



Morecambe Town Council

Morecambe Town Hall,
Marine Road
Morecambe
Lancashire
LA4 5AF

www.morecambe.gov.uk
clerk@morecambe.gov.uk

Proper Officer: Mr Luke Trevaskis

FAO: Planning Department
Lancaster City Council

1 February 2022

Dear Planning Officer,

RE: Planning Application 21/01341/OUT

I am writing to advise Morecambe Town Council, as a statutory consultee, objections to Planning Application 21/01341/OUT in the strongest possible terms.

Positioning in the Countryside

The site is designated as Key Urban Landscape (KUL) under Policy DN5 and Open Countryside in the Local Plan.

The Local Plan does not contain an urban area policy. This is confirmed in paragraph 1.5 of the Strategic Policies and Land Allocations document which notes that the policies map identifies where policies apply and what specific uses land is allocated for. It goes on to state that although the Council does not have an urban area policy an urban area boundary is shown on the policies map. The paragraph advises that the boundary is intended to be helpful in delineating the land within the district which is not subject to Open Countryside policy.

It is noted that the supporting planning statement does not consider it possible for the application site to be simultaneously within both the boundary of the urban area and designated as open countryside. It is understood that the site is unequivocally designated as Open Countryside and as such must be determined in this context.

Policy EN3 'Open Countryside' states that any development proposals located within open countryside should have due regard to all relevant policies contained within the Local Plan, in particular policies within the Development Management DPD relating to development in the rural area.

Policy SP3 'Development Strategy for Lancaster District' promotes an urban-focussed approach to development with development concentrated towards the main urban areas of Lancaster, Morecambe, Heysham and Carnforth. The development of land designated as open countryside in the Local Plan is not consistent with the development strategy for the district and is not a location that should support development.

Removal of Green Belt Designation & Discussion of Alternative Uses at Public Examination

Prior to the adoption of the new Local Plan the site had been included within the Green Belt. As part of the preparation of the Local Plan, Lancaster City Council undertook a Green Belt Review in 2016. This established the opportunity to re-align the Green Belt boundary in the Torrisholme area to follow a more definable feature, namely the West Coast Mainline and the newly constructed

Bay Gateway. The Council stated that following its removal it would be identified as Open Countryside.

The issue of re-aligning the Green Belt in the Torrisholme area was well-explored as part of the Hearing Sessions of the Local Plan Examination. The Inspector's Report supported the amended boundary and noted that its removal did not mean that it would be identified for development purposes and would instead be designated as Key Urban Landscape under Policy EN5 of the Local Plan and as an area of open space and as a Scheduled Ancient Monument due to its recreational and historical importance (paragraph 163 "the land will not be identified for development purposes"). Whilst the Inspector refers to open space it is presumed that the actual designation being referred to was Open Countryside with this being the alternative designation suggested by Lancaster City Council in its Matters Statement for this issue.

This site was also explored as an alternative location for development through the examination process. Whilst supporting the removal of the site from the Green Belt, Oakmere Homes sought for this to be replaced with a housing allocation. The Inspector made clear in paragraph 63 of his report that it was the focus of his report to consider whether the process the Council followed in selecting sites was sound and whether allocations will meet the development requirements. The Inspector did not see it as his role to discuss and conclude on the merits of the other sites as alternatives.

The Inspector concluded that reasonable alternatives had been assessed through the SHELAA and SA and concluded in paragraph 72 that he was satisfied that the reasons for selecting allocated sites and rejecting others was clear and the conclusions reached reasonable. On this basis the site selection process was considered to be robust. It is important to note that this conclusion was reached in the context of an acknowledgment from the City Council that it was unable to meet its Objectively Assessed Housing Need with a lower housing requirement being promoted.

Local Landscape Designation

In addition to the Open Countryside designation the site is also allocated as Key Urban Landscape (KUL) in the Local Plan.

The Local Plan identifies two types of local landscape designations: Urban Setting Landscape (USL) and KUL. Both are protected and allocated under Policy EN5 'Local Landscape Designations' of the Strategic Policies and Land Allocations document. The Local Plan landscape designation was informed by specific externally procured professional advice, described below, that was part of the evidence base submitted along with the Local Plan. The designation recognises that identified areas perform a significant role in defining the character of the district with many landscapes providing the setting for significant areas and features that together contribute and define the character of the district. Policy EN5 states that development proposals within these areas will only be permitted where they preserve the open nature of the area and the character and appearance of its surroundings.

The Council attaches great importance to maintaining the open nature of both KUL and USL and will look to protect them from inappropriate development which would erode this character.

KULs and USLs are protected under Policy DM46 'Development and Landscape Impact' of the adopted Development Management DPD. This states that the contribution that these areas make to the character and setting of the urban areas of the district will be conserved and important natural features safeguarded, providing particular regard to the historic townscape and built form of the urban areas. The policy goes on to state that within these areas Lancaster City Council will only support development that preserves the open nature of the area and the character and appearance of its surroundings.

The local landscape designation is a well-established local designation in the district. Historically only KUL were identified however through the preparation of the new Local Plan Lancaster City Council recognised the need to sub-divide this local designation to more accurately reflect the

varying role that these landscapes provide and to consider new areas for designation. Policy EN5 therefore identifies both KUL and USL.

This area was identified as one of 10 new local landscape designations by landscape consultants Arcadis in their 'Key Urban Landscapes Review' document (May 2018). The report concluded that the site (AS-03) contained strong cultural heritage with distinctive landform and mature well managed landscape features and that it was a landscape which has significant qualities and is distinct in appearance, providing a setting for the adjacent areas. It was scored the highest out of all the new areas assessed and was recommended as KUL.

The Inspector considered that the sites had been subject to a robust landscape assessment with the provisions in Policy EN5 in respect of these designations considered to be necessary and justified.

The proposed development would clearly be contrary to the designation of the site as KUL and as such contrary to the adopted Local Plan. It would significantly reduce the extent and function of this valuable local landscape designation at this location.

It is noted that the supporting evidence to the application concludes that the northern part of the KUL designation (the application site) makes a very limited contribution to the purposes of the KUL, and consequently, that the proposed development will have a negligible adverse effect on the KUL overall on the basis that it will not harm and will beneficially preserve and enhance the open nature of the most important part of the KUL.

Whilst recognising this evidence Morecambe Town Council does not support this view and would consider that any development of the KUL would impact on the integrity of this designation with the whole site providing a valued local landscape which should be protected.

Strategic Housing and Employment Land Assessment (SHELAA)

The land is situated in the Parish of Slyne with Hest and the emerging Neighbourhood Plan of that Parish has already identified the land needed for Housing Development under the terms of the City Council's SHELAA and, as such, there is no need for further housing development in that Parish.

The site was submitted as part of a larger site to Lancaster City Council as part of its Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (SHELLA) (LPSA_712). This considered that whilst the site as a possible urban extension was not suitable, small-scale development may be appropriate, particularly at the northern end of the site.

As described in appendix C of the SHELAA 'Post SHELAA Site Assessment Paper' the SHELAA is a policy neutral process concerned only with assessing the deliverability of sites. Only through the Local Plan process having regard to Lancaster City Council's wider evidence base and wider policy considerations can the most appropriate use for sites be determined. Recognising this fact the SHELAA contained a Post SHELAA Site Assessment Paper. This allowed for an additional stage of assessment having regard to alternative allocations. The paper recognised that there were a number of sites, such as this site, which whilst receiving positive consideration in the SHELAA, Lancaster City Council believed that alternative designations would be more appropriate.

In considering this site Lancaster City Council concluded that whilst potentially developable the local landscape designation should be applied. This decision was made having regard to the Council's housing land supply position and wider development strategy for the district. This was supported by the Planning Inspector.

Housing Mix

The SHMA and OAN Verification Study identifies a district wide annual imbalance of 376 affordable homes each year. It is this high level of need which the requirement for affordable housing provision within the Local Plan seeks to address. The provision of affordable homes on

developer led sites will account for a large percentage of the delivery of affordable housing in the district. Even if the percentages sought within the Local Plan policies are delivered, the shortfall in affordable housing will not be met and will remain significant. It is therefore important to ensure that each site makes an appropriate contribution to meeting the affordable housing need for the whole district.

Policy DM3 'The Delivery of Affordable Housing' sets out the requirement for affordable housing by area and the Wards within these areas are shown at figure 4.1 of the DMDPD. The site is within the Ward of Bolton-with-Slyne which falls within the Rural West area. Policy DM3 is therefore clear that the percentage of affordable homes required at the site is 30%. The applicant aims to provide 15% of the new homes as affordable, but caveats this with the comment that the percentage will be subject to a financial appraisal at reserved matters stage. It is also stated at 6.32 of the Planning Statement that whilst the site may geographically be within the Parish of Slyne with Hest, the application site is physically part of Bare and Morecambe. This geography has been used in an aim to justify the provision of only 15% affordable homes. The interpretation/justification provided by the applicant, is incorrect, policy DM3 requires the provision of 30% of the new homes at this site as affordable home. Even if 15% of the homes are provided as affordable, which is unclear at present, the proposed development would not accord with Policy DM3.

Flooding

The Land regularly suffers from floods which result from rainfall and inadequate land permeability. The Flood risk assessment accompanying the application clearly understates this risk and as such it must be clear that any measures proposed to ameliorate the risk must be inadequate. The subsequent "run off" to surrounding areas which already flood at times of high rainfall will exacerbate an already existing problem.

The flooding of surrounding areas at times of high rainfall clearly indicates the incapability of the local drainage system to cope at times of high stress and, as such, will be wholly incapable of receiving additional "run off" from the proposed development.

Heritage

It is noted that the supporting Heritage Statement states that the development will not cause substantial harm to the setting (significance) of the designated heritage asset (scheduled monument).

A heritage impact assessment was prepared for this site as part of the Local Plan process. This recognised that the site made a contribution to the setting and significance of designated and non designated heritage assets. This includes Torrisholme Bowl Barrow (Scheduled Monument), Belmont Bridge (Grade II listed), Williamlands Farm (NDHA) and Belmont Farm (NDHA). The main issue related to the impact on the Scheduled Monument.

The assessment went onto conclude that the harm caused to the significance of the Scheduled Monument is considered to be major as it would subsume and surround the asset. Some of the harm could be mitigated through the restriction of development north of Hasty Brow Road and restriction of heights of buildings to 2 storeys. This would reduce some of the visual impact on views of the asset from the east, but views from the asset would still be negatively impacted. Overall, the harm caused by development of the site would not be outweighed by enhancements such as increased interpretation and the mitigation measures are unlikely to reduce the harm on the Scheduled Monument significantly.

Conclusion

The site's location on the edge of the urban area is relatively remote from many services such as schools, employment areas, health facilities. The applicants TA refers to maximum walking distances however the IHT guidance states that an acceptable distance to schools and work is 1km, to town centres 400m and elsewhere 800m. Reference is made to a local centre which,

taking into account the indicative layout of the site, is in excess of 800m from much of the site. It should also be noted that the Bare 'Urban Local Centre' identified in the Local Plan is 1.5km from centre of site.

The indicative layout shows that walking and cycling is not prioritised and contrary to the NPPF (paragraph 110) and fails to maximise the opportunities for cycling and walking in accordance with Policy DM60. Although in outline form it would be beneficial to see a revised layout showing how walking and cycling can be prioritised within the site.

There is reference within the TA (page 23) to the existing cycle network but this is out of date and does not include the Bay Gateway. There is no indication as to how access is made to the existing cycle network from the site or how the local network could be improved as set out in Policy T2.

The existing South Road cycle route provides access to Morecambe Town centre and the Lancaster Greenway but provides no links to the south and the significant trip attractors located there ie. Lancaster city centre and the employment area at White Lund.

The road network leading to the proposed development is inadequate both for the purposes of day to day access for residents and for the purposes of the construction work associated with the development of a large housing estate and the enormous amount of material necessary to raise the land to the level proposed in the application.

The site is designated as Open Countryside and allocated KUL in the recently adopted Local Plan and as such is not somewhere where the council would support development.

Paragraph 11 of the NPPF states that where a local authority is unable to demonstrate a 5 year supply of deliverable housing sites granting planning permission unless i) the application of policies in the framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or ii) any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.

The Local Plan was subject to extensive consultation and is informed by a thorough evidence base; the allocations, including the identification of significant strategic development sites, were concluded through a robust Examination process. The achievement of planning consent for proposals on sites that were specifically precluded for development purposes by such as recently adopted plan would undermine confidence in the forward planning process.

It is therefore considered by Morecambe Town Council that the scheme should be refused due to the significant harm identified.

Yours sincerely,



Mr Luke Trevaskis
Proper Officer
Morecambe Town Council