

Wyre Forest District Core Strategy Examination

Wyre Forest District Council's response to the Inspector's Advertised Possible Changes for the former British Sugar Site, Stourport Road, Kidderminster.

Overview

This written response sets out the District Council's views in relation to the two options advertised by the examining Inspector as possible changes to the Core Strategy. The views have been developed in consultation with the District Council's Local Development Framework Core Strategy Panel and the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration.

Background

The District Council's position in relation to future development proposals at the former British Sugar Site is clearly set out within the Statement of Common Ground that was produced in discussion with Pegasus Planning on behalf of the landowners – St Francis Group (SCG4). The Council also provided written statements in relation to the Inspector's questions on Matter 4 – Kidderminster Strategy and Proposal and Matter 13 – Economy and Employment. These further clarify its views in relation to the future development of the site.

The Council maintains that the Core Strategy as submitted alongside the proposed minor amendments is appropriate and reflects the findings of a robust evidence base. In particular the Employment Land Review concluded that by planning for an additional 44 hectares of employment land over the plan period the District's requirements will be adequately met. It demonstrates that there are enough sites within the District to meet the requirements set out in the Core Strategy. It is important to preserve and plan a portfolio of sites to provide a degree of flexibility which can be reviewed, monitored and managed through the Site Allocations DPD process.

The Employment Land Availability update at 1st April 2010 (ED20) demonstrates that the entire 24 hectare former British Sugar site is not required to meet this employment land provision. However, it is envisaged that at least 50% (12 hectares) will be required for employment uses during the plan period. It is accepted that at 24 hectares the brownfield site is particularly complex and that St Francis group has submitted compelling evidence (albeit at this late stage, despite being given a number of opportunities through the various stages of the iterative consultation process), to question the viability of developing the whole site for employment uses. It is noted that St Francis Group calculated that a purely employment regeneration would (in their view) lead to a £9m net loss.

The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) demonstrates that sufficient brownfield sites exist in sequentially attractive locations within Kidderminster, including Churchfields, to meet the District's overall housing target of 4,000 dwellings. Following receipt of St Francis's representations at the publication stage, the annual SHLAA update produced in April 2010 (ED39) considered the former British Sugar site. This has indicated that the brownfield site may be suitable for a mixed use redevelopment.

The vision as set out in the Regeneration Prospectus (EB14), and reflective of the Adopted Local Plan, is a starting point and not set in tablets of stone. However, the essence of the South Kidderminster Business and Nature Park remains a key

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ambition supported by the business leaders and so a significant business opportunity at the British Sugar site remains.

Response to Inspector's Options.

Option A – Amend the 2nd sentence of paragraph 5.26 of the Core Strategy to read: “The site provides a large opportunity to provide new industry and employment opportunities. However, due to viability concerns it may be necessary to consider a mixed use approach as part of the Site Allocations DPD to deliver this potential, including a significant area of residential.”

Against the above background, as the District Council expressed at the relevant hearing session that on the principle of a mixed use approach, the position has been to raise no objection to a possible ‘hook’ in the Core Strategy that might ultimately allow some flexibility – crucially, where that would deliver the business regeneration of the wider site.

It is considered that the specific allocation for uses on the site should be a matter for consideration through the next stages of the LDF and specifically the Site Allocations DPD, when the consequences and implications can be fully considered in the round with all of the other housing and employment sites. From the Council's point of view the key will be ensuring an appropriate balance of uses throughout the district, making sure that any mix of uses is complementary and where possible doesn't limit the potential business opportunities presented by the site.

The Council therefore is supportive of Option A as put forward in the Inspector's possible changes.

Option B – In addition to Option A, also include a new strategic policy for the redevelopment of the British Sugar Site.

Throughout the preparation of the Core Strategy, the Council has chosen not to designate any strategic sites for a number of technical planning reasons. As the SHLAA (EB10) demonstrates, the delivery of the 4,000 dwellings across the plan period is not governed by the need to deliver a particular site. There are enough brownfield sites available to deliver this quantum of houses without being dependent on any particular site.

Furthermore, as supported through the various consultation stages and stakeholder workshops on the Core Strategy's development and indeed demonstrated at the hearing sessions, further detailed work on infrastructure provision would be required to designate strategic sites. In the case of the former British Sugar site, further work on the evidence base is clearly required through the Site Allocations process. In particular, Worcestershire County Council as the Local Transport Authority has specified that detailed modelling and transport assessment is required in relation to the provision of mixed uses on the site.

For these reasons, the Council is not supportive of Option B and strongly considers that more detailed work particularly in relation to transportation modelling and infrastructure provision, would be required in order to allocate the former British Sugar Site as a Strategic Site within the Core Strategy.