two were assessed in 2020 and found to be of negligible value for great crested newts. The other three were on private land and were not assessable during this survey, but the low terrestrial value of site means the risk of an offence is extremely low.

The site has no features of roosting value for bats, and the proposed enhancements on site will vastly improve the value for local bat species. Similarly, the new planting regime will provide significantly more nesting potential for local birds.

Conclusion

It is understood that the site plans will include a woodland walk and attenuation pond, both of which will provide a significant ecological enhancement over the site. In addition, the provision of artificial bat roosting and bird nesting habitat will be incorporated into any housing plan to provide further enhancement.

The method statements provided in sections 6.2.2, 6.3.2, 6.5.2, 6.6.2 of the report will be followed, and work will be conducted at a suitable time of year to minimise potential impacts.

There would be no other ecological constraints to the proposed development of the site.

Drainage : A Flood Risk, drainage and water supply statement supports these representations. In simple terms, enquires made to Severn Trent confirm the ability for the site to be connected to the existing mains sewage which has sufficient capacity for the quantum of development proposed. Similarly, adequate water supplies are available to serve the development.

As far as surface water drainage is concerned, the development will incorporate SUDs principles in order to provide appropriate attenuation. It is proposed that discharge from the attenuation feature (at the north west corner of the

site) will be controlled to greenfield run off rates, with the attenuation sized to store the surface water from all events up to and including the 1 in 100 year event plus 40% allowance for climate change.

The discharge from the attenuation will enter into a new ditch system along the west edge of Bishops Wood. This new ditch starts to restore the original ditch network that was partially destroyed by the adjacent housing development in the 1970's.

The ditch will join with the current watercourse to the north of the Parish Council Play area.

Flooding - Of greater significance however is the role that the development will play in solving existing surface water flooding issues that persist in relation to the wider village, particularly the housing development to the immediate north of the site. The proposed ditch system to the west of the existing settlement, delivered as a direct consequence of this development will address the overland surface flows from the north and west of the village. The existing limitations of the current drainage system mean that it is very quickly overwhelmed resulting in flooding. The SUDs solution that this site will deliver is predicted to eliminate a large proportion of these overland flows delivering tangible improvements to existing residents of the village. It is to be noted that this proposed solution has been discussed with Andrew Brett, Flood Risk Management Team at the Staffordshire County Council and has his support in principle.

Utilities : A preliminary investigation into the existing utilities infrastructure around the site has been undertaken by ECS Energy and they have advised as follows:

Electricity

- Application has been made to Western Power Distribution for a new point of connection serving the proposed development site and early indications are that a new point of connection will be provided, potentially from the high voltage main running past the northern side of the land.
- This point of connection would likely require a new, 1MVA substation, with 800kVA of potential demand coming from the estate at any given time.
- ECS have every expectation that adequate power will be available to serve the entirety of demand arising from the proposed development.

Gas

- Whilst applications have been made with Cadent (the local network provider) which have revealed that connection is possible, we consider that there are more sustainable ways of providing heat to new homes on this site.

Water

- Applications are underway with the network and independent connections providers for a new point of connection serving the proposed development site.
- There are currently no known issues with connecting to the local water infrastructure, with mains water already provided to properties immediately adjacent to the site.

Telecoms

- Openreach have confirmed that they will deliver FTTP product free of charge. The site therefore has the ability to be served by high speed broadband.

Key Benefits

The allocation and subsequent development of this site will help to support and grow the existing settlement and bring key community benefits. It would be the intention to provide space for the establishment of a convenience store within the site which the village does not currently possess.

In addition, the provision could be made for a 'drop-off' area to the rear of the adjoining school site to alleviate existing pressures on the roads around the school at present. Preliminary discussions with the school confirm support for this proposal.

As set out above, the development of this site will also deliver significant, tangible improvements to the existing drainage network and infrastructure which is known to be a significant issue within the village.

In summary, it is submitted that there are no substantive technical or other reasons why this site could not be developed in line with the principles and the above information provided in support of these representations. In fact, the Offoxey site proposals offer the opportunity to provide significant infrastructure benefits to the Bishops Wood village, improving its ability to sustain itself through new community facilities and affordable housing, plus through the delivery of the only viable option to solve existing surface water flooding issues that persist to the north of the development site.

Conclusions

It is acknowledged that Bishops Wood is one of seven Tier 4 settlements within the District's Settlement Hierarchy and, in line with the Council's current development strategy within the Preferred Options document is not currently proposed to receive any direct allocations under the Local Plan Review. However, as has been demonstrated in these representations, there is significant unmet need within the GBBCHMA which this plan needs to make a

greater contribution towards addressing. By consequence, the plan needs to make provision for further housing allocations.

At present, the Tier 4 settlements play no strategic role in meeting future housing needs. We contend that the provision of homes within these settlements should be part of this plan's spatial strategy. The provision of windfall developments on the scale set out in the Spatial Strategy are unrealistic given the Green Belt nature of the district. The plan should be subject to main modifications to effect this change in strategy.

In this regard, land off Offoxey Road in Bishops Wood, previously submitted as site 096, can assist the Council in delivering the greater number of homes required and should be allocated accordingly. The Council recognises that land needs to be released from the Green Belt to deliver homes within the district and accordingly there are no substantive planning reasons why the Offoxey site could not come forward in whole or in part for housing development. We assert that the settlement boundary for Bishops Wood should be redrawn accordingly and an allocation made on site 096 for housing development as part of a modification exercise to the plan.

Yours faithfully,

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