



**INDEPENDENT EXAMINATION OF THE ALLERDALE
LOCAL PLAN (PART ONE)**

HEARING STATEMENTS

SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF STORY HOMES LTD



SIGNET PLANNING

Session 1: Duty to Co-operate and other Legal Requirements (Main Matter 1)

Whilst Story Homes have submitted representations previously in relation to the Duty to Co-operate issue, including at the Allerdale Local Plan (Part One) Pre-Submission Draft Stage, they currently do not wish to submit a Hearing Statement prior to the commencement of the Examination. However, they would like to reserve their position to formally respond to any Position Statement prepared and submitted by Allerdale Borough Council.

Session 2: Cross-Boundary Issues (Main Matters 1, 2, 3, 4, 10 and 13)

Whilst Story Homes have previously submitted representations to the emerging Allerdale Local Plan in relation to cross-boundary issues, including those submitted to the Allerdale Local Plan (Part One) Submission Draft, they currently do not intend to submit a Hearing Statement prior to the commencement of the Examination. However, they wish to reserve their right to formally respond to any Position Statement prepared by Allerdale Borough Council in relation to any of the main matters comprising 'cross-boundary issues', prior to the commencement of the Examination. It should also be noted that cross-boundary issues relating specifically to housing are considered by Story Homes as part of Session 4.

Session 3: Settlement Hierarchy (Main Matters 11 and 12)

Further to the preparation and submission of previous representations to the emerging Allerdale Local Plan, including representations to the Pre-Submission Draft, Story Homes formally submit the following Hearing Statement prior to commencement of the Examination with regard to the Settlement Hierarchy: Criteria for Designation; Transport Sustainability.

Hearing Statement (Main Matter 11)

Story Homes do not have any fundamental objections to the composition of the Settlement Hierarchy itself in terms of, first, the sub-division of settlements into Principal, Key Service and Local Service Centres, together with Limited Growth Villages, or, secondly, those settlements included within each respective tier. However, they are of the view that Policy S3, as currently worded, makes the Local Plan unsound on the basis that there is no reference in the Plan document, nor any documents comprising the evidence base, as to how the local planning authority have apportioned the percentage split of the overall housing requirement between the different settlements. In accordance with the NPPF, in order for the level of housing development apportioned to each settlement to be sound it is important that the local planning authority clarify the evidence base on which the respective percentage split has been made, in order to confirm the level of housing need to be met.

This is particularly important when there are disparities between the affordable housing needs within different settlements. For example, Cockermouth has the highest affordable housing requirement and, in the context of no significant public funding to meet such needs, the reliance upon market housing to cross-subsidise such delivery is considered essential. Given the significant doubts as to the ability to meet the 40% provision on sites within Cockermouth required by Local Plan Policy S8, it is clear that full transparency is required in order to explore fully, first, the workings behind the settlement by settlement housing distribution and, secondly, the ability of this distribution to meet the full housing needs identified by the evidence base in terms of both market and affordable housing.

Session 4: The Provision of Housing (Main Matters 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 14 and 15)

Whilst Story Homes have previously submitted representations to the emerging Allerdale Local Plan (Part One) including the pre-Submission Draft, with regard to the Main Matters comprising Session 4, they wish to submit the following Hearing Statement prior to commencement of the Examination in respect of the following matters:

Hearing Statement

Main Matter 2 (The Extent of the Plan Period)

It is noted that Major Modifications MM1 and MM4 proposed by the Council have extended the plan period by a further year from 2028 – 2029, which the Council indicate has been done to ensure that the Plan period covers the full 15 years, as per Story Homes previous representation requested. As a consequence, Story Homes are supportive of this change.

Main Matter 3 (The Scale of the Housing Requirement)

It is noted that Major Modification 12 increases the overall Plan housing requirement from 5,167 to 5,471. However, it appears that this is solely due to the extension of the Plan period from 2028 – 2029 to achieve a 15 year plan period. However, the annual requirement of 304 net new dwellings per annum remains the same.

Following submission of the Core Strategy, the Council published an update to the 'Housing Growth Topic Paper' (May 2013) in October 2013 which seeks to provide further clarification as to the overall Plan housing requirement. This confirms that the current housing requirement figure is broadly based on both the 2008 and 2011 interim household projections. However, it is Story Homes' view that these household projection figures do not provide an accurate representation for the full Plan period, given that they were generated through a period of recession.

As such, it is the view that, under more favourable economic conditions, which is expected in future years, it is highly likely that higher rates of household formation will be achieved. Indeed, the use of the 2011 interim household projections was recently raised by the Inspector considering the emerging Lichfield Local Plan who confirmed that Lichfield Council should not plan on the basis of the 2011 headship rates as this would merely be planning for recession.

In order to obtain a fuller picture in terms of identifying the scale of housing need, the recently published National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) emphasises the importance of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment and economic aspirations in determining housing numbers. The baseline economic forecast for West Cumbria, identified within the 'West Cumbria Evidence Base Projections Paper' (2011), identifies an overall housing requirement for West Cumbria of 615 dwellings per annum. However, presently the combined housing requirements of the West Cumbria authorities (Copeland and Allerdale) is 554 dwellings per annum, some 61 dwellings per annum (or 1098 dwellings over the Plan period) short of this requirement.

In terms of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment the 2011 SHMA and subsequent 2013 Update identify an annual need for 181 affordable dwellings and 295 market dwellings over the next 5 years. This equates to a requirement for 476 dwellings per annum. Given the importance that the Government places upon the SHMA Story Homes consider that the Plan is currently unsound due to the fact that Allerdale has not sought to address this need in full.

In addition, paragraph 12 of the updated Housing Growth Topic Paper (October 2013) suggests that previous delivery rates have been a factor in the local planning authority's identification of the Plan housing requirement. The NPPF requires plans to be positively prepared and provide a significant boost to housing supply. Indeed, the draft NPPG identifies that historic delivery rates are not a basis for identifying future needs. It is also evident that the Council's previous under delivery has not been considered as part of the overall housing requirement, which needs to be accounted for in the first 5 year period of the Plan.

Further, Story Homes are concerned that the local planning authority make no allowance for the potential influence of the 'Nuclear New Build Programme', with the Council suggesting that the uplift in employment and requirement for additional housing that may arise is likely to impact

upon Copeland rather than Allerdale. However, whilst this may be the case, with the effects on Allerdale predicted to be small (19 dwellings per annum over the economic baseline scenario), this, nonetheless, accounts for 342 dwellings over the plan period. Whilst the Copeland Plan allows for some flexibility for the emergence of the Nuclear New Build Programme, the Allerdale Local Plan, as currently worded, does not. This lack of flexibility to accommodate a potentially important national infrastructure project is not reflective of the NPPF.

Story Homes are of the view that the proposed housing requirement does not fulfil the needs of Allerdale's vision and objectives for the Plan. In order to remedy this situation and ensure that the plan is sound, the housing requirement figure should be increased to account for the need identified within the SHMA, previous under-delivery within Allerdale and also the Council's aspirations for economic growth.

Main Matter 4 (Cross-Boundary Issues in Housing Provision)

There appears to be some contradiction in the Council's consideration of cross-boundary working, as required by the 'Duty to Co-operate' in the Localism Act 2011. In this regard, paragraph 5 of the 'Housing Growth Topic Paper' Update (October 2013) confirms, at paragraph 5, that *'there are no strategic cross-boundary issues in relation to housing delivery'*.

However, the Council's own 'Statement of Compliance' with the Duty to Co-operate actually identifies housing as a cross-boundary issue and, in light of this, the requirement to work jointly with neighbouring authorities' own housing delivery, both historic and planned, given that the housing requirement within the Plan currently will not meet the authority's objectively assessed needs for both market and affordable housing. In light of this the Plan is not sound and does not comply with the Duty to Co-operate.

Main Matter 5 (Delegation of Location Decisions to Subsequent Document(s))

Paragraph 79 of the Pre-Submission Draft Plan confirms that the Site Allocations DPD will identify the broad distribution of housing and employment growth with Policy S5, as currently written, advising that development will be confined to within the settlement boundaries. This approach introduces a significant level of uncertainty as to the ability of the Plan to meet its

core planning principles of proactively driving and supporting sustainable economic development to deliver the homes, businesses and infrastructure that Allerdale needs. Constraining development to within settlement boundaries, and then failing to identify these boundaries within the Core Strategy, will effectively constrain development until the adoption of the Site Allocations DPD.

According to the Council's most recent Local Development Scheme, published in September 2013, the Site Allocations DPD will not be adopted until March 2016 at the earliest. This will undoubtedly, first, impact upon the Council's ability to deliver new housing and their ability to identify a 5 year supply of housing and, secondly, many elements of the Plan, importantly the review of settlement boundaries in housing allocations, will have a relevant plan period of only 13 years. This takes on additional significance given that the current settlement boundaries are dated and do not reflect housing requirement needs for this Plan and will need to be aligned with the strategy. This approach would also cut across the 'Limited Growth Villages' with new development currently restricted to small scale and within the designated settlement boundaries.

The identification of the revised settlement boundaries is a fundamental element of the strategy and should not be left until a later document, which is contrary to paragraph 153 of the NPPF which identifies that additional development plan documents should only be used where clearly justified.

In light of the above Story Homes consider that the Local Plan is currently unsound. In order to remedy this situation it is considered that, as a minimum, revised settlement boundaries should form part of the Core Strategy.

Main Matter 6 (Viability of Housing Provision in Low Market Areas)

The Council's Housing Viability Study, together with the Cumulative Viability Topic Paper (May 2013) identify viability issues across Allerdale, and particularly in the low market areas of Workington, Maryport and Wigton. This is of concern to Story Homes as these areas are identified within Policy S3 as accommodating the major proportion of the future housing requirement.

The Cumulative Viability Topic Paper Update (October 2013) indicates that, under an improving market a potential supply of 1,624 dwellings would be available. However, the Plan needs to commence delivery of housing immediately which will necessitate developing within the restrictions presented by current market conditions. Whilst an uplift in the market is being predicted the Plan's housing requirement cannot rely on an improving market. In addition, no account is taken of the need for a 20% buffer to be brought forward from later in the Plan period, as required by the NPPF, for persistent under-delivery.

In light of the above Story Homes consider that the housing numbers proposed by the Plan in low market areas are presently unrealistic, particularly given the other policy requirements and the lack of a 20% buffer due to persistent under-delivery. In order to address this situation it is suggested that the Council, first, reduce policy burdens within the Workington, Maryport and Wigton areas in accordance with paragraph 173 of the NPPF and, secondly, incorporate an allocations buffer of 20% over and above the Plan requirement in order to provide sufficient flexibility to allow for the under-delivery or non-delivery of certain allocated sites.

Main Matter 6 (Developer Contributions)

Policy S21 (Developer Contributions), incorporating Major Modification MM66. is presently unsound as the approach to producing SPD on developer contributions is not acceptable and does not accord with the NPPF. Consideration of development contribution issues are fundamental to demonstrating the overall viability and deliverability of the Plan and, as such, must be set within the DPD and open to full assessment.

In addition, there is significant doubt as to the ability of the Council's 'Strategy for Infrastructure' to have identified the likely infrastructure required to accommodate the additional growth proposed when the Core Strategy fails to review settlement boundaries, provide an indication of the broad scale and location of future development or identify sites.

Main Matter 14 (Protection of Employment Sites)

The approach to deferring the de-allocation of sites to a DPD is not effective, justified or consistent with national policy and, as such, is unsound. The NPPF is clear that reviews of land for economic development should be undertaken simultaneously with the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment as the approach to employment land allocation/de-allocation is fundamental in terms of assessing land availability to inform the overarching approach to delivery within the Plan.

Main Matter 15 (The Emphasis upon Previously Developed Land)

It is considered by Story Homes, that, Policy 30, together with proposed Major Modifications MM80 and MM81 remains unsound as, first, there is still reference by the Council to prioritise (our emphasis) the effective re-use of previously developed and vacant sites within the Plan area and also reference that a sequential test may be necessary for windfall proposals on greenfield land to demonstrate that no suitable previously developed sites are available. There is no justification for either approach within the NPPF other than, where it can be justified, a target for development on previously developed land to be set out within the Plan. There is no such justification and, therefore, a PDL target contained within the Plan. This has been upheld in a number of recent appeal decisions (including Secretary of State decisions), with an example being Burgess Farm, Worsley (PINS Ref: 2157473) which concludes, at paragraph 14, that:

“The Secretary of State agreed that the sequential approach to the location of housing development is not reflected in the Framework”.

Policy S30, as currently worded, is therefore unsound, with substantial amendment to the policy in the form of deletion of reference to both prioritising PDL and the sequential test.

Session 5: Affordable Housing: Gypsies and Travellers (Main Matters 7, 8 and 9)

Whilst Story Homes have prepared and submitted representations to the previous stages of the emerging Allerdale Local Plan (Part One), including the Pre-Submission Draft, they wish to submit a Hearing Statement in relation to Matter 7 (The Provision of Affordable Housing) prior to commencement of the Examination.

Hearing Statement (Matter 7)

The viability evidence base referenced to in Story Homes' Statement with regard to Matter 6, comprising the Cumulative Viability Topic Paper (together with Update October 2013), indicates that, unless the market conditions improve significantly, very few sites within the Borough, particularly within the Workington, Maryport and Wigton areas, will be viable to deliver sufficient affordable housing to meet the Council's overall requirement. With specific reference to the Workington, Maryport and Wigton areas the expectation of achieving 20% affordable housing on sites is unrealistic and not supported by the Council's own Viability Assessment. It is acknowledged that improvements over the Plan period to market conditions may improve the viability of delivery – however that is not the current position, on which the Plan must be based.

Notwithstanding that the overall housing requirement for the Borough is already in question, the affordable housing requirement alone necessitates, for clear viability issues, an increase in market housing to provide the opportunity to reduce the percentage requirement on a site-by-site basis. Without this re-assessment of overall housing numbers the Plan is unsound and will fail to deliver the affordable housing required.

Session 6: Landscape and Locational Factors (Main Matters 10, 13, 16, 17 and 18)

Story Homes currently have no objections to issues relating to landscape and locational factors given that the Main Matters comprising Session 6 are, at this stage, of a general nature. However, if any of these Main Matters are considered on a more site-specific basis then Story Homes reserve the right to, first, respond to any Position Statement prepared and submitted by Allerdale Borough Council prior to commencement of the Examination and, secondly, to make verbal representations at the Examination itself, if appropriate.

Session 7: Development for Energy Provision (Main Matters 13, 16 and 19)

Story Homes currently have no objections to issues relating to development for energy provision given that the Main Matters comprising Session 7 are, at this stage, of a general nature. However, if any of these Main Matters are considered on a more site-specific basis then Story Homes reserve the right to, first, respond to any Position Statement prepared and submitted by Allerdale Borough Council prior to commencement of the Examination and, secondly, to make verbal representations at the Examination itself, if appropriate.

Session 8: Nature Conservation; Built Heritage (Main Matters 10, 13, 17 and 18)

Story Homes currently have no objections to issues relating to nature conservation and built heritage given that the Main Matters comprising Session 8 are, at this stage, of a general nature. However, if any of these Main Matters are considered on a more site-specific basis then Story Homes reserve the right to, first, respond to any Position Statement prepared and submitted by Allerdale Borough Council prior to commencement of the Examination and, secondly, to make verbal representations at the Examination itself, if appropriate.

Session 9: Employment, Economic Development, Town Centres (Main Matters 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15)

Story Homes have prepared Hearing Statements in relation to Main Matters 11, 14 and 15 which have been submitted in relation to Session 4. However, they also wish for these Statements to apply to Session 9, at which they will be intending to make verbal representations where appropriate.

Session 10: Monitoring and Implementation

Story Homes do not wish to submit a Hearing Statement at this stage. However, they wish to reserve their right to formally respond to any Position Statement prepared and submitted by Allerdale Borough Council.

Session 11: Any Other Business - Close

Story Homes reserve the right to respond to any Position Statement prepared and submitted by Allerdale Borough Council relating to an issue considered under Session 11, together with the opportunity to make verbal representations at Session 11, if appropriate.