

BLACK COUNTRY CALL FOR SITES REPRESENTATION






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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	0
2	SITE AND SURROUNDINGS	1
3	POLICY CONTEXT	5
	Greater Birmingham HMA Strategic Growth Study	7
	Black Country Urban Capacity Study	7
4	KEY CONSIDERATIONS	8
5	CONCLUSION	11

FIGURES

Figure 1	Site Location Plan.....	1
Figure 2	View of site from Wynall Lane South	2
Figure 3	Footpath extending up towards the northern boundary of the site.....	3
Figure 4	View from the site towards existing dwellings on Wynall Lane South.....	4
Figure 5	View into the site from Wynall Lane South towards Farmside Close	4
Figure 6	View of Foxcote Farm and boundary of promoted site.....	9

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This representation has been produced and submitted by RCA Regeneration Ltd (the agent) on behalf of D T Ruston Associates Properties Ltd (the landowner). This representation relates to land to the north of Wynall Lane South and east of Farmside Close for the release or land from the Green Belt and its subsequent designation for housing as part of a strategic urban extension to the east of Wollescote.

1.2 This representation is set out as follows:

Section 2: Site and Surroundings

Section 3: Policy Context

Section 4: Key Considerations

Section 5: Conclusion

2 SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

- 2.1 The site is roughly rectangular in shape extending to approximately 0.94ha and lies immediately adjacent to the existing built-up area to the east of Wollescote. The site comprises mainly scrub with some deciduous trees and is enclosed on its northern, eastern and southern boundaries by native hedges. The western boundary is formed by boundary treatment associated with the rear gardens of dwellings accessed off Farmside Close.
- 2.2 The southern boundary of the site lies adjacent to Wynall Lane South, which connects with Hayley Green to the east. The northern and eastern boundaries of the site adjoin arable farmland. A site location plan is also submitted as part of this representation and is included below.



Figure 1 Site Location Plan

- 2.3 Wynall Lane South is elevated above the site by approximately 1m with the southern boundary of the site comprising an embankment. The site itself falls in level from south-east to north-west. Views of the site from Wynall Lane South are provided in Figure 2 below.



Figure 2 View of site from Wynall Lane South

2.4 Open countryside in the form of managed agricultural land is situated beyond the northern and eastern boundaries of the application site. A footpath also extends along the northern boundary (see photograph 3 below). Analysis of Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council's interactive planning policy map does not indicate that this is a public right of way. However, there is evidence that this footpath is used by the general public and it connects to other routes within the open countryside.



Figure 3 Footpath extending up towards the northern boundary of the site

- 2.5 There are inter-war hipped-roof semi-detached properties located on the opposite site of Wynall Lane South to the site (Figure 4). Further residential properties that are recently built are situated immediately abutting the western boundary accessed off Farmside Close (Figure 5).



Figure 4 - View from the site towards existing dwellings on Wynall Lane South



Figure 5 View into the site from Wynall Lane South towards Farmside Close

3 POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The site is subject to a number of planning policy designations. This includes Green Belt (Policy CSP2 of the BCCS and Policy S23 of the Development Strategy), a Site of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (Policy ENV1 of the BCCS and Policy S21 of the Development Strategy) and Landscape Heritage Area (Policy 31 of the Development Strategy).
- 3.2 The spatial strategy associated with the adopted Black Country Core Strategy (2011) is one which has a strong Green Belt to promote the urban renaissance of the urban area and to provide easy access to the countryside for residents (Policy CSP2). The presumption against inappropriate development within the designated Green Belt is reaffirmed by Policy S23 within the adopted Dudley Borough Development Strategy (2017).
- 3.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) at para 134 identifies that the Green Belt should serve 5 purposes;
- To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
 - To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
 - To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
 - To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
 - To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.
- 3.4 Para 135 of the NPPF confirms that the general extent of Green Belts across the country is already established and that new Green Belts should only be established in exceptional circumstances. In particular, it states that:
- "Any proposals for new Green Belts should be set out in strategic policies, which should:*
- a) demonstrate why normal planning and development management policies would be adequate;*
- b) set out whether any major changes in circumstances have made the adoption of this exceptional measure necessary;*

c) show what the consequences of the proposal would be for sustainable development;

d) demonstrate the necessity for the Green Belt and its consistency with strategic policies for adjoining areas; and

e) show how the Green Belt would meet the other objectives of the Framework.”

3.5 Paras 136 and 137 of the NPPF goes on to state that once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified, through the preparation or updating of plans. The NPPF is clear that before concluding that exceptional circumstances exist to justify changes to Green Belt boundaries, the strategic policy-making authority should be able to demonstrate that it has examined fully all other reasonable options of meeting its identified need for development. This includes:

- Making as much use as possible of suitable brownfield and underutilised land.
- Optimising the density of development.
- Discussing the development needs with neighbouring authorities as to whether they could accommodate some of the identified need

3.6 The review of the Black Country Core Strategy has begun to plan for development up to 2036. A number of studies have been commissioned to inform the development potential of land within the urban areas and the need for the release of Green Belt to meet the housing and employment needs of the Black Country, the Greater Birmingham HMA and the aspirations of the West Midlands Strategic Economic Plan.

3.7 The G L Hearn Greater Birmingham HMA Strategic Growth Study (February 2018) has assessed the growth needs of the Greater Birmingham and Black Country HMA. This being between 256,000 and 310,000 new homes to 2036. The Greater Birmingham and Black Country HMA Strategic Growth Study updated need and supply figures for the wider Housing Market Area, estimating a shortfall of between 28,150 homes up to 2031 and 32,700 homes for 2031-36.

3.8 The Black Country published the Black Country Urban Capacity Review in May 2018 following the G L Hearn report to identify existing housing and employment land supply to meet the current plan period and to act as a working document informing the BCCS review up to 2036.

3.9 The strategy for delivering sufficient growth to meet the needs of the HMA is yet to be concluded but both the G L Hearn report and the Black Country Urban Capacity Analysis

(May 2018) agree that the Black Country does not have sufficient land within the urban area to meet its future housing and employment growth needs without releasing Green Belt.

Greater Birmingham HMA Strategic Growth Study (February 2018)

- 3.10 The Greater Birmingham HMA Strategic Growth Study analysed a number of options to address the housing supply shortfall up to 2036 including; increasing development densities, urban extensions and new settlements within the West Midlands area as advocated by paras 136 and 137 of the NPPF. This analysis assessed from a high strategic level a number of general areas that could be suitable for the creation of both urban extensions and new settlements in the West Midlands and their ability to accommodate residential development.
- 3.11 In terms of future work, the assessment recommends that the sites identified within this report should be subject to a more detailed analysis in terms of sustainability and suitability.
- 3.12 Of pertinence to this representation is the identification of a potential Urban Extension South of Dudley (Ref: UE1) as an option for growth.
- 3.13 The analysis concluded that development in this area would only have a limited effect on the strategic function of the Green Belt due to the high degree of containment provided by the A456 to the south. This study identifies that the quantum of housing for each urban extension as being between 1,500 – 7,500 dwellings.
- 3.14 Moreover, we consider that the subject site is (together with some of the neighbouring land) visually self-contained.

Black Country Urban Capacity Study (May 2018)

- 3.15 In addition to the above, the Black Country Urban Capacity Study is an evidence-based document to inform the Black Country Core Strategy Review. This document confirms that the Black Country does not have sufficient land within its administrative area to meet the housing need identified within the Greater Birmingham Strategic Growth Study (32,700 homes up to 2036) and an additional 800ha employment land (between 2014 – 2036) identified within the Black Country Economic Development Needs Assessment. The Black Country Urban Capacity Study concludes that in order to meet the housing and employment land requirements to 2036 that a review of the existing Green Belt boundary should be undertaken as there are exceptional circumstances to justify such an approach in accordance with the NPPF.

4 KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1 The Greater Birmingham HMA Strategic Study (2018) has identified the general location in which the site subject to this representation is made as having limited effect on the strategic function of the Green Belt if it were to be released for development. This is due to the high degree of visual and physical containment provided by the A456 to the south.
- 4.2 The site subject to this representation could be brought forward as part of a larger strategic release of Green Belt land forming part of an urban extension adjoining the south of Dudley Borough. Its release would not result in the unrestricted sprawl of the built-up area and would restrict in the encroachment of development into the countryside through containment provided by the A456. Further masterplanning work would ensure the prevention of the coalescence of Stourbridge to the west with Halesowen to the east and the urban extension would not adversely impact upon the setting and special character of a historic town adjoining inter-war and post-war development on the edges of Wollescote and Belle Vale.
- 4.3 The site could also successfully form part of a smaller urban extension immediately to the east of Wollescote contained by Wynnall Lane South to the south and Oldnall Road to the north to include Foxcote Farm. It is understood that a representation has already been submitted into the Call for Sites consultation seeking the release of Foxcote Farm from the Green Belt to deliver strategic housing requirements. Foxcote Farm immediately adjoins the northern boundary of the site accessed by a footpath located off Wynnall Lane situated to the west of the site. The land associated with Foxcote Farm is shown in Figure 6 as viewed from the footpath with the boundary of the site subject to these representations shown on the right.



Figure 6 - View of Foxcote Farm and boundary of promoted site.

- 4.4 Development of the site for residential purposes would not result in Pedmore Fields merging with Belle Vale, with a significant gap remaining between the two suburban areas. Although a Grade II Listed Building is located approximately 230m to the east of the site at Foxcote House Farm, the separation distance from any development would ensure that the setting and special character of this heritage asset is preserved.
- 4.5 As previously referenced, the site is designated as a SLINC within the adopted Borough Development Strategy (2017). In order to support this representation, a Phase 1 Preliminary Ecological Assessment (PEA) has been undertaken to establish the nature conservation value of the site and the potential for protected species. A copy of this report is also submitted to the 'Call For Sites' consultation. A brief summary of this report is provided below.
- 4.6 The PEA confirms that the site remains suitable for its designation as a SLINC being of moderate ecological value with further survey work required if development proposals progress in relation to the site.
- 4.7 Paragraph 171 of the NPPF identifies that plans should distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated nature conservation sites. Therefore, Sites of Local Importance, such as this, should be afforded the least protection. The site's designation

as a SLINC should not preclude the land from being brought forward for development as the development of the site needs to be weighed against the strategic requirement to release land from the Green Belt to help contribute towards meeting the long-term housing needs of the Black Country up to 2036.

- 4.8 It should be noted that the release of the site from the Green Belt and its subsequent development would not necessarily mean the total loss of the nature conservation value of the site or habitat and a strategic urban extension is likely to provide an opportunity for enhancement, mitigation and compensation from a nature conservation perspective. This is especially since the majority of the land likely to form part of the urban extension is farmed agricultural land, which is usually of limited ecological value. In this case, the strategic benefit of the development would clearly outweigh the local nature conservation importance and potential harm to this specific site when weighed against the overall benefits of development (social, economic and environmental).
- 4.9 Similarly, the sites designation within an Area of High Historic Landscape Value would not prohibit the principle of development. Detailed technical work will follow this representation to demonstrate that development can come forward that can preserve the character, quality and historic integrity of the landscape. This would be through Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment and Heritage Assessment work.

5 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The release of land to the east of Wollescote as a sustainable urban extension including the site subject to this representation would have limited effect on the strategic function of the Green Belt due to the high degree of containment provided by the A456 to the south.
- 5.2 Whilst the specific site is sensitive in terms of its moderate nature conservation value and falling within a landscape heritage area, these aspects would not prohibit the principle of development. It will be possible, subject to further technical work, to design a sensitive development that secures an appropriate level of ecological enhancement, mitigation and compensation across the wider site as a whole and does not result in an adverse landscape or visual impact.
- 5.3 The strategic benefit of the release of this site as part of an urban extension would clearly outweigh the local nature conservation importance and potential harm to this specific site when weighed against the overall benefits of development (social, economic and environmental).

