

Mr I Kemp
Programme Officer
49 All Saints Place
Bromsgrove
Worcestershire
B61 0AX

09 April 2015

Dear Mr Kemp

Land at Hillwood Road, Mere Green, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands
Exam 131 (inspector interim findings)

The two crucial defects identified in the process were:

- (a) the failure to explain the reasons for the selection of the allocated Green Belt strategic sites, and the corresponding rejection of Areas A and B; and*
- (b) the failure to explain why the potential urban extension areas were assessed on the basis that what was being sought was a single site for around 5,000 dwellings, rather than site(s) for a range of between 5,000 to 10,000 dwellings as stated in HTY11.*

Having reviewed only the elements of the Revised SA requested by the programme officer it is hard to understand how the Revised SA fixes the second defect.

*The Inspector asks for an explanation of why BCC moved from a range of **between** 5,000 to 10,000 however what is presented is a Revised SA showing options of 5,000 **or** 10,000.*

The range of between 5,000 and 10,000 is again not considered nor are reasons given for only considering blocks of 5,000.

Reasonable alternative sites such as land at Hillwood Road (within A1) which could make a significant contribution to housing delivery over the plan period are not considered because they are not big enough for 5,000 units.

No explanation of why Birmingham consider all sites of less than 5,000 unsuitable for SUE is given – despite there being many SUE's at significantly smaller sizes being delivered across the country.

We would further argue that the revised SA does not meet the requirements of para 54 (emphasis added).

*E131 para 54. "Further SA work needs to be carried out in order to **ensure that all reasonable alternatives have been assessed** at the same level of detail as the option taken forward in the submitted Local Plan [paras 49-50 above]."*

As no option that can provide less than 5,000 has been considered within the Revised SA all reasonable alternatives have not been considered.

Whilst it maybe that LPA are the arbiters of what is or is not a Reasonable Alternative some rational for the decision must surely be given as per para 41.

E131 para 41 *“Secondly, there is no clear explanation in either HTY17 or SUB3 of why the potential urban extension areas were assessed on the basis that what was being sought was a single site for around 5,000 dwellings. That is a clear change from the position set out in the BDP Options Consultation document [HTY11], which referred to a range of between 5,000 to 10,000 dwellings21. Some reasoning to support the change in position is given on pp13-14 of PGI, but not in the SA documents themselves.”*

The revised SA now considers two options one site of 5,000 units or two sites of 5,000 units however no reasoning is given for this choice.

The foot note 35 on page 75 of the Revised SA appears to be the only reference to this decision but again does not give reasoning.

On page 75 of the Revised SA description of table 5.1 (emphasis added) ... *“Table 5.1 summarises the appraisal of two reasonable development scenarios for a potential sustainable urban extension...”*

Not the reasonable alternatives, not all reasonable alternatives but two reasonable alternatives have been considered.

Nowhere within the revised SA is the range of 5,000 – 10,000 addressed only 5,000 or 10,000.
Nowhere within the revised SA are any reasons given for only addressing blocks of 5,000 units.
Nowhere within the revised SA are all reasonable alternatives assessed.

E131 at para 54. ... *“Further SA work needs to be carried out in order to **ensure that all reasonable alternatives have been assessed at the same level of detail** as the option taken forward in the submitted Local Plan [paras 49-50 above].”* Emphasis added

The statement on page 75 of the Revised SA:-

*“There is **an absence of any evidence which shows how the traffic impacts from a larger development could be accommodated on the network.** No agreement with the Highways Agency has been reached in respect of a larger scheme creating considerable uncertainty over the traffic impacts of a larger development. The design, costing and **impacts of additional transport infrastructure provision of the larger scheme are unknown at this stage...**”*

This is a direct demonstration that the two options 10,000 and around 5,000 have not been considered at the same level of detail.

Indeed this lack of detail for the 10,000 dwelling schemes appears to be the only substantive reason for rejection given that the other difference between the two schemes considered appear to be proportional to the level of development.

In addition the statement:-

“...The proximity of some of the option areas (e.g. B and C) could mean that the cumulative burden on, for example, highway infrastructure would necessitate a greater range of interventions than if the areas were more remote from one another...”

Is again untested, and not based on evidence. It could be that the cumulative effect of 10,000 units provides more viable public transport or that the transport interventions that were outside of the budget of 5,000 units can be implemented at 10,000. Even if a greater range of interventions were required if the interventions are

undertaken and the scheme does reduce the need to travel, provides sustainable travel options, reduces journey times then in SA terms 10,000 is better than 5,000.

The statement:-

“...Equally, the potential economies of scale associated with the provision of infrastructure would not be realised through two geographically separate areas (e.g. C and D or C and A)”

Is again untested as we do not have any evidence as to the impact of two 5,000 unit sites.

Given this is an evidence led process there seems to be a significant lack of evidence.

Nowhere within the Revised SA are all **reasonable** alternatives assessed.

The same level of detail is not used to assess the difference between 5,000 & 10,000 as evidence has only been gathered to support the chosen policy.

Throughout appendix B and feeding back into pages 75 & 76 where development of 10,000 is considered are statements like this “As for 5,000 units but potential risk of new infrastructure being delayed leading to loss of opportunities for provision.” But this assumes that the targets and triggers for delivery are the same.

“Evidence on housing delivery rates suggests that the slower delivery rate which would be associated with a larger site would fail to deliver sufficient volumes of housing at the right time to provide adequate infrastructure, specifically: “The inevitable consequence of [a] slower rate of delivery would be that trigger points for the provision of infrastructure would not be reached as per the anticipated trajectory. “

The outcome of the assessment on the scale of development is heavily dependent upon accepting the PBA position that delivery of more than 5,000 units is unachievable in Birmingham green belt, together with the acceptance that this would mean delivery of only 5,000 units over plan even with allocation of 10,000. Whilst the Inspector has not given a view on this, constraining the plan for the next 20 years based on the assumption that something that's not been done in Birmingham before can never be done in Birmingham seems short sighted at best.

If however two sites do indeed split the delivery rate in half as suggested by PBA surely the triggers and trajectories would be adjusted accordingly.

Significantly within the Site Delivery Plan (IMP2) it can be seen that there are currently no details of trigger points for the LSUE.

Whilst the Infrastructure delivery plan has identified some of the items needed no evidence is provided on the actual timing required.

If there is no evidence of timing, trigger points for the delivery of the selected LSUE option how can it be compared to the timing of delivery and trigger points of the other reasonable alternatives options. Simply stating that the delivery could be delayed is not evidence nor does it reflect the delivery elsewhere.

All over the country, LPA's are delivering multiple simultaneous SUE's yet the SA suggests that this cannot be achieved in Birmingham but can in Peterborough, Cambridge, rugby, etc.

For example in Peterborough the council have 5 SUE's (3 under construction) yet to provide some 14,000 units (as at policy map adoption).

<https://www.peterborough.gov.uk/upload/www.peterborough.gov.uk/council/planning-and-development/Planning-Policies-MapUrban.pdf?inline=true>

SAI.2 (1,154 units) is immediately adjacent to SAI.5 (2,300 units) on the north of the city.

SAI.3 (1,5278 units), SAI.1 (3,709 units) SAI.4 (5,350 units) are all immediately adjacent to one another on the south of the city.

The two areas of development are 6.6km apart.

If Peterborough can do it why not Birmingham?

Other Matters

Ignoring the matters of opinion regarding appendix C we would comment as follows on the facts.

At C8 there are two primary schools missing New Hall and Walmley schools

At C9 there are two post offices missing from the plan Grange Lane & Whitehouse Common Road.

As local transport hubs and public transport routes play such an important role why is neither shown on the plans at C7?

Looking at C10 it would appear that there is a problem with the layers – none of the underlying layers produces and area of influence which crosses/covers Fox Hollies Lane yet one does. The key describes 4 services yet the proceeding pages only show 3.

Is the missing layer the local shop provision layer which is not published in this report but was in the SA HTY14 (at b4)

If the missing layer is the local shop provision can this be shown?

If it is shown can it include all the missing local shops Grange Lane post office, Weeford Road farm shop and possibly Slade Road convenience retail in the petrol station.

Given this level of attention to details on matters of fact which can easily be checked it calls into question the attention to detail in the areas subject to opinion.

*In closing we would ask the inspector to consider if the short comings of the SA have actually been addressed by this additional work and direct you to page 20 of HTY14 (options consultation interim sustainability appraisal) **[emphasis added]***

*“Whether a single location or multiple locations (either within Options or between them) represents the best planning solution is dependent upon a range of factors, notably transport infrastructure and the capacity of existing services such as schools, as well as the scale of development which could provide new infrastructure. More detailed transport and service capacity modelling, would therefore be required to appraise these impacts, **in particular the cumulative impacts associated with different combinations of sites, site sizes and mixtures of development.**”*

In our view the appropriate sound planning solution has not been identified because this work has still not been under taken.

We trust these additional comments can be taken into consideration.

Yours sincerely

GARY CARDIN
Senior Director
National Planning & Development