

Mr Robert Scott
Chair of Hockliffe Parish Council

Your ref:
Our ref:
Date: 19/02/2021

By Email

Dear Mr Scott

Central Bedfordshire Local Plan – Hockliffe Village – Hockliffe Neighbourhood Plan

Thank-you for your letter concerning the Local Plan allocations at Hockliffe and the Planning Inspectors' letter to the Council dated 4 February 2021.

Firstly, I think it is important to say that I do understand your disappointment and your concerns in relation to these two sites. In terms of seeking to respond to your letter, it is helpful to be clear about the Examination process and the role of the Inspectors'. Once a plan is submitted, the Inspectors' work on the basis that the Council has submitted what it believes to be a sound plan. Their remit is to independently review the plan to determine whether it is sound and legally compliant as submitted, or whether Modifications are required to make it sound and/or legally compliant (or indeed if the plan cannot be progressed).

Main Modifications (such as the removal of a site) can only be recommended by the Inspectors' and they must be necessary to make the plan sound. The Council can only make additional (minor) modifications to the plan, which do not fundamentally affect the plan's policies.

As your letter states, the Council did put forward evidence at the recent hearings to remove sites HAS25 and 26 from the plan, based on the reasons you have set out. The Inspectors' heard this evidence and have, nevertheless, determined that the sites should remain. They do not agree with the Council's position and do not agree that the evidence requires the deletion of the sites (for soundness). It is important that the Council respects the Inspectors' decision and it would not be appropriate to go back to the Inspectors to reiterate our previous position. By not following their direction, we jeopardise the progress that has been made in getting the Local Plan to this stage.

Notwithstanding the points above, there will be a further opportunity for the Parish Council, and its residents, to have their say in relation to these Modifications. All Main Modifications, once agreed with the Inspectors', will be subject to a 6-week public consultation, which we expect to begin around Mid-March. This will provide the opportunity to make clear your views on the Inspectors' decision in relation to these Hockliffe sites, including your points around traffic, schools and flooding. The Inspectors' will take any representations made during this consultation into account when preparing their final report. If you are going to respond, I would also recommend that you include responses on HAS24, which the Inspectors' have agreed will be deleted from the Plan.

In terms of your points around the Neighbourhood Plan, as you know, the Council's position at the recent hearings, was to seek to support Hockliffe Parish Council to oversee the process of making any site allocations within their emerging Neighbourhood Plan for Hockliffe, rather than this matter being set out in the Local Plan. The Council supports Neighbourhood Planning and felt this might be an appropriate way of taking any site allocations forward for Hockliffe.

The Inspectors' rightly pointed out that the Local Plan is being examined under the 2012 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in accordance with transitional arrangements, but it is the 2019 NPPF that makes provision for Green Belt amendments being possible within neighbourhood plans, where the need has already been established in strategic policies. As such, they correctly concluded it would not be possible to recommend the Modifications the Council were proposing in this regard. It is important we recognise the significant advantages to the Council of progressing the plan under the 2012 NPPF, even though there may also be some less helpful consequences.

Whilst I appreciate it is not the outcome the Parish Council wanted, the Inspectors' findings do not restrict the Hockliffe Neighbourhood Plan from considering site allocations in the future, as part of the future Local Plan Review process, and so any ambitions the group may have to support growth can still be supported in this way. The Hockliffe Parish Council commitment to prepare a neighbourhood plan and to plan for your community is commendable, and Central Bedfordshire Council will continue to provide you with support in doing so.

Even though the Planning Inspectors letter may be a disappointing outcome for the Parish Council, the number of dwellings to be allocated in Hockliffe has been reduced from 141 to 41 dwellings, through the course of the Local Plan Examination, and there are still many positive opportunities the neighbourhood plan can address.

I hope my explanation is helpful and I can of course provide a continued commitment that my team will be available to assist with your neighbourhood planning process moving forward.

Yours faithfully,



Caroline Danby
Head of Strategic Growth
Central Bedfordshire Council