

Planning Policy Department  
Walsall Council  
Civic Centre  
Darwall Street  
Walsall  
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**Date:** 22 October 2018

**Our ref:** 42085/02/MW/AMCL/16623516v5

**Your ref:**

Dear Sir or Madam

## **Black Country Joint Core Strategy Review: Call for Sites Land at Mob Lane, Pelsall, Walsall**

We write on behalf of our client, Taylor Wimpey UK Limited, in response to the Black Country Joint Core Strategy Review [BCJCS] Call for Sites Consultation.

These representations are made in the context of Taylor Wimpey's interest in Walsall, namely the land at Mob Lane, as indicated in the accompanying red line plan (dwg. ref. 1246\_CP\_01). The site has the potential to deliver up to 240 new dwellings, and is currently identified as Green Belt.

These representations support the removal of the site from the Green Belt and its allocation for residential development on the basis that:

- 1 It would assist in the delivery of sustainable development;
- 2 It does not fulfil Green Belt purposes; and,
- 3 There are no known constraints to its development and, it is deliverable in the next five years.

### **Sustainable Location**

The site comprises 8 hectares of agricultural land which is situated to the north of Mob Lane, 1.2km to the east of the centre of Pelsall. The site is suitable for residential development due to its proximity to local services, its favourable topography and its proximity to the A461 and its links to the strategic road network.

The site is well located for new residential development. It is within close proximity to a range of local services and facilities together with employment and education opportunities, including:

- 1 Sheffield Community Academy (Secondary School);
- 2 St Francis Primary School;
- 3 New Leaf Centre (Short Stay School);
- 4 High Heath Park;
- 5 Pelsall Cricket & Sports Club;
- 6 Better Gym Walsall Wood;
- 7 Four Crosses Pub;

- 8 Spring Lane Takeaway outlets;
- 9 Nisa Local;
- 10 Hartshorne KV Chemists; and
- 11 Chapel Street Surgery.

There is a good level of public transport accessibility near the site. There are a number of bus stops close to the site, including “Coronation Road” north and southbound stops located on Broad Way, within 0.5km of the site.

Bloxwich Railway Station is located 5.8km from the proposed site access, with Walsall Railway station 7km from the Site. Both stations are accessible as part of a multi-modal journey, via bus service 32 or alternatively by cycle. There is also potential to provide pedestrian and cyclist access onto Mob Lane from the site.

The allocation of the site would assist in the delivery of sustainable development within the Borough by making a significant contribution towards meeting the need for market and affordable housing. Overall the site is considered to deliver economic, social and environmental gains in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (2018) [the Framework]. This is summarised below:

### *Economic*

The BCJCS promotes a strategy for growth across all 4 Black Country authorities, and seeks to secure high levels of investment for all areas of the region. The development of the site will provide a number of economic and fiscal benefits in terms of job creation and increased expenditure in the local economy both during and post development.

Housing supply also plays a key role in the flexibility of the local labour market which itself is an important component in local economic competitiveness. A shortage of housing or lack of affordability can act as a barrier to people accessing employment opportunities, or result in long distance commuting with adverse transport and environmental impacts. The development will assist in addressing this, and will also provide numerous construction benefits, seeking to use local construction firms and suppliers where possible to create jobs for the local economy.

Following completion of the development it is also expected that new residents will spend in the local area which will boost the local economy and sustain local jobs.

### *Social*

The development of the site will support the creation of a strong, vibrant and healthy community by increasing the supply of housing of a type and tenure to meet the needs of the area. It would provide a high quality built environment and complement the character of the surroundings. In particular, it will provide a suitable range of open market and affordable housing along with public open space for existing and future residents.

### *Environmental*

The site is currently in use for agricultural purposes and as such has limited ecological value. Although the proposed development will involve the loss of greenfield land, proposals will provide numerous compensatory improvements, and seek to retain, enhance or mitigate the existing ecological and environmental features of value on the site. Existing hedgerows and trees will be retained and incorporated within the proposed development where possible.

The proposed scheme includes provision for a total of between 2-2.5 hectares of Public Open Space. The scheme includes areas of open space along the boundaries of the site, and responds to the environmental features adjacent to the northern and eastern borders of the site.

## **Green Belt Release**

In delivering sustainable development, the Framework attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence [§133]. The Framework states that before concluding that “exceptional circumstances” exist, the Council will be required to demonstrate that it has fully examined all other reasonable options for meeting its identified need for development [§137]. This includes:

- 1 Making as much use as possible of suitable brownfield sites and underutilised land;
- 2 Optimising the density of developments; and
- 3 Discussions with neighbouring authorities to ascertain whether they could accommodate the identified need.

Taylor Wimpey considers that availability of land and the acute housing needs in the Black Country and the wider Greater Birmingham HMA, demonstrates that “exceptional circumstances” exist to justify the release of the site from the Green Belt. There are no other reasonable alternatives other than releasing Green Belt land to meet the housing needs of the Black Country and wider Greater Birmingham HMA. The Framework indicates that when drawing up Green Belt boundaries, the Council should consider the need to promote a sustainable pattern of development, channelling development towards the urban area. Where Green Belt land is required for release, consideration should first be given to land which is previously developed and/or well served by public transport.

As set out in the preceding section, the development of the site would deliver the three dimensions of sustainable development as it performs a positive economic, social and environmental role in accordance with the Framework [§8]. The site is situated in a sustainable location and relates well to the urban areas of High Heath and Pelsall. It also benefits from nearby shops, services and facilities and is within close proximity to the strategic road network and public transport links.

## **Green Belt Purposes**

The Framework [§134] identifies the 5 purposes that Green Belts serve. The following assessment considers the site against the five purposes of the Green Belt to establish its suitability for Green Belt release.

### **Purpose 1 - To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas**

The site comprises a land parcel which is adjacent to the existing urban area. The site is bounded to the south and south-east by Mob Lane and existing residential development which provide firm and long-term defensible boundaries. Tree lines and substantial planting establish strong boundaries to the north and east of the site. It is envisaged that a firm, defensible landscape edge could be provided on the northern and eastern boundaries by enhancing the existing landscaping.

The removal of the site from the Green Belt will not result in the in unrestricted sprawl of the urban area.

### **Purpose 2 - To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another**

The site is not essential in preventing any neighbouring towns merging into one another. The site does not comprise an essential parcel of land that needs to be kept open for any strategic reason. The distance

between High Heath and Pelsall is currently around 150m at its closest point. This natural landscape break between High Heath and Pelsall would remain if the site were to be developed, and an alteration to the Green Belt boundary in this location would not alter the current separation between the settlements.

The development of the site would not result in the narrowing of the gap nor would it result in merging of settlements.

### **Purpose 3 - To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment**

The land at Mob Lane comprises a natural extension to the urban area, and represents a logical continuation of residential development to the area of High Heath. The site is defined by substantial landscape features around its northern, eastern and western boundaries, and built development which defines the edge of the site to the south and south-east.

The development would result in some encroachment into land which presently is countryside, though a sympathetic layout which respects the existing building line and reinforces site boundaries could assist in the integration of any future development of the land.

The removal of the site from the Green Belt does not affect the purpose of safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.

### **Purpose 4 - To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns**

Pelsall and High Heath are not nationally recognised historic towns and there are no Listed Buildings or Conservation Areas in close proximity to the site. Therefore, this Green Belt purpose is not relevant to the assessment of the site against the Framework.

The removal of the site from the Green Belt does not affect the purpose of preserving the setting and special character of a historic town.

### **Purpose 5 - To assist urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land**

The release of the land at Mob Lane from the Green Belt would not prevent the recycling of derelict land and other urban land within Walsall, as there is insufficient previously developed land available to meet future housing requirements.

The Black Country Issues and Options Core Strategy notes that there is significant housing need within the Black Country and the wider HMA, and the Greater Birmingham SGS concludes that a shortfall of up to 47,800 homes exists across the HMA to 2036. Therefore, there is a requirement for the identification of new sites on land outside the urban area that are not currently proposed for development. Land will need to be removed from the Green Belt and safeguarded from development to meet housing needs beyond the plan period.

In summary, the proposed allocation does not fulfil any strategic Green Belt function and its loss will not lead to any issues of coalescence. Removal of the land from the Green Belt, and its allocation for housing, will not harm any of the five purposes of the Green Belt set out in §134 of the Framework.

On behalf of Taylor Wimpey, Lichfields is currently in the process of preparing a Vision Document and supplementary Technical Green Belt Report for the Mob Lane site. It is expected that these documents will be submitted in support of representations for the next stage of consultation for the BCJCS, in order to promote and further justify the release of the site from the Green Belt.

## **Greater Birmingham and Black Country HMA Strategic Growth Study [SGS]**

The Mob Lane Site has been identified in the SGS as part of a larger parcel of land (ref. N22) which comprises Green Belt land between High Heath and Brownhill. This parcel of land appears to be included as a potential 'Area of Search' and is identified as a 'Proportionate Dispersal' area (ref. Location PD3).

The Study defines 'Proportionate Dispersal' as areas suitable for: *“development (500 to 2,500 dwellings, either on a single site or cluster of sites in a local area), or indeed perhaps smaller scale development schemes, most appropriate to complex settlement edges where the strategic role of the Green Belt is less coherent, allowing for localised infill and rounding off.”*

With reference to Location PD3, the strategic function of the Green Belt in this locality is described as *“complex urban edge with various instances of strategic separation and containment”* and its local function as *“separation of various settlements.”* The explanatory text notes that there will likely be opportunities for various scales of development adjacent to the complex urban edge within this area, subject to it not impacting on local separation and settlement identity.

The Site is designated by Figure 6 (Contribution to Green Belt Purposes) (Appendix 1) as performing a 'Supporting Contribution' to the Green Belt. The SGS confirms that rounding off of Pelsall is appropriate.

## **Deliverability**

Taylor Wimpey aims to create an attractive housing development with a distinctive character offering a choice of high quality new homes to meet local needs. The site has the potential to deliver up to 240 high quality new homes with a mix of housing types, tenure, and sizes. It would also deliver high quality, accessible, green space for the benefit of existing and future residents. Taylor Wimpey understands the local market and can deliver a high quality residential development within the first 5 years of the plan period.

The site is both deliverable and developable when considered against the definitions set out in the Framework.

## **Is the site available?**

The proposed allocation and development of the site:

- 1 Will make a valuable contribution towards meeting the quantitative and qualitative needs of the community for market and affordable housing. It could deliver up to 240 high quality family houses.
- 2 Is being promoted by a national housebuilder, Taylor Wimpey, who can deliver the proposed residential scheme. Taylor Wimpey is seeking to commence development as soon as the site is allocated.
- 3 Is not subject to any known constraints that would impede deliverability. There are no legal impediments, need for land in third party ownership. The site is therefore fully deliverable.

## **Is the site suitable?**

The site is located to the north of the residential area of High Heath - situated adjacent to Shelfield Community Academy - and in close proximity to a number of services and facilities in High Heath and in the neighbouring residential area of Shelfield.

The site is also well located in the context of the wider settlement, and is situated within 0.5km from bus stops on Broad Way and Spring Lane, which provide direct access to the centre of Pelsall.

Pelsall is identified within the BCJCS Centres Key Diagram as a District and Local Centre. District and Local Centres provide for important day-to-day local shopping and service needs and are key areas within the

