
Hearing Statement – Matter 7 Selection of Sites Allocated for Development

Rother Development and Site Allocations Local Plan Examination

Prepared for:

The Blue Cross

Prepared by:

Savills (UK) Limited

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This Hearing Statement is prepared and submitted by Savills on behalf of The Blue Cross in response to Matter 7 of the Inspector's Matters, Issues and Questions issued 22nd March 2019, in relation to the examination of the Rother Development and Site Allocations Local Plan (DaSA).
- 1.2. For information, The Blue Cross owns the St Francis Fields site (hereafter referred to as 'the site') in the village of Northiam and have submitted a pre-application enquiry to Rother District Council (RDC) in relation to the development of the site. Pre-application discussions with RDC are yet to be held.
- 1.3. This Hearing Statement should be considered alongside previous representations made by The Blue Cross to the Regulation 19 DaSA consultation.
- 1.4. Only questions related to the village of Northiam are responded to here.

2. Matter 7 – Selection of Sites Allocated for Development

Issue: Is for each area, are the individual sites selected sound?

Policy NOR1 Land South of Northiam Church of England Primary School, Northiam

- 1. How does the archaeological interest of the site, the requirement for 40% affordable housing and the need to retain protected trees impact on the viability and delivery of the development?**
- 2.1. We are aware of the comments made by RDC in response to the Regulation 19 representations made by The Blue Cross, contained in RDC-DaSA-004 Initial Response to Representations, dated 6th March 2019. The response by RDC advised that the local highways authority is satisfied that suitable access to the site can be achieved in principle. In light of this, The Blue Cross do not have any comments to make in relation to this question.
- 2.2. We do however note that this site is a greenfield site. The St Francis Field's site is previously developed land which should arguably be considered preferable to NOR1. Consequently this policy is not justified as it is not the most appropriate strategy for the village, when considered against the objectives of the Core Strategy and National Policy. The benefits of the St Francis Fields site are set out in our representations to the Regulation 19 consultation on the DaSA.

Policy NOR2 Land South of the Paddock / Goddens Gill, Northiam

- 2. Does the evidence support the proposed density, affordable housing provision and deliverability of the site given that the extant planning permission for a similar number of dwellings is unlikely to proceed (para. 11.16)?**
- 2.3. Land South of the Paddock / Goddens Gill (the NOR2 site) is located to the east of the centre of Northiam and comprises approximately 1.2 ha of greenfield land. It is bordered to the north and east by ancient woodland and is surrounded by mature trees on all sides. The NOR2 site is allocated for two different developments, either a 52 unit age-restricted residential development, or a 36 unit non-restricted development.
- 2.4. The NOR2 site was previously allocated in the Rother Local Plan 2006 but has not come forward for development in the intervening 13 years. Permission was granted for 58 age restricted dwellings in 2014 under reference RR/2013/1490/P, however the development was not implemented as the developer advised that the scheme was not viable, as set out in paragraph 15.65 of the DaSA Options and Preferred Options document. Paragraph 11.161 of the DaSA confirms that the permitted scheme is unlikely to proceed and therefore the site has been re-allocated.
- 2.5. Given the fact that the previously approved 58 unit age-restricted development was not considered viable, serious concerns are raised as to whether a smaller age-restricted development of just 52 units is likely to be viable. These concerns were raised in the Regulation 19 representations to the DaSA made by The Blue Cross. The response of RDC provided in RDC-DaSA-004 Initial Response to Representations, dated 6th March 2019 is noted, however it is not considered that the response suitably addresses the concerns.

- 2.6. RDC's response to the viability concerns stated is that "*There is no evidence that a smaller scheme is unlikely to be viable*". This response is considered insufficient. It is not the role of interested parties to prove that a scheme is unviable, rather RDC should be ensuring that all sites that they allocate are viable, particularly where it is documented that viability issues have stopped a site from being developed in the past.
- 2.7. We remain sceptical as to whether the provision of 52 age-restricted dwellings on the NOR2 site will be viable, given that it has been documented that 58 age-restricted dwellings are not viable, and permission has been in place for five years without a scheme progressing. It is suggest that, if the NOR2 site is to remain as an allocation, further evidence is provided to ensure that it can and will be delivered over the plan period (to 2028).
- 2.8. In addition, viability aside, given that the NOR2 site has benefitted from an allocation for the past 13 years and has not been brought forward for development, it is questioned whether the policy is effective and deliverable over the plan period.
- 2.9. Due to the clear uncertainties regarding the delivery of the NOR2 site, it is suggested that it is removed as an allocation from the DaSA and replaced with a more appropriate site / sites that can be delivered, to ensure that the housing requirement for Northiam is met over the plan period. To retain the NOR2 site as an allocation, despite the clear concerns surrounding viability and deliverability is an unsound approach which cannot be considered positively prepared, justified or in accordance with national policy, through non-conformity to the Core Strategy.
- 2.10. Furthermore, it is noted that the allocation of the NOR2 site has a second strand, for the development of 36 unrestricted dwellings. It is accepted that the development of the NOR2 site for 36 unrestricted dwellings is likely to be more viable (even accounting for 40% affordable housing) than a 52 unit age-restricted scheme, although the viability of such a scheme should still be demonstrated to ensure deliverability, given the longstanding allocation at the NOR2 site.
- 2.11. Should it be demonstrated that the development of the NOR2 site for 36 non-restricted dwellings is viable and therefore deliverable, then the allocation and the overall allocation for Northiam through the DaSA should be updated to reflect this lesser quantum of development. This would result in a requirement for at least an additional 16 units in the village, to meet the minimum Core Strategy requirement for Northiam.
- 2.12. In their response to Regulation 19 representations RDC acknowledge that, if the NOR2 site was to be developed for 36 units, a shortfall of 16 units against Northiam's Core Strategy housing target would remain. RDC argue that no other appropriate sites have been identified within the village and therefore the shortfall will be made up by an overprovision of dwellings in other areas of the district. However, as set out in the Blue Cross' Hearing Statement for Matter 6, we do not consider there to be an oversupply of dwellings, rather a shortfall of 162 dwellings over the plan period, should the DaSA be adopted as drafted.
- 2.13. It is our view that the St Francis Fields site, which represents a suitable, sustainable, previously developed site (please see our representations to the Regulation 19 DaSA consultation for further details) should be allocated for approximately 45 units, which would help to meet the housing shortfall that the DaSA would leave against the Core Strategy target (as set out in the Blue Cross' Hearing Statement for Matter 6) and would provide a degree of flexibility for non-delivery of allocated / permitted sites. At the very least, the allocation of the St Francis Fields site for a lesser number of units (i.e 17 units utilising the existing access) which would meet the demonstrable shortfall of 16 units in Northiam over the plan period should be

considered to ensure that the housing requirement for the village is met in accordance with the spatial strategy set out in the Core Strategy.

- 2.14. In addition, it is clear that the St Francis Fields site is a suitable, sustainable brownfield site, in an ideal location that could be brought forward for up to 17 units utilising the existing access (please see The Blue Cross' representations to the Regulation 19 consultation on the DaSA for details).
- 2.15. As drafted, we do not consider the allocation the NOR2 site to be a sound allocation as it has not been demonstrated to be deliverable and therefore is not justified. Furthermore, the dual allocation of the NOR2 site, for two different housing numbers, only the greater of which would provide the requisite minimum number of units in the village, were it to come forward, is not a sound approach. Given the viability and deliverability issues with the NOR2 site, it is likely that the lesser quantum of development would be brought forward, and therefore the DaSA proposes to plan for a shortfall against the Core Strategy minimum target for the village. This is not sound planning as it does not represent a positive approach and is inconsistent with national policy, additional sites within the village should be allocated to ensure that the minimum housing target is met, and if possible exceeded.

