

Our ref: 9852 LPA2 JKW

Development Policy Manager,
Development Services,
Warwick District Council,
Riverside House,
Milverton Hill,
Leamington Spa,
CV32 5QH.

26th July 2013.

Dear Sir/Madam.

Warwick Revised Development Strategy: Formal Representations - Land at Station Lane, Lapworth.

We act on behalf of The Trustees of the F S Johnson 78NEL Settlement in respect of land at Station Lane, Lapworth, and write in response to the Revised Development Strategy which has been published for consultation for a 6 week period until 29th July.

You may recall that we took the opportunity to submit representations as part of the Local Plan Preferred Options Consultation in July last year (Respondent ID: 7206, 6007; representation nos. 48542, 48539, 48540, 48541, 48934, 48936) in support of the then draft Policies PO3 and PO4, and to promote the credentials of our clients' land to accommodate the housing development envisaged for Lapworth. For ease of reference, a copy of the previously submitted plan showing the extent of the land ownership is attached to this letter. I am pleased to set out our formal representations below.

Level of Housing growth.

The Revised Development Strategy sets out in draft Policy RDS3 the Council's preferred option for the broad location of housing development, which allows for a hierarchy of growth in the rural area to include a higher level of growth in larger more sustainable villages with a reasonable level of services.

The draft policy is supported, since it is consistent with the advice given in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), specifically in paragraph 14 which supports a prosperous rural economy and the need to retain and develop local services and community facilities in villages, and in paragraph 55 which advises that, to promote sustainable development in rural areas,



housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities.

The broad location of development.

Draft Policy RDS4 establishes the broad location of development, where approximately 15% of the allocated housing sites is proposed as village development. The document explains that the overall strategy for villages aims to focus limited new housing development on the more sustainable villages, whilst recognising that smaller less sustainable villages may also benefit from limited housing growth.

The draft policy is supported as being consistent with the advice given in the NPPF, for the reasons explained above.

Housing allocations.

The proposed housing allocations are set out in draft Policy RDS5, which proposes that the 5 identified Primary Service Villages be allocated between 100-150 houses each, to be developed across all three phases of the Plan period. Kingswood / Lapworth is identified as one of the 5 Primary Service Villages, and the draft Plan explains that where villages are currently washed over by green belt, as is the case with Lapworth, new village envelopes will be established to enable development to take place.

The concentration of the main housing development in villages which score highest for settlement sustainability, and the increase in their proposed allocations to 100-150 is supported as being entirely consistent with the advice given in the NPPF, for the reasons explained above.

The site at Station Road, Lapworth.

We understand that the work is still ongoing to identify suitable sites within the villages to meet the housing allocations proposed in draft Policy RDS5, and that a further consultation on the preferred options is likely to take place in the early autumn. In our previous representation last year, we identified the reasons why our clients' land is ideally suited and located to be chosen as an allocated site at Kingswood / Lapworth to assist in meeting the identified local housing needs and requirements for the village, and these are identified and discussed below.

- **Relationship to existing settlement.**

The draft Strategy states in paragraph 4.4.4 that "it is important that rural housing projects respond positively to the uniqueness and quality of the local environment and should be located within or on the edge of established settlements, so as to avoid the development of isolated, individual or groups of dwellings which are detached from or peripheral to the main villages". That approach echoes the advice given in paragraph 55 of the NPPF.

As we explained in our 2012 representation, the opportunities to identify land that would be seen as a 'natural extension' of the current village envelope are limited, being constrained by the clear physical boundary provided by the railway line, the location of the Grand Union and Stratford Canals, the land at risk of flooding, and by the presence of attractive natural features such as wooded areas or trees.

However, our clients' land provides one of those limited opportunities where development could take place to provide the additional new housing that is needed whilst being seen as a natural extension of the village envelope.

The land is located within Station Lane, with a frontage to the eastern side of the road between an existing ribbon of houses to the south, which are already included within the village envelope, and a further ribbon of houses that are not currently within the envelope boundary. On the opposite, western side of the road, there is an established line of relatively closely packed houses, and the frontage is therefore seen within an urban context such that its inclusion within the envelope would be seen to be entirely appropriate.

Our clients' land is one of only 3 gaps on the eastern side of Station Lane which lie outside the current village envelope, which otherwise embraces the development along both sides of the road. Whilst the land to the north of Meadow Lane is closest to the station, it is well-treed and the removal of those trees as a consequence of development would result in the loss of an attractive feature in the Lane. Of the two remaining gaps, our clients' land is closer to the village centre than the land at Kingswood Farm, enhancing its credentials for selection as a first-choice allocated housing site.

In short, the site relates well to the existing pattern of development of the village, such that if it were to be allocated as a housing site the development would not look out of place, but instead appear as a natural part of the settlement. The allocation of the land for housing would clearly meet the "test" set by paragraph 4.4.4 of the draft strategy, and in terms of its location, it must be regarded as being the best potential housing site within the village.

In our view, it will be difficult to find land that is similarly well located; a view reinforced by Savills in their submission of July last year promoting the case for the land at Kingswood Farm, to the north of our clients' site, where their sketch proposals showed how our clients' land could be integrated with Kingswood Farm to provide a comprehensive development solution. Savills obviously considered that such a linkage was desirable because it would enhance the credentials of their own land, which would otherwise be less attractive as a stand-alone option.

- **Sustainable development.**

The NPPF establishes a presumption in favour of sustainable development, with Local Authorities tasked to prepare their plans and policies within that context. In identifying potential housing sites within Kingswood / Lapworth and assessing them for their suitability, careful consideration will need to be given to the sustainable credentials of each option.

The sustainable credentials of our clients land must be regarded as excellent. The land is within the central part of the village, as defined by the current village envelope, rather than at the periphery and therefore the village school, post office and shops and services would all be within easy walking distance of any new houses constructed on the site.

The land is very close to the village railway station and therefore provides a highly sustainable location for new residents who need not be dependent on the use of a private car to access employment opportunities or the higher order level of services and facilities available in town and city centres.

The allocation of the site for housing would therefore be fully in accordance with advice given in the NPPF, where a core planning principle requires that planning should “actively manage patterns of growth to make the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling, and focus significant development in locations which are or can be made sustainable”. This advice is reinforced in paragraph 30 which advises that “in preparing Local Plans, local planning authorities should therefore support a pattern of development which, where reasonable to do so, facilitates the use of sustainable modes of transport”.

The proximity of the site to the village railway station, which provides services to local and national destinations, makes this a highly sustainable location and will be particularly valued by those residents of the affordable housing in particular who do not have access to a private car. That proximity, coupled with the central location of the site within easy walking distance of the village facilities, makes this site the most appropriate location to accommodate the planned new housing development for the village.

- **Green belt and visual impact.**

Because the village is washed over green belt, any housing allocations made to meet the local requirements for Kingswood / Lapworth will impact on the green belt, and the Planning Authority will need to include an assessment of the degree of impact caused by each of the candidate sites in their site selection and allocation process.

The NPPF advises, in paragraph 84 that in any review of green belt boundaries, local planning authorities should take account of the need to promote sustainable patterns of development, and the sustainable credentials of this site, identified above, provides the justification for including it within the inset area of the village to be removed from the green belt.

Because of its location within the centre of the village, our clients’ land is seen within the context of the settlement such that its development would be viewed as the infilling of a gap within the settlement itself rather than the extension of development into the surrounding countryside. In relation to the impact on the five purposes of the green belt, as defined in paragraph 80 of the NPPF, therefore, the allocation of the site would cause little harm to the first three purpose relating to sprawl, merging and encroachment, whilst the other two categories are not relevant.

In relation to the advice given in paragraph 85 on the need to establish clear green belt boundaries, the existing field boundaries of our clients’ land would provide clear physical boundaries which could be utilised to define a robust and defensible boundary to the enlarged village envelope and for the green belt.

In relation to visual impact, the land is seen within the context of the ribbons of development to either side and opposite the site, and in those circumstances the infilling of that gap will not cause any seriously adverse impact on the wider landscape. The existing trees on the site frontage can be retained as part of any development, with any new highway access located between them so that they are unaffected and can continue to contribute to the character of Station Lane.

Indeed, the allocation of the site would result in the opening up of the Grand Union Canal frontage in this part of the village, with the option of providing new recreational space

alongside it within the extensive corridor of land within our clients' ownership as part of any new development opportunity.

In short, no significant harm would be caused to the green belt or to visual amenity as a consequence of allocating our clients' land for development.

- **Developability.**

The extent of the land available lends itself to a variety of development options, including cul-de-sac development to mirror similar patterns of development elsewhere within the village, including Station Lane, without looking in any way out of place or out of character with the prevailing pattern and style of development within Station Lane, whilst providing for the housing needs of the village.

- **The absence of constraints to development.**

The land is unconstrained, being open and available to accommodate a range of development options. Field boundary hedging could be retained as part of any scheme of development if desired, and access could be provided along the Station Lane frontage whilst retaining the two existing mature trees.

Only the strip of land along the canal lies within the flood area, but this part of the site would be excluded from consideration in any event. There are no other technical constraints to inhibit development, and we understand that the site is not subject to any ecological designations.

For all the reasons set out above, we strongly believe that our clients' land provides the best and most suitable opportunity available within the village to achieve the housing requirement for Kingswood / Lapworth in a manner that meets the normal planning objectives for site selection whilst minimising the impact on the village environment. It is a 'natural' infill opportunity within a Lane that is largely characterised by linear development on both sides, and its development would be easily absorbed into the built fabric of the village without appearing, in any way, to look out of place or out of character. Its location within the heart of the village and its sustainability credentials make it a 'first-choice' housing allocation within the village in the site selection process that will be involved in finding sufficient land to meet the identified local housing need.

We formally request that land forming part of our client's land holding at Station Lane be allocated for housing development and included within an expanded village envelope for Lapworth to accommodate the housing development proposed in the Revised Development Strategy.

Yours sincerely,

**John K. Wilson. MA(Oxon), DipTP, MRTPI.
Director.**

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