

South Wiltshire Core Strategy Examination

Hearing Statement

Terence O'Rourke Ltd on behalf of JS Bloor (Newbury) Ltd

Matter 3, Core Policy 2: Distribution of Development – Strategic Allocations

Introduction

Terence O'Rourke Ltd acts on behalf of JS Bloor (Newbury) Ltd, who is currently bringing forward the Archers Gate housing development on land to the south of Boscombe Road at Amesbury in conjunction with Persimmon Homes (South Coast) Ltd.

In March 2005, Salisbury District Council granted outline planning permission (reference S/2002/1075) for the construction of 550 houses at the site, plus ancillary infrastructure including:

- the southern section of the Amesbury link road to connect the A345 with both the site and with the northern sections of the link road which had been constructed previously
- the 14 classroom Amesbury Archer primary school
- a new local centre
- a new community hall (the Bowman Centre)
- a new cemetery, and
- formal playing fields, a new changing facility, informal open space and children's play areas.

As at 18 February 2010:

- the first phase of the Amesbury Archer primary school comprising seven classrooms and core facilities has been operational for three and a half years
- the Bowman Centre has been operational for over three years
- the link road has been full open for just over a year
- the formal playing fields and informal areas of open space have been laid out and are 18 months into their maintenance period
- reserved matters applications have been approved for each of the 550 houses, with construction having recently commenced on the final 44 units
- construction of the local centre has just commenced
- full planning permissions exist for the changing facility and cemetery, although construction of these has yet to start.

The site has been brought forward for development in accordance with Policy H9 of the adopted Salisbury District Local Plan (2003). It is clear from the extent of the land allocation on the Local Plan Proposals Map and the supporting text that the comprehensive development of the site was envisaged, and that the allocation was strategic, with the 550 houses and ancillary infrastructure representing the first phase of a much larger development. Indeed, chapter 16 of the Environmental Statement

submitted with outline planning application S/2002/1075 in May 2002, demonstrated that the environmental impacts likely to arise from the development of up to 1200 houses at the site would be acceptable.

Since the 2002 Environmental Statement was produced, the capacity of the site has been revisited to take account of the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West, which includes a requirement for urban extensions to accommodate housing at a higher density than that previously required. The site's capacity has also been revisited following analysis of its landscape character (as required by PPS7) and with reference to the future education and recreational needs of the town. These studies have indicated that the site is capable of accommodating a further 1300 residential units over and above the 550 identified in the Local Plan.

In view of the Council's housing supply situation, planning applications (one full and one outline) have already been submitted to Wiltshire Council for the first 183 of these units, and determinations are currently awaited. Noise, air quality, transport, socio-economic, landscape and ecological impact assessments of the remaining 1117 units are all well underway, with the results hopefully being available by the commencement of the Core Strategy examination.

The strategic allocation in the South Wiltshire Core Strategy accords with the requirement in PPS3 to identify deliverable sites, because:

- the land is under the ownership of JS Bloor (Newbury) Ltd and is available now for further development
- the site is suitable for additional residential development and community infrastructure, as identified in the Local Plan and as identified in the Environmental Statement accompanying outline planning application S/2002/1075
- a significant proportion of the 1300 houses can be delivered within the first five years.

The adopted local plan allocation and the outline planning permission have confirmed that this is a suitable location for new housing and historic building rates at Archer's Gate of circa 100 units per year since construction commenced in February 2006 (despite the impacts of the recession), demonstrate that houses can be delivered at the rate required.

Its identification in the South Wiltshire Core Strategy is therefore considered to be compliant with national and emerging regional planning policies, and totally sound.

Question 3.1 – Are all of the allocations truly strategic in the sense that they are central to the achievement of the strategy?

The King's Gate allocation at Amesbury comprises 1300 dwellings and ancillary infrastructure including education, recreational and community facilities. The scale of the urban extension and the range of infrastructure proposed to serve it make it a strategic allocation, which is central to the achievement of the overall Core Strategy.

Question 3.2 – Is the King’s Gate allocation suitable?

The proposed King’s Gate allocation represents an extension of Archer’s Gate and will provide a significant opportunity to develop a further sustainable urban extension of Amesbury within easy walking and cycling distance of:

- the existing and future employment opportunities at Boscombe Down and Solstice Park
- the existing public transport network
- the Archers Gate development, including the Archers Gate primary school, the local centre, the Bowman Centre and new recreational facilities
- the Stonehenge secondary school, and
- existing shops and services within Amesbury town centre.

The Archers Gate development has proved to be successful in both design and commercial terms and has been well received locally, and it is JS Bloor (Newbury) Ltd’s intention to deliver the additional 1300 units in the same manner and to the same high level of quality. The draft concept master plan for the site (see attached) has been formulated with regard to the site’s characteristics (including topography and known areas of archaeological importance) and its surroundings including Boscombe Down Airfield and the Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site Management Area, and will therefore respect the local character and local environment. As identified above, the allocation has excellent access to local services, community facilities and employment opportunities, and is therefore considered a highly suitable site when judged against general sustainability principles and the criteria used for site selection in the Core Strategy.

Question 3.3 – What evidence is there that the King’s Gate strategic allocation would reduce the number of trips by car?

The master plan for the Archers Gate development was devised so that the local centre, primary school and recreational facilities were located at the heart of the development, within easy walking and cycling distance of both existing residents of Amesbury and those moving into the new houses. The approved master plan was also designed to be highly permeable to promote walking and cycling within the site, and to incorporate a circular bus route so that each part of the development could have easy access to public transport.

Until the bus route is fully implemented and all of the community facilities are operational, it will not be possible to produce evidence to demonstrate that the allocation has reduced the number of trips by car. However, anecdotal evidence given to us by Amesbury Town Council suggests that levels of walking and cycling between the site and surrounding areas has increased.

Despite the absence of hard evidence, it remains JS Bloor (Newbury) Ltd’s intention to ensure that the King’s Gate master plan continues to maximise the opportunities for walking and cycling within the site and between the site and surrounding areas, and for public transport to permeate the site.