

Sunderland Local Plan Examination

Taylor Wimpey – Houghton-le-Spring

Matter 7 - The Strategy and Housing Growth Areas for The Coalfields

Issued May 2019

1.0 Strategic Policies

(1.1) Are policies SP6 and SS7 justified and effective?

- 1.1 Taylor Wimpey supports the Council's overall approach to Policies SP6 and SP7, recognising the need to rebalance the distribution of housing across the sub areas to ensure the needs of the entire city are met.
- 1.2 Taylor Wimpey also agrees that there is limited capacity within the Existing Urban Area and that amendments to the Green Belt are required to deliver the housing requirement and to allow for sustainable development. For the Coalfield sub area specifically, the current Green Belt boundary significantly constrains development around settlements including Penshaw and Houghton-le-Spring. In addition, Taylor Wimpey agrees that Houghton-le-Spring is the principal centre in the Coalfield, but notes that it does not currently have a Housing Growth Area allocation in SP6 (2).
- 1.3 Whilst Taylor Wimpey supports the housing strategy in the CSDP, if additional sites are needed, Policy SP6 (2) could be extended to include the release of land east of Seaham Road, Houghton-le-Spring (SHLAA ref. 645) from the Green Belt for development in the plan period. Taylor Wimpey's preferred approach would be for this site to be allocated for delivery within the plan period. If this approach is not supported, Taylor Wimpey requests that the site is released from the Green Belt and included as safeguarded land (Policy SS3).
- 1.4 As demonstrated within the Vision Document (submitted with the representations to the consultation on the CSDP Publication Draft in July 2018) and detailed in our response to question 2.3 below, the Site represents a logical and sustainable extension to Houghton-le-Spring, whilst protecting the existing Settlement Breaks and Open Countryside in accordance with SP6 (1). The Site is also demonstrably sustainable and within reasonable walking distance to local shops, schools and a range of existing services and facilities.
- 1.5 The Site has no known constraints which would preclude it from development and it would allow housing growth to meet the Council's identified housing need at one of main centres within Sunderland. Taylor Wimpey therefore considers that the release of the site from the Green Belt is a sustainable and logical location to deliver new homes, if additional sites are needed.

2.0 Identification of Sites and Protected Areas

(2.3) Are the configuration and scale of the HGAs justified taking into account development needs and the Green Belt assessments?

- 2.1 As outlined above, whilst supporting the configuration and scale of the proposed Housing Growth Areas, Taylor Wimpey considers that Policy SP6 (2) could be extended to include the release of Green Belt land to the east of Seaham Road, Houghton-le-Spring (SHLAA ref. 645) for housing development in the plan period, if there is a need for additional sites.
- 2.2 Taylor Wimpey considers that the inclusion of this site under Policy SP6 (2) is logical to allow for future development needs in Houghton-le-Spring, as the “*principal centre in the Coalfield*” (paragraph 4.65), with no HGAs currently allocated in this area.
- 2.3 In addition, Taylor Wimpey agrees that there is limited capacity within the urban area and that amendments to the Green Belt are required to allow for the sustainable expansion of settlements to meet the long terms needs of the City. Taylor Wimpey also notes that the revised NPPF (paragraph 136) prescribes that in reviewing Green Belt boundaries, Local Planning Authorities should have regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so that they can endure beyond the plan period. As such, the Council needs to satisfy itself that there will be *sufficient* land, at appropriate locations, to meet development needs beyond 2033.
- 2.4 This is particularly applicable to Houghton-le-Spring since there is limited available land within the built-up area and the Green Belt boundary is drawn tightly around the north and east of the settlement.
- 2.5 Taylor Wimpey’s preferred approach would therefore be for this site to be allocated for delivery within the plan period to support development needs. If the Council does not support this approach, Taylor Wimpey considers that the site could be released from the Green Belt and included as safeguarded land (Policy SS3).
- 2.6 As demonstrated below, the Site is highly sustainable and has no known constraints which would preclude it from development. Taylor Wimpey considers that the release of the site from the Green Belt is logical and would allow housing growth to meet the Council’s identified housing need at one of main centres within Sunderland.

Site Assessment

- 2.7 The Council’s most recent assessment of the site (SHLAA (2018) ref. 645) states:
- “Site lies within the Green Belt. Site lies in close proximity to ponds, SSSI and LWS. There is evidence of priority species on and in vicinity of the site. Site is located within the wider setting of Copt Hill Schedule Ancient Monument. The north west part of the site lies within the historic boundary of the Houghton. Part of site lies within the critical drainage area and a small area is affected by 1:100 incidence surface water flooding. Low incidence potential of groundwater flooding.”*
- 2.8 Stage 1 of the Council’s Green Belt Assessment concluded that the site was not physically separate to the urban area. Stage 2 also stated that the site had no Category 1 Designations and overall performed moderately against the five Green Belt purposes and that it should be considered as part of the Site Selection process. However, Stage 3 of the Council’s Green Belt Site Selection Report concluded:

“Site is not considered for Green Belt deletion. This proposal is not considered to be suitable due to the combined impact on Green Belt purpose as well as to landscape and wildlife impacts. The impact to Green Belt purpose is moderate/major and there would be loss of an existing strong and defensible Green Belt boundary. Furthermore, the impact to the wildlife / GI corridor, to the ecology and to an area of High Landscape Value is also highly significant.”

- 2.9 Taylor Wimpey has considered the Council’s SHLAA (2018) and Green Belt Site Selection Report, along with other evidence-based documents, and has developed a Vision Document and instructed a number of technical assessments to respond to any potential concerns about developing the site, as detailed below. These reports demonstrate that the site is suitable, sustainable and deliverable.

Landscape

- 2.10 As set out the attached Vision Document, a Landscape Appraisal, undertaken by DP Landscape Architecture, concluded that the development on the site would have a relatively low impact on the local landscape character as new housing would sit comfortably within the urban fringe.
- 2.11 The Landscape Appraisal also considers that any impacts on views could be successfully mitigated through a sensitive landscaping strategy involving the partial retaining of views through the development and by interspersing open green space and woodland throughout the development. At present, the Appraisal considers that Seaham Road does not provide a strong Green Belt boundary and there is an opportunity to allow for sustainable growth whilst creating a new strong, defensible Green Belt boundary to the east of the site which would be defined by a readily recognisable physical feature (consistent with the requirements of NPPF).
- 2.12 DP Landscape Architecture therefore confirms that through appropriate mitigation the site will integrate into the surrounding area without causing any detrimental harm to the Landscape Value of the area and that the development of the Site could enhance the Green Belt boundaries, without any detrimental impacts on the purpose of the Green Belt.

Ecology

- 2.13 A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of the site, undertaken by E3 Ecology, confirms that the site is generally of poor ecological value. Initial surveys found no evidence of protected species on the site. Further, the habitats on site are considered to be of only low value to bats, comprising arable fields, allotments, bound by defunct hedgerow. A single pond was recorded to the north east of the site and was found to have an average suitability to support great crested newts. The presence of the SSSI and LWS in the wider area does not represent an insurmountable constraint to development of the site. Through implementation of a number of mitigation measures, the development is anticipated to result in net ecological gain, potentially including:
- A landscaped buffer zone along the northern and eastern boundaries;
 - Retention of existing hedgerow and enhancement of boundary features;
 - Creation of Green Infrastructure routes and Wildlife Corridors across the site to facilitate movement through the site post development;
 - Use of SUDS within the site to create good quality habitats for a range of species; and
 - Erection of bat and bird boxes across the site.

Transport

- 2.14 S.A.J Transport Consultants Ltd have undertaken a Transport Study to assess the highway considerations associated with the development of the site. The Study confirms that a suitable site access junction to the site can be established off Seaham Road. The site access junction would be a priority junction designed in accordance with the Council's design standard.
- 2.15 The site is positioned in a sustainable location within reasonable walking distance of a number of education, employment, retail and other amenity opportunities. The Study concludes that the development of the site would not result in severe cumulative impacts on the surrounding road network.

Ground Conditions

- 2.16 A Phase 1 Desk Study Report has been undertaken by Delta Simons to assess the potential for soil and groundwater contamination. The report identifies the site as being underlain by glacial till properties comprising clays, silts and sands.
- 2.17 The report established only limited sources of potential contamination associated with the allotment area to the north of the site, former landfill site to the north of the site and the former railway lines to the south of the site. A review of the Coal Authority Report indicates that whilst the site is in the likely zone of influence of coal seams, these have not been worked since 1981.
- 2.18 The Report concludes that there are no significant contamination risks that would preclude the site from development.

Archaeology/Heritage

- 2.19 An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment, prepared by Durham University Archaeological Services, has assessed the impact of the development on above and below ground heritage assets. The assessment identified evidence of ridge and furrow cultivation, reflecting the use of the area for agriculture in the medieval and post-medieval periods. There are no known archaeological features which require preservation in situ.
- 2.20 There are no statutorily protected buildings in the vicinity of the site. Copt Hill Scheduled Monument lies approximately 275m from the southern boundary of the site, however there is very limited inter-visibility between Copt Hill and the site due to the topography and presence of dense tree belt along the former railway line.

Flood Risk

- 2.21 The site falls within Flood Zone 1, as defined by the Environment Agency's Flood Map, and is considered to be at a low risk of flooding. A Drainage Strategy has been prepared by Wardell Armstrong to consider the foul and surface water drainage strategies for the site. It is proposed that surface water will be managed on site with provision of an attenuation pond in the northern part of the site which will discharge at controlled rates to Houghton Burn to the north.

Other

- 2.22 Taylor Wimpey considers that the site is demonstrably accessible and sustainable. The attached Vision Document (at page 12) clearly demonstrates that the site presents a sustainable location for residential development. The site is located within a 15-minute walking distance of Houghton-le-Spring town centre and is well-connected to neighbouring settlements through bus routes and through proximity to the A19 and A1(M).

- 2.23 The development of approximately 270 new homes would deliver significant and lasting economic, social and environment benefits to the local community. Socially, it would further contribute to meeting Sunderland's housing requirement, widening the range and choice of new homes in the Coalfield sub-area, whilst concurrently helping to retain and attract economically active, skilled residents who will generate significant local area spending, enhancing the vitality of local services.
- 2.24 Environmentally, the development of the Site also presents an opportunity to deliver net ecological gains, including the creation of new habitats to support diversity, and the accessible location would promote sustainable methods of travel to meet day-to-day needs.

Summary

- 2.25 Overall, Taylor Wimpey considers that the allocation of the Site as an additional Housing Growth Area would promote a sustainable pattern of development within the Coalfield sub-area. Houghton-le-Spring is the largest settlement within the Coalfield sub-area and Taylor Wimpey considers that it would therefore be a logical approach to plan for sustainable growth in this location.
- 2.26 Whilst Taylor Wimpey supports the housing strategy in the CSDP, it considers that the Site offers a sustainable and logical location to deliver new homes if additional sites are needed. Taylor Wimpey's preferred approach would be to allocate this site for delivery within the plan period. If this approach is not supported, Taylor Wimpey considers that the land could be released from the Green Belt and included as safeguarded land (Policy SS3).