

MATTER 1

Biddulph – Safeguarded Land and Provision for Housing

Issue 1 – Consideration of options for Biddulph, including safeguarded land

1.1 Is the overall analysis of options for Biddulph, following the Inspector's Post Hearing Advice, robust?

1.1.1 Yes, it is.

1.1.2 In order to address the Inspector's Post-Hearing Advice, the Council undertook a robust analysis documented in the Biddulph Options Planning Analysis (EL10.005) assessing all land considered suitable for release from the Green Belt (upon demonstration of exceptional circumstances) in the Green Belt Review and subsequent technical notes (SD22.4, 22.4a, 22.4b, 22.6 and 22.7). Refer to map on p.7 of Biddulph Options Planning Analysis to view the Green Belt sites assessed.

1.1.3 The methodology used to assess the sites was to consider a number of reasonable alternatives in the form of five broad options for ways forward:

- Option 1 – Do nothing
- Option 2 – Allow targeted Green Belt Release around the town to enable additional site allocations where considered deliverable.
- Option 3 – Allow strategic Green Belt release around the town to enable identification of safeguarded land.
- Option 4 – Allow both targeted and strategic Green Belt Release around the town to enable additional site allocations where considered deliverable and identification of further land for safeguarding.

1.1.4 Following the appraisals of options 1 to 4 above, a fifth option was considered. It considers the results from the masterplan process on the two large site allocations in Biddulph (Wharf Road and Tunstall Road) which concluded that higher residential densities could be applied than originally anticipated.

- Option 5 – Increase densities at Wharf Road and Tunstall Road to limit the need for Green Belt release and limited safeguarding for a future plan period.

1.1.5 All options were the subject of Sustainability Appraisal which informed the recommendation made as to an appropriate way forward for future development in Biddulph. The assessments were carried out within the context of the wider evidence base summarised in the Biddulph Topic Paper (SD13.2 BD062 p.219-239 on the pdf, BD068 p.260-282 on the pdf, BD087 p.305-326 on the pdf) which includes the Council's ecological studies. The assessment tables for each option included a selection of information from the evidence base, namely: estimated housing capacity, approximate site size, no. of potential dwellings deliverable within 5 years (allocations only), suitable land use(s), green belt assessment, landscape impact, heritage impact, agricultural land classification, highways, land availability and other site constraints (where applicable). Pros and cons of each option are clearly set out and a recommendation as to whether or not it would be appropriate to take the

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option forward with reasons is included. Where options have included sites, the sites have been ranked.

1.2 Does the evidence base, including the Sustainability Appraisal, Green Belt Reviews and Options Analysis, support the identification of the three sites at Gillow Heath as safeguarded land?

1.2.1 Yes, it does. The evidence base which has informed the sites is proportionate to the matters under consideration as per paragraph 182 of the Framework.

Sustainability Appraisal

1.2.2 In addressing the Inspector's post hearing advice in relation to the future development needs of Biddulph, the SA Addendum report (June 2019) (EL10.006) considered the same reasonable alternative approaches as the Options Analysis (refer to paragraphs 1.1.3 and 1.1.4 above).

1.2.3 The details of each Option, and the potential sites they include, are set out in Section 2: Selection of alternatives.

1.2.4 Section three of the SA Addendum report summarises the findings of the appraisal, providing a summary of the likely significant effects of each option. Table 3.1 on page 12 of the report identifies those options dismissed with reasons. Table 3.2 on page 16 of the report sets out the option recommended to be taken forward (Option 5) with reasons.

1.2.5 Option 5 is described at paragraph 2.10 of the SA Addendum. The option proposes increased development densities at existing site allocations in Biddulph: Wharf Road Strategic Development Area (Policy DSB1) and Tunstall Road Strategic Development Area (Policy DSB3). In addition the option proposes to identify safeguarded land to the north of Biddulph at Gillow Heath: BD062, BD068 and BD087.

1.2.6 Having assessed the overall sustainability of the different alternatives, the SA found that Option 5 offered the preferred approach. It notes that since Option 5 proposes increasing densities on allocated sites and safeguarding land in an area considered to be of low landscape sensitivity, and where the Council's evidence suggests that development would be unlikely to cause high adverse effects to the settings of heritage assets, the risk of cumulative impacts arising is likely to be more effectively managed than under other options.

Green Belt Review

1.2.7 The Green Belt Review Study 2015 (SD22.4) assesses the three sites at Gillow Heath (BD062, BD068 & BD087) against the purposes of the Green Belt and concludes that all the sites are suitable to be considered for release from the Green Belt subject to exceptional circumstances as they have a limited effect on the Green Belt purposes.

Options Analysis

1.2.8 The Options Analysis - EL10.005 – considers reasonable alternative strategic options to take the plan forward following deletion of BDNEW and as part of this, sites which have been deemed suitable for release from the Green Belt by the Council's Green Belt Review have been assessed against a

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number of relevant criteria and ranked accordingly (refer to pages 12-16 on pdf - EL10.005). The table clearly documents the results and explains the rankings. Pages 30-31 of the pdf - EL10.005 - explain the reasons for selection of the strategic option and why these sites in particular are considered the most suitable for safeguarding.

1.2.9 In summary, the Council has adhered to the Inspector's Post Hearing Advice Note as regards safeguarding land to meet the longer term development needs in Biddulph. Protection of the Green Belt has been key - through consideration of delivering more housing on non-Green Belt land and where Green Belt land has been selected choosing that which has the least harmful impact. The results of the Sustainability Appraisal have also been a factor in selection of the strategic option. In terms of selection of the Gillow Heath sites for safeguarding, on planning balance, the limited overall impact on the Green Belt and lack of other constraints gives these sites the highest ranking.

1.3 Is the conclusion that there will be a limited effect on the Green Belt purposes from the Gillow Heath sites justified?

1.3.1 Yes it is.

1.3.2 The Council's Green Belt Review Study has been undertaken by specialist consultants using robust methodology. The conclusion that all three of the Gillow Heath sites (BD062, BD068 and BD087) have a limited overall impact on the Green Belt purposes of development is justified for the reasons set out in the document (SD22.4b – Appendix C – p.8). This area is relatively small scale compared with the other safeguarding options so by its very nature future development here would have the lowest impact on the Green Belt.

1.3.3 Looking at the Options Analysis of possible areas for safeguarding (EL10.005 p.18-20 on the pdf), the three Gillow Heath sites perform best in terms of impact on the Green Belt in comparison with the other areas identified as possible areas for safeguarding. They have a limited overall impact on Green Belt purposes and only make a contribution to one of the green belt purposes and a limited contribution to the rest and are thereby the least harmful.

1.3.4 The area north of Mill Hayes Road and the area west of the Biddulph Valley Way are both considered to have a moderate overall impact on Green Belt purposes. Although, like the Gillow Heath sites, the area south of Brook Street / West of Brown Lees Road is also considered to have a limited overall impact on Green Belt purposes, it is considered to make a contribution to two of the Green Belt purposes and the Gillow Heath sites are only considered to make a contribution to one of the Green Belt purposes and a limited contribution to all the rest.

Issue 2 – Other potential Impacts of sites in Gillow Heath – landscape, highways, flood risk, drainage, odours, biodiversity, infrastructure

2.1 Are there any overriding constraints that are likely to prevent the Gillow Heath sites coming forward to meet any longer-term needs beyond the plan period?

2.1.1 No there are not.

Landscape

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- 2.1.2 The sites lie on the northern edge of Biddulph. As these were options at an earlier stage in the process, a site specific Landscape Impact Study (SD22.5 p.48) has been undertaken. Each parcel of land has been separately assessed and it has been concluded that all are of low landscape sensitivity.

Highways

- 2.1.3 County Highways have been consulted throughout the plan preparation process and have stated that development of the sites would be acceptable in principle subject to technical matters like access design, visibility splays and Transport Assessment in relation to BD068/BD087. (SD13.2 p.222 on the pdf – BD062, p.263 on the pdf – BD068 and p.308 on the pdf – BD087). They also advise that cumulative impact of several developments in this area would be assessed through a Transport Assessment.

Flood Risk & Drainage

- 2.1.4 The site boundaries for BD062, BD068 and BD087 have all been drawn to ensure the sites lie wholly within Flood Zone 1. Representations made by the Environment Agency to the main modifications consultation clarify that no further technical evidence is required to justify the safeguarding of any of the three sites.
- 2.1.5 If the Inspector considers it to be appropriate, the recommendation from the Environment Agency that the Local Plan acknowledges that the Biddulph Brook is at this location, a Main River and as such would require a minimum 8m development easement to be maintained from the top of the bank of the brook, in order to provide essential space for overland flood flows, essential flood defence maintenance work and as a green corridor for water-based ecology could be incorporated into the supporting text to Policy SS6 (MM12).
- 2.1.6 Local Plan Flood Risk Policy SD5 covers the issue of new development and surface water drainage and should the sites become future allocations, suitable measures to deal with surface water sustainably would be required (though the precise policy measures would be determined in a future Local Plan). When the sites were previously included in the Local Plan as site options, consultation responses from members of the public raised an existing issue with an inspection chamber in the area overflowing during periods of heavy rainfall and on occasions depositing raw sewage into Biddulph Brook. When the Council queried this with United Utilities they stated that this matter is under separate investigation.

Odours

- 2.1.7 The landowners / agents have previously supplied odour reports undertaken by specialists to the Council. These could be submitted to the Examination Library at the request of the Inspector. In respect of BD062, the odour assessment recommends excluding a small portion of the site (to the north) from development and using it as open space. The Council's Environmental Health officers reviewed the assessment and provided comments to the land owner who considered them in a technical addendum to their odour assessment (which could be submitted to the Examination Library at the request of the Inspector). United Utilities agreed that the issue of odour has been

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effectively addressed in the land owner's odour report subject to inclusion of the buffer proposed in the assessment and the inclusion of appropriate landscaping boundary treatments.

- 2.1.8 In respect of BD068 and BD087 the odour report does not consider that any odour mitigation measures are necessary.

Biodiversity

- 2.1.9 Ecological survey work by Council consultants has taken place on all three sites in the form of an extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey and a Local Wildlife Assessment. A summary of the results of these can be found in SD13.2 p.220 on the pdf (BD062), p.261 on the pdf (BD068), p.306 on the pdf (BD087). Further surveys / actions are recommended prior to any development taking place. If the sites came forward as allocations in the future up to date ecological evidence would be needed to support this and suggested wording to reflect this point is made in the main modifications schedule (refer to paragraph 2.2.2 below).

- 2.1.10 It is acknowledged that Biddulph Town Council have recently commissioned ecological evidence for the Parish for their Neighbourhood Plan. This evidence is published on their Neighbourhood Plan website in the form of a set of detailed ecological maps. However, there is no accompanying narrative to explain how the data was collected and whether there are any limitations to the data. For instance whether it is based on site survey work or other data sources such as aerial photography. In any case, as the sites are not proposed for development at this stage, it would be most appropriate to refresh ecological evidence if they are considered for allocation in a future Local Plan.

Infrastructure

- 2.1.11 The Local Plan is supported by an Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) (SD8.2) that sets out the level of new or improved infrastructure required to deliver the Local Plan. However, as the Gillow Heath sites are not proposed for allocation at this stage but may be in a future Local Plan, a further IDP would be required to identify infrastructure needs at that time to support any future allocation.

- 2.1.12 In terms of site specific infrastructure needs, some information is available from an earlier stage in the Local Plan production process when these sites were included in previous draft plans. This information can be found in the relevant site proformas within the Biddulph Topic Paper (SD13.2 starting on p.219 of the pdf (BD062), starting on p.260 of the pdf (BD068), starting on p.305 of the pdf (BD087)). In relation to all three sites, United Utilities has previously advised that if appropriate measures for surface water disposal are included within the development schemes (i.e. no discharge of surface water to the existing public sewerage system) then there should be no detrimental impact on the capacity of their infrastructure. The principle of development on all three sites has been accepted by the Highway Authority. The sites which would be accessed from Marsh Green Road (BD068 and BD087) would require footway improvements and suitable access design / visibility splays. Junction improvements at Marsh Green Lane / A527 may be needed – a Transport Assessment would be required to determine this. An access point for vehicles to BD087 in the form of a bridge over Biddulph Brook has been agreed as a suitable solution by the Highway Authority. In relation to BD068, some United Utilities pipes are present on the site so early discussions between

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United Utilities and the land owner would be needed if the sites are developed. With regard to education, the County Council advised the District Council that in relation to Biddulph given the housing numbers set out in the Preferred Options plan, expansions of existing schools to deal with potential demand would suffice. The housing numbers in Biddulph have actually decreased since then as BDNEW has been removed and the safeguarded sites are smaller and are not proposed as allocations. The Education Authority review their data regularly and this issue would be considered if the sites become future allocations.

2.2 Should Policy SS6 and MM12 be further modified to make it clear that consideration would need to be given to potential impacts if the sites were brought forward for development in the future?

2.2.1 The 'Summary of Responses to Main Modifications Consultation'(EL11.002) includes a Council officer response which states that: "If necessary, Policy SS6 could be modified to clarify the fact that further detailed consideration of planning matters, including ecology, would be required to inform a future Local Plan review".

2.2.2 Suggested wording for consideration is included in the Council's Main Modifications Schedule dated February 2020 (refer to MM12 – part 6 of Policy SS6 and the supporting text).

Issue 3 – Proposals for Wharf Road and Tunstall Road

3.1 Are the increases in density and housing numbers following master planning work justified?

3.1.1 Yes, they are.

3.1.2 The housing numbers and densities given in the Submission Version Local Plan were based on evidence available at that time but not detailed site survey work or commercial expertise in relation to housing mix. Subsequently, the Wharf Road and Tunstall Road Masterplans were undertaken by consultants with master planning and commercial expertise and more detailed survey work has been undertaken. In developing the Wharf Road masterplan they looked at site constraints from the existing evidence base (e.g. landscape sensitivity, heritage, mining, watercourse, highways, ecology) and additionally commissioned a topographical survey the results of which confirmed the site areas and influenced the resultant site layout plan. Market demand for house types was also investigated which influenced densities which could be accommodated on the site and landowner engagement was undertaken to produce credible masterplan options culminating in a preferred option, demonstrating a layout which could realistically be accommodated on the site.

3.1.3 In addition to market demand testing, the approximate gross site area as identified in the Local Plan for Wharf Road increased when it was measured on site for the topographical survey and it was also found that the site was more suited to a varied density rather than the original density anticipated. Consequently, it was found that 109 additional dwellings could be accommodated on the Wharf Road allocation than originally anticipated.

3.1.4 In developing the Tunstall Road masterplan, like the Wharf Road masterplan, site constraints from the existing evidence base were considered as well as residential market demand and landowner engagement. As this site is primarily for employment use, industrial market demand data played a

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crucial part in informing the final layout. Also, the market demand assessment for the residential use on the site suggested that the land is most suited to a housing mix of two and three-bedroom dwellings at a relatively high density. This information influenced residential densities in the site layout plan and the type of commercial units proposed culminating in 20 additional dwellings on this site.

- 3.1.5 Consequently, main modifications are suggested by the Council (EL10.001 - MM9, MM39 and MM41) to reflect the increased housing numbers on both sites.

Issue 4 – Housing Supply in Biddulph

4.1 Is it necessary to identify sufficient land in Biddulph at this stage to meet the housing needs of the town over the plan period?

- 4.1.1 The Council has sought to ensure that there is sufficient housing land supply for the plan area as a whole for at least ten years as required by Paragraph 47 of the 2012 Framework. Housing land for years 11-15 should be identified “where possible”. In relation to Biddulph, options to increase housing land supply would require additional Green Belt release beyond that already proposed to support the Tunstall Road mixed-use allocation and the newly proposed safeguarded area at Gillow Heath. The Council’s view is that exceptional circumstances for the release of both sites has been demonstrated. In the case of the Gillow Heath safeguarded area, the case for exceptional circumstances is based on the need to ensure that the Green Belt boundary has a degree of permanence beyond the plan period and the suitability of these sites to fulfil this purpose.
- 4.1.2 Whilst the allocation of additional housing sites through the release of Green Belt may further enhance the 5 and 10 year housing land supply position of the Local Plan, on balance, it is not considered that exceptional circumstances exist for any of the potential additional housing allocations in the Green Belt. This is because they are not required in order for the Local Plan demonstrate a 5 or 10 year supply of housing land as required by Paragraph 47 of the NPPF.
- 4.1.3 Furthermore, the allocation of the site options considered would only provide a relatively modest uplift to the 5 year land supply position. In part, this is due to the lead in times from the allocation of the site through to granting of planning consent to the start of completions. Indeed, even if all of the site options identified in EL10.005 were allocated, they would only increase the 5 year land supply position for the District by 0.69 years.
- 4.1.4 It is acknowledged that there is a deficit of 228 dwellings in Biddulph with a supply of 734 set against a residual requirement of 962 over the remainder of the plan period (Policy S4, MM9). However, Policy S4 as modified (MM9) identifies sufficient land through allocations and windfall to provide a supply of housing land for 10.7 years when measured against the annual requirement for Biddulph as identified below. Again, this is consistent with the requirements of paragraph 47 of the 2012 Framework. This adds further weight to the view that exceptional circumstances for further Green Belt release cannot be demonstrated at this point in time.

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Table 1 Net requirement and housing land supply in Biddulph (2019 – 2033)

Net housing requirement	962
Annual requirement	68.7
Total land supply	734
Years land supply	10.7

4.2 If it is considered necessary to identify sufficient land, how is it to be achieved?

- 4.2.1 As identified above, the Council does not consider it necessary to identify further land for housing in this Local Plan.