NPPF – IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUNDNESS OF CORE STRATEGY

SUBMISSION BY ASSOCIATED HOLDINGS

1.00 INTRODUCTION

1.01 A major theme in the NPPF is that Local Planning Authorities should produce plans that 'proactively drive and support sustainable economic development to deliver the homes, business and industrial units, infrastructure and thriving local places that the country needs.' Paragraph 17 (12 Core Planning Principles) continues:

'Every effort should be made objectively to identify and then meet the housing, business and other development needs of an area, and respond positively to wider opportunities for growth. Plans should take account of market signals, such as land prices and housing affordability, and set out a clear strategy for allocating sufficient land which is suitable for development in their area, taking account of the needs of the residential and business communities.'

1.02 On a District wide level, the Modified Submission Draft Core Strategy has identified and quantified the strategic local need for new housing and is therefore Sound. However, the Council failed to apply the same proactive approach to Henley as in other parts of the District during the preparatory stages of the process, and as a result has not achieved identification of land which is strategically important to the delivery of essential new housing to support the economic well being of the largest of the three market towns.

1.03 What has been achieved so far is the allocation of a small proportion of the District's housing growth to this area. At 400 units (the maximum considered in sustainability appraisals), the allocation is around 55% of the level that is required for balanced growth across the market towns. Submissions have previously been made that the Council omitted to consider at any time the negative impacts on the local economy and social needs of the area resulting from this 'constraint' strategy, but instead focussed on minimising impact on designated sensitive landscapes (without at that time any AONB appraisal) and areas liable to flood.

1.04 Paragraph 7 of the NPPF refers to the need to ensure that 'sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time'. Background evidence demonstrates that housing delivery around Henley has been extremely slow in the past as the supply of urban sites is limited, and 'old' local Plan policies presumed against development outside existing settlement boundaries and in the AONB. The Core Strategy is the proper and only opportunity to create a new planning environment for the town where essential growth can be accommodated in a planned way beyond historic boundaries. The right place is close to or within Henley, and the right time is immediately.

1.05 At Paragraph 47, NPPF requires LPAs to indentify key sites which are critical to the delivery of the housing strategy over the plan period, with the objective to ‘boost significantly the supply of housing’. No sites have been identified in the Core Strategy for Henley, even though delivery is just as urgently required in this location as at Wallingford and Thame.
1.06 At this advanced stage of the Core Strategy process, it would be undesirable to introduce further delay while a more proactive approach is taken. However, to ensure soundness is achieved, the Inspector is urged to make take appropriate steps to ensure that:

(i) 400 units are seen as an absolute minimum at Henley, and that if opportunities arise, more are accommodated.

(ii) Delay in delivery is avoided, through policies which allow development to proceed as soon as possible on those sites which have been scrutinised in considerable depth, and found acceptable in principle, during the 2011 SHLAA review of sites.

Submissions have been made in relation to these points by Associated Holdings as objections to proposed Modifications, as the objector does not consider that the current Draft as modified is sufficiently clear.

2.00 **NPPF – changes from previous PPG and PPS advice**

(i) **AONB designation**

2.01 In relation to Henley, much of the surrounding land is identified as AONB, where the NPPF confirms both that

- Great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty, and
- In exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that development is in the public interest, land can be released for development subject to certain considerations.

2.02 The evidence base shows that growth has to be accommodated at Henley to ensure the economic and social health of the town – and in particular an urgent need for affordable housing. Research carried on over the past six years has established that this will need to be outside the existing developed area, and the scale of growth required, even at the constrained level of 400 units, will of necessity involve incursions into the AONB. This constitutes exceptional circumstances and a public interest case, consistent with the case put during the Examination based on PPS7 and PPS4.

2.03 The NPPF has therefore not changed the fundamental approach to development in the AONB which was set out in previous National Guidance, and new housing development in the AONB at Henley remains acceptable for the important reasons discussed during earlier parts of the Examination. The allocation of at least 400 new homes to Henley remains SOUND.

2.04 The Inspector will be familiar with the 2011 Kirkham Associates report which considered the landscape quality of SHLAA sites around Henley. It concludes that there is scope for development in the AONB on sites reviewed, without harm to AONB objectives.

(ii) **Effective use of Brownfield Land**

2.05 The NPPF at Paragraph 17 and again at Paragraph 111 states that plans should:
• encourage the effective use of land by reusing land that has been previously developed (brownfield land), provided that it is not of high environmental value

2.06 It is not apparent in the SHLAA review of sites that any additional weight was afforded to previously developed land at Henley when assessments were made of the merits of different sites. The NPPF confirms that development of such land should be encouraged, and if comparative weightings are to be given in site selection it is clear that brownfield land should be given additional weight. This needs to be reflected in the Core Strategy policies to inform the SADPD and/or Neighbourhood Plan processes in order to deliver SOUNDNESS.

2.07 Submissions have been made in relation to Saved Policy E6, which sets a series of tests before brownfield employment sites can be released for other uses such as redevelopment for housing. The application of this Policy to SHLAA sites already assessed acceptable for housing in principle will introduce considerable unnecessary delay in the release of brownfield land. The continued application of E6 is not in accordance with the proactive approach urged to enable a significant boost to housing delivery.

(iii) Housing land supply and flexibility

2.07 Paragraph 47 of the NPPF requires maintenance of a 5 year land supply in the form of specific, deliverable sites, with an additional 5% buffer in all cases, raised to 20% in instances of past poor performance, in order to ‘provide a realistic prospect of achieving the planned supply and to ensure choice and competition in the market for land’.

2.08 The Council has provided a March 2012 appeal decision attached to its submissions on the recent Modifications, (APP/Q3115/215119) in which the Inspector concluded that:

‘The Council cannot currently demonstrate a full 5 year supply of deliverable sites either in the relevant sub area or in the District as a whole’

In the sub area in which the appeal site and in which also Henley lies, the supply is agreed at 3.7 years. While the Councils approach to negate the subdivision into the two sub regions has been accepted by the Core Strategy Inspector, in terms of geography (which is important to the issue of accessibility and thus sustainability), Henley remains a distinctly separate housing and planning market area. On paper new housing at Didcot, Wallingford or Thame will contribute to Housing Land Supply for the District, but will have no positive impact on meeting practical real local needs in Henley.

2.09 At present, the housing trajectory does not propose any substantive housing delivery for Henley until 2017/2018. Part if not most of the later programmed delivery of 400 units should be moved forward in order to achieve the objectives set out in NPPF and achieve soundness and consistency with the NPPF.

2.10 The programme for a District wide SADPD would not enable earlier release of sites at Henley, regardless of urgent local need, and past poor performance in this part of the District. It is therefore extremely important that the Modification to CSHEN1 makes it clear that planning applications on sites already supported after review in the 2011 Henley SHLAA Site assessment can be approved without conflict with the housing delivery policies.
3.00  **MODEL POLICY**

3.01  The Core Strategy does not adequately reflect the presumption in favour of sustainable development set out in the NPPF. This is unsurprising, as the NPPF post-dated much of the preparatory work, and was developed in the context of earlier PPG and PPS guidance.

3.02  NPPF paragraph 151 states:

> Local Plans must be prepared with the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development. To this end, they should be consistent with the principles and policies set out in this Framework, including the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

3.03  At this advanced stage of the Core Strategy, it would cause unacceptable delay to delivery and the adoption of a Strategy to direct new development to review all Core Strategy polices. The inclusion of the Model Policy is therefore strongly supported. It needs to be seen as the principle policy, and provide the context for interpretation for all others.

3.04  The Model Policy is particularly helpful in that it not only describes the basis for assessment, but follows the strategic theme of the NPPF in requiring LPAs to work positively with applicants to find solutions, allowing flexibility and an opportunity for LPAs to give support to innovative developments which may not have been anticipated at the time the plan was adopted. As is evident by changes during the time taken from inception to adoption of this Core Strategy, the world, market forces and new forms of development change more rapidly than the Local Plan process. The thrust of the NPPF is to remove unhelpful rigidities in the planning process, and creating a flexible and responsive Core Strategy is essential to deliver soundness.

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