
Charnwood Local Plan Examination

Matter 6 – Urban Area Policies, Site Selection, Sustainable Urban Extensions and Housing Site Allocations

Define Planning and Design Ltd on behalf of Bloor Homes Ltd – Laburnum Way, Loughborough
(PSLP Representations Ref. PSLP/572)

SITE HA16

Question 6.7: Site selection process

Charnwood Borough Council's (CBC) selection of allocation sites has been carried out on the basis of a clear and robust site selection process that has been justified based on the plan's evidence base. Promoted sites have been considered at various points by CBC, for example through the Council's Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) and Sustainability Appraisal (SA), in order to ascertain their suitability, availability and achievability. The reasoning for allocating the sites included in the Local Plan is clear and justified and, therefore, soundly based.

Question 6.16a: Scale of development

The Local Plan indicates that the site should accommodate approximately 422 dwellings. However, as was set out in BHL's representations to the Regulation 19 consultation (PSLP/572), as well as the Vision Document that was submitted alongside those, the site has been the subject of a number of detailed technical assessments and a masterplanning exercise that has demonstrated that it has the capacity to accommodate circa 500 dwellings

The Vision Document gives an overview of the various technical and environmental assessments and summarises the manner in which the site's opportunities and constraints have been robustly considered in light of those in preparing the scheme Masterplan. A well-designed and distinctive development scheme is presented that will have a clear sense of place which reflects its surroundings, and where the new houses will be contained within a cohesive and robust landscape setting.

A robust net developable area for the built form has, therefore, been defined within the proposed Green / Blue Infrastructure network, and there is a generous (approx.) 40:60 (respectively) split between them (as per the Vision Document). The size and nature of the site means that the density of development would vary across it, with areas of higher and lower density as appropriate, but the 500 dwelling capacity would be achieved with only an average net density of 35 dwellings per hectare (dph) across the site. That is entirely appropriate for this site and its surrounds.

Policy DS3(HA16) should, therefore, be modified to reflect the true capacity of the site of approximately 500 dwellings.

Question 6.16b: Consistency with development strategy and Neighbourhood Plans

Focusing future development at Loughborough and the allocation of site HA16 is wholly consistent with CBC's development strategy in that it directs growth to a well-connected and accessible site that is well located in relation to an inherently sustainable settlement.

The site is not subject to a Neighbourhood Plan and so there is no conflict in that regard.

Question 6.16c: Likely impact of the development

In relation to CBC's assessment of the site, a smaller area of 6.25ha adjacent to Laburnum Way was considered under reference PSH21 in both the Council's Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) and Sustainability Appraisal (SA). The SHEELA found that the site is suitable, available and achievable, and that there are no irresolvable constraints to its development. In the SA the site performed favourably by receiving 5 significant / minor positive effects. Moreover, whilst it did receive some negative effects, they can be addressed by delivering a sensitive scheme that incorporates the mitigation that has been identified through the detailed assessment of the site (in the case of landscape and visual impact), or by facilitating on-site infrastructure (such as an extended bus route to improve connectivity to existing facilities).

The wider allocation site was considered as part of the extremely large parcel PSH106 that extended to the Outwoods. Inevitably, the SA found an increased level of negative effects than it would have done had it considered the allocation site alone (given that HA16 is a more contained and less sensitive site). However, the boundaries of the allocation site were subsequently refined and defined through the assessments that were carried out to support BHL's promotion of the site in the Local Plan process (as summarised in the Vision Document submitted alongside BHL's Reg19 representations). Notably, the comprehensive landscape and visual appraisal was undertaken in close collaboration with CBC in order to ensure that the proposed extent of development and landscape strategy was carefully considered and entirely appropriate.

Settlement and Landscape

CBC has undertaken a number of studies in relation to landscape character and sensitivity, including the 2012 Borough of Charnwood Landscape Character Assessment (BCLCA), the Charnwood Forest Landscape Character Assessment (CFLCA), and the Charnwood Landscape Capacity and Sensitivity Assessment (CLCSA) and its 2021 Addendum (CLCSA Addendum). Thus, the site and the surrounding area have been extensively assessed. CBC's SA refers to the findings of the CLCSA Addendum that the site is located in an area of 'moderate' sensitivity to residential development. It finds, therefore, that the likely effect of the site's development is minor negative.

The Vision Document submitted alongside BHL's representations summarises how these assessments relate to the allocation site and carefully considers the potential impact of its development on the surrounding area and how that can be mitigated. In referring to the BCLCA, it highlights that, whilst land further west (i.e. the Charnwood Forest and the Outwoods) is more sensitive, the site itself is located at the fringes of that area and is less sensitive due to its close relationship with the existing built form of Loughborough. It also sets out an appraisal of the site's relative landscape value. That finds that, whilst the allocation site is a component of its wider landscape, it is comparatively of lower value due to its lower-lying position, the partial enclosure provided by its topography, the settlement edge and surrounding planting, the limited public access, and the lack of any features of heritage interest / landscape or scenic quality (except Halfway House).

The Vision Document highlights that the BCLCA's management recommendation for the character area is to ensure that any "*further new developments on the edge of Loughborough are suitably designed with ample planting to ensure integration into the existing landscape character and softening of development edges*". Similarly, the CFLCA recommends that new development on the edge of Loughborough should be sited where visual containment can be achieved, and where developments can be suitably designed with ample planting to integrate them into the landscape.

A detailed assessment of the potential visual impact has been undertaken and its findings are summarised in the Vision Document. It has highlighted that the site is visually very well contained by the surrounding built form, topography and robust landscape framework. Therefore, available views of it are limited to those from short stretches of nearby footpath and bridleway links (including a section of

a public footpath running directly through the site). Where the site is visible from more elevated viewpoints, it is apparent that any development would be seen in the context of the existing built form. Therefore, it was concluded that the development of the site could be successfully integrated into the surrounding landscape alongside the settlement edge with the implementation of appropriate mitigation.

The recommendations of CBC's assessments and the more detailed site assessments presented in the Vision Document have informed the approach taken in the Masterplan that is clearly landscape-led and seeks to minimise the scheme's landscape and visual impact and sensitively integrate it into its wider context.

The built development will be located on the lower slopes close to the settlement, avoiding the more prominent higher ground near to Outwoods and preserving long distance views across the site. The boundary trees and hedgerows will be retained and enhanced wherever possible and woodland planting will be provided at the western boundary in order to screen and filter views of the development and soften the settlement edge. The internal field boundaries and footpath that travels through the site will be retained and formalised within wide green corridors with significant additional tree planting that will further break up the built form and roofscape.

Therefore, taking account of the site's specific character, its relatively low value, its well-contained nature, and the landscape-led mitigation strategy that has been developed, it can be concluded that the site's allocation is entirely appropriate.

Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure

There are no statutory designated nature conservation sites within or immediately adjacent to the site. Whilst there is a small Parish level site adjacent to the site's southern boundary, which relates to a strip of Oak trees, the Masterplan has provided a 15m green buffer from that area. Furthermore, the proposed landscape scheme referred to above incorporates significant green infrastructure throughout the site that will provide significant opportunities for habitat creation and biodiversity enhancements.

Heritage

There are no registered World Heritage Sites, Archaeological Areas, Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Conservation Areas, Registered Parks and Gardens or Registered Battlefields in the site or within its immediate surrounding area. Whilst part of the site was formerly included in the Loughborough Park, it was de-parked in the late 16th century and its setting has been very much compromised by its post-medieval de-parking and the significant residential development in the wider area.

One listed building, Halfway House, is located centrally in the site, and another, Park Grange, lies close to the eastern boundary. The significance of Halfway House is derived from its physical fabric, and to a lesser extent its setting (the yard, its immediate curtilage, the wider agricultural land, and Park Grange). Development would not physically impact on the building or its immediate curtilage, and the line of the trackway between Halfway House and Grange House would be maintained. The built form would, however, wrap the asset and be visible from it, in turn blocking some views of the building, with other views from areas of public open space potentially becoming available.

The significance of Park Grange, which is derelict, is again derived from what remains of its fabric and, to a lesser extent, its setting. The site makes a minor contribution to the setting of Park Grange and will not affect the physical fabric of the asset or its associated farm complex. Whilst development would change the character of some former functional associated agricultural land, it is considered that the development would result in minor harm to its overall heritage significance and that this harm would clearly be less than substantial. A very minor impact is anticipated on the significance of other buildings in the complex.

Highways and Accessibility

Vehicular access to the site will be provided via extensions to Laburnum Way and Corydalis Close. An initial assessment of the potential highways impact has been undertaken that has identified deliverable improvement options to mitigate the impact of the traffic that is generated by the development on the wider network.

The site benefits from excellent connectivity to the range of services and facilities that are available in Loughborough and will meet the residents' day-to-day needs. That is reflected at Page 4 / Figure 3 of the Vision Document, which sets out that the site is located in walking distance from existing primary and secondary schools, food retail provision, a sports ground and larger complex, and extensive areas of open space, and also benefits from good public transport connections to the services, facilities and employment opportunities that are available elsewhere in the town. The potential to extend bus services to include the site will be taken into account as part of the development management process, and would further enhance the site's excellent accessibility.

Pollution

The site is not located in an air quality management area, no concerns have been raised in relation to water quality (drainage is considered below), the site is not located near to any significant sources of noise, and there are no known constraints in relation to land stability.

Conclusion

In light of the above analysis, it is clear that the site is a suitable location for growth, and is not subject to any insurmountable constraints. Therefore, the proposed allocation of site HA16 is entirely justified and sound.

Question 6.16d: Development requirements and main modifications

The development requirements that are set out in Policy DS3(HA16) are considered to be appropriate and clear, and seek to secure the mitigation that is outlined above in relation to landscaping, green infrastructure, heritage and drainage, plus the provision of contributions towards the delivery of the 2FE primary school at site HA15.

However, the above response to Q6.16a highlights how the robust site assessment / Masterplanning exercise has demonstrated that the site can accommodate c. 500 dwellings, rather than 422 dwellings. As such, the policy should be modified to reflect that.

Question 6.16e: Planning permission

The site is not subject to an existing planning permission. However, as highlighted in the Statement of Common Ground with CBC, it is anticipated that a planning application will be submitted by the end of 2022.

Loughborough Urban Centre General Questions – Delivery of the primary school, and the cumulative effect on landscape character and settlement identity:***Delivery of primary school***

CBC's PSLP indicates that a new 2 form entry primary school will be provided within Site HA15 to also meet the needs arising from the development of sites HA16, HA17, HA19, HA20, HA24, HA29 and HA50. It is expected that the developers of those sites will provide reasonable and justified contributions towards the land and build costs of the school and BHL have confirmed that this approach is acceptable in principle. The precise mechanism to realise the delivery of the school, taking account of additional capacity and the housing trajectory, is still being discussed, but is expected to follow the example set by the arrangements for school provision in Barrow upon Soar.

It should be noted, however, that if the school site is not able to be accommodated at Site HA15 (for whatever reason) it could be delivered within Site HA16. Therefore, CBC have a large degree of comfort that the school site will come forward as required to unlock the proposed development to the west of Loughborough.

Cumulative landscape impact

The impact of site HA16's development on landscape character and settlement identity is set out in response to Question 6.16c. In considering the cumulative effect of sites HA15, HA16 and HA17 on the area's landscape character and settlement identity, it is important to note that as a result of the area's undulating topography, robust landscape framework and the built form, there is little physical or visual inter-relationship between the three sites. Thus, each allocation site is very much contained in its own landscape unit and would, therefore, be largely viewed as discrete developments. Any views of all three sites would be limited to distant views from higher land (e.g. Beacon Hill) and, even then, they would very much be viewed in the context of Loughborough. As such, there would be limited impact on settlement identity and landscape character.

HA16 Laburnum Way – Drainage:

The Level 2 SFRA undertaken to inform the preparation of the Local Plan highlights that the site was carried forward to the Level 2 stage due to its surface water risk. Having undertaken detailed modelling, CBC's SFRA concludes that new developments in the area should seek to store additional water to alleviate flooding in that area. However, there is no suggestion that, subject to that mitigation and the implementation of SUDs (as per Policy CC2), the effects of the proposed development would be significant.

Moat Brook runs northwards through the allocation site and has its headwaters in a wide catchment area with a significant topography to the south. The Brook is also fed by a separate un-named watercourse to the north of the allocation site that has its own catchment.

Downstream of the site is an existing housing development (Bramcote Road) that has suffered flooding events. Leicestershire County Council (LCC) has investigated the matter thoroughly and its report (November 2021) concluded that the causes were multi-faceted and include the wide catchment area's antecedent wetness, the steepness of the catchment area, an existing culvert upstream that throttles flow significantly and the severity of a single rainfall event that resulted in a rapid and significant unregulated runoff towards the properties on Bramcote Road. A number of recommendations are made to address the identified issues and it is understood that they are being implemented.

The Environment Agency also has a project that is examining options to reduce flood risk within Loughborough. That is expected to be concluded by the end of the year. One long term option is to implement natural flood management features that increase storage and slow down the run off in the upper catchment of Moat Brook.

Within the allocation site itself, surface water runoff will be collected via a series of Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS) features and discharged at a controlled rate back into Moat Brook. The design standard to be provided will be to attenuate run off to the Qbar green field value for all events up to the 1 in 100 year return period plus a 40% allowance for climate change.

There is, therefore, no evidence to indicate that the development of the allocation itself would increase the risk of flooding to existing properties or people.

Indeed, whilst the full benefits are to be confirmed through detailed modelling, it is anticipated that the development's SUDS strategy alone will reduce the scale of the catchment where run off is unregulated from 177ha to 157.4ha (11% reduction) and manage overland flows in the site reducing the rate of flow

from the catchment area. That will provide a notable betterment to the wider area in terms of the existing flooding that occurs upstream.

Moreover, the site and wider land could accommodate additional facilities in line with the long term option that is currently being considered by the Environment Agency, that would provide further betterment in relation to the existing flooding issues. For example, the stream leg that runs through the allocation site will be incorporated into a green corridor where check devices and localised storage could be provided to offer further control of the rate of flow.