

South Wiltshire Core Strategy Examination

Hearing Statement

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

Matter 5. Core Policy 2. Delivery 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 fully 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 Archers 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.

The King's Gate strategic housing allocation therefore provides a significant opportunity to develop a further sustainable urban extension of Amesbury, which will be 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 primary school and the smaller primary school to be provided as part of the site's development
- the Stonehenge secondary school
- existing and new recreational facilities
- existing shops and services within Amesbury town centre, and

- new shops and services which will be provided within the local centre at the entrance to the site.

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 5.1 – Would the King’s Gate strategic allocation be capable of delivering the amount and mix of development proposed?

Yes. The draft King’s Gate master plan (see attached) demonstrates that:

- there is sufficient land available within the site for 1300 additional houses, plus additional community facilities including a new primary school and formal sports pitches
- the amount and mix of development proposed could be achieved at densities which are consistent with PPS3.

Historic building rates at Archer’s Gate since February 2006 (circa 100 dwellings completed per year) demonstrate that the 1300 units would easily be delivered during the plan period. Sales of houses at Archers Gate have benefited from the provision of the 7 classrooms at the new Archers Gate Primary School, the expansion of which towards its 14 classroom capacity will commence during the summer of 2010. JS Bloor (Newbury) Limited expects that the school’s continued expansion, and the provision of a further new primary school within the site, will ensure that demand for the planned housing remains high.

Question 5.3 – How many houses is it anticipated that each of the strategic allocations would yield per year? What evidence is there to suggest that these sites would be able to deliver development at this rate?

Since construction commenced at Archers Gate in February 2006, the site has been developed by two companies and has produced around 100 completed dwellings per year, despite the declining economic conditions. Moving forward, JS Bloor (Newbury) Limited has already submitted planning applications for the first 183 dwellings of the proposed 1300 King’s Gate development, and anticipates at least two developers being involved with the construction of the site. With demand for houses at the site remaining strong as a result of the provision of new education facilities and because a significant amount of the site’s strategic infrastructure has already been put in place, it is anticipated that with an improved economic situation the site would be able to deliver around 180 completed units per year, meaning that the site would be fully completed in just over 7 years.

Question 5.4 – How reasonable and feasible is it to expect that a planning application for the King’s Gate allocation will be submitted within 18 months of the adoption of the Core Strategy, and that delivery will commence within a further 12 months, and that thereafter it would proceed in accordance with an agreed phasing plan?

As indicated above, two planning applications for the construction of the first 183 dwellings of the proposed 1300 unit King's Gate allocation were submitted to Wiltshire Council in September 2009 and await determination. The submission of these applications in advance of the adoption of the Core Strategy demonstrate the good progress that has been made with the delivery of new housing and community infrastructure at Archers Gate, and the early submission of these applications is clearly compliant with the Core Strategy requirements. Indeed, if these applications are approved, construction of these units is expected to commence later this year, which will also comply with the construction element of the Core Strategy policy.

Work is already well advanced on the production of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the remaining 1117 units of the proposed allocation. Baseline transport, ecological, landscape, archaeological, ground conditions, noise and air quality data have already been collected and a transport model for the Amesbury road network has been developed. This model is currently being used to assess the transportation impacts of the first 183 units of the site's expansion, as well as the full site allocation, the results of which are expected to be available shortly. An EIA Scoping Report is currently the subject of consultation with Wiltshire Council and other key stakeholders in South Wiltshire, and given that the site is likely to have to meet ever increasing levels of sustainable construction during the lifetime of its development, an energy strategy (including a renewable energy strategy) is currently being devised. Should the allocation at King's Gate be confirmed, it is envisaged that an outline planning application for the 1117 units would be submitted shortly afterwards.

A draft phasing plan for the King's Gate site showing the sequence in which parts of it will be developed and the capacity of each area has been prepared (see attached) to aid the production of the site's energy strategy. Whilst it is reasonable of the Core Strategy to expect strategic allocations to identify such plans to act as a guide (so that the Council can better predict likely building rates and anticipate potential problems with delivering a five year housing land supply), it would be unrealistic of the Core Strategy to expect developers to commit to the construction of a specific number of residential units within a specific time period, or for the Council to take action should construction levels fall short of those predicted. As has been evident during recent years, levels of housebuilding vary depending on market conditions and as commercial enterprises, housebuilders need total flexibility to respond to these changing conditions accordingly.

Question 5.5 – What is the evidence to support the Core Strategy statement that in highways and transportation terms, there are no insurmountable barriers to delivery, and that the transport network, with improvements, will be able to support the levels of growth over the local plan period?

And

Question 5.6 – What are the highway and transportation measures that need to be put in place to ensure that the transport network would be able to support the King's Gate strategic allocation? In developing this site, can congestion and

safety problems on the A303 be overcome and can meaningful alternative transport choices to the private car be provided?

The transport assessment undertaken as part of the outline planning permission (reference S/2002/1075) for 550 units at Archers Gate assessed the highways and transportation impacts of 700 dwellings (which was the intended scale of development at the site prior to the Local Plan Inspector's report), and 1200 units, which represented the anticipated extent of the site's capacity in 2002. The assessment concluded that with the provision of the southern section of the Amesbury link road, the site's development for up to 1200 units would not have significantly adverse effects on the local highway network.

The southern section of the Amesbury link road has now been constructed and a transport model has recently been established to evaluate the likely traffic impacts associated with the proposed King's Gate development. The model has been used to assess the likely traffic impacts arising from both 183 units and 1300 additional units at the site (which equates to a maximum of 650 units over that which was assessed as part of the 2002 transport assessment).

The current planning applications for the first 183 units of development at the site prompted a holding objection from the Highways Agency because of concerns about the extra 11 vehicle movements (including construction vehicles) that would take place in the morning and evening peak period on the Countess Roundabout (which is the junction of the A345 with the A303). Although the Agency has since agreed that the impacts on this junction are negligible and no physical enhancements to the roundabout are required, they have requested that a travel plan be prepared in the form of a leaflet for each of the 183 houses which identifies opportunities for walking and cycling, includes a map showing public transport connections and a list of website links which promote car sharing and other forms of sustainable travel. This leaflet is currently being produced and we expect that the Agency's holding objection will be lifted shortly.

The transportation impacts of the proposal for 1300 units at the site are still being analysed, with the results expected to be available by the time of the public examination. Early analysis of the modelling data, however, suggests that a greater proportion of vehicular traffic is likely to access the A303 via the all-movements junction at Folly Bottom (adjacent to the Solstice Park) rather than the Countess Roundabout, which is considered to represent a highway benefit.

We consider that the King's Gate allocation does offer meaningful alternative transport choices to the private 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. Whilst buses do not yet permeate the development, Amesbury Town Council has informed us that the pedestrian and cycle links provided are well used. It therefore 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 to ensure that it facilitates good access to public transport routes permeating the site.

Question 5.7 – Do any Key Strategic Elements of Infrastructure need to be in place before the commencement of development?

and

Question 5.8 – What measures are proposed to ensure that additional pressures on the sewerage network are accommodated, that phosphate and pollution levels in local watercourses can be controlled, that an adequate water supply can be provided, that the additional demand for emergency services, healthcare and school places is dealt with and that important green infrastructure is provided or retained?

The southern section of the Amesbury link road, the Amesbury Archer Primary School and the Bowman Centre were all implemented in the very early phases of the Archers Gate development and represent items of strategic infrastructure that will also serve the proposed King's Gate allocation.

Drainage and water supply infrastructure is available. Wessex Water were consulted prior to the grant of outline planning permission S/2002/1075 and confirmed that local foul and water supply networks could accommodate the additional flow from these dwellings and that the additional houses would be allocated within Wessex Water's future house numbers for the waste water treatment works. Wessex Water has also confirmed that there are satisfactory water resources available to serve new development at King's Gate and that no off-site network improvements will be required.

In terms of additional education provision, the current planning applications for 183 units on the site generate the need for two additional classrooms to be provided at the school. However, for practical operational reasons, Bloor Homes and Persimmon Homes have reached broad agreement with the Council to secure planning permission for the previously envisaged seven class room extension (albeit to the latest standards set out in Building Bulletin 99), and to commence its construction during the coming summer so that additional facilities are available for use in September 2011.

Wiltshire Council has confirmed that there is capacity at Stonehenge Secondary School within the town, and that new development at King's Gate would simply be required to make a financial contribution towards funding additional places at the school if and when necessary.

Additional educational, recreational and community facilities in the form of a further primary school, sports pitches, changing facility, allotments and children's play areas would all be provided in tandem with the site's development, at points to be agreed with the Council as part of an overall phasing plan.

Enquiries with the Wiltshire Primary Care Trust have not indicated a requirement for additional health facilities at King's Gate. We are aware that the emergency services are looking for additional premises in the Amesbury area and although we consider that a variety of better sites are available, we have agreed to consider the practicalities of accommodating such premises within the King's Gate allocation.

A significant amount of green infrastructure has already been delivered within the King's gate allocation pursuant to outline planning permission S/2002/1075. This will be retained and enhanced where necessary in conjunction with Natural England and the Council.

We are aware of Natural England's concerns about increased levels of development and potential increases in phosphates and pollution levels in local watercourses, and in particular the River Avon Special Area of Conservation. Should it be established that the King's Gate allocation might be responsible for increasing the level of phosphates in local watercourses, then an appropriate mitigation strategy would be agreed with Natural England and the Council as part of the site's future development.