Land at Brafield on the Green

South Northamptonshire
Part 2 Local Plan
Draft Submission

Representations on behalf of
Davidge Usher Trust
AGENT
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LANDOWNER
Davidge Usher Trust
c/o Fisher German LLP
1. **INTRODUCTION**

1.1. These representations, made by Fisher German on behalf of Davidge Usher Trust, relate only to those policies considered relevant to our client's land at Brafield on the Green.

1.2. To set the context for the representations, Davidge Usher Trust own land at Brafield on the Green. There are three sites to the western boundary of the village which each represent logical, sustainable and deliverable site for future housing needs.

![Figure 1: Proposed development sites in Brafield on the Green](image-url)
2. **Representations**

**Delivering Housing**

2.1. The scale and distribution for new housing is set out within the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (WNJCS).

2.2. The Submission Local Plan Part 2 sets out that the Objectively Assessed Need is 6,320 dwellings for the period 2011-2029, as calculated in December 2013, and the housing delivery being 7,170 dwellings (351 dwellings per annum). The WNJCS directs growth to Brackley (2,160 dwellings) & Towcester (2,650 dwellings). Modest growth is identified for the rural area (2,360 dwellings).

2.3. The Plan then outlines that the overall supply for the same period is 7,024 dwellings, thereby providing a 704 dwelling surplus. However, measured against the planned delivery there is a 146 unit shortfall, which includes a 377 unit surplus in the rural areas.

2.4. As the Council are measuring housing delivery against the 2013 OAN figure of 6,320 dwellings, resulting in a surplus, the Local Plan Part 2 makes no additional allocations.

2.5. It is considered that the meeting of the rural requirement so early in the Plan period is indicative of the significant levels of unmet needs in the rural areas, and that the strong market conditions that exist in the rural area could deliver a far greater level of growth to support thriving rural communities, in accordance with paragraph 17 bullet 5 of the NPPF 2012 and paragraph 78 of the NPPF 2018.

2.6. The Local Plan Part 2 document ignore the fact the OAN is out of date; based on data collated in 2010 and updated in 2013. The data does not therefore reflect an up to date housing requirement for the District as a whole. The Plan does not take into consideration the new standardised methodology for objectively assessed housing need as set out in the NPPF and Planning Practice Guidance (September 2018).

2.7. The Plan’s submission to the Secretary of State by 24 January 2019 is unlikely given that Regulation 19 consultation is taking place until mid-November. All responses will need to be considered and the Plan amended where necessary. There are numerous changes sought to the Plan as discussed latter, including the revised Settlement Hierarchy, which means further consultation should take place, unless the hierarchy reverts to that in the pre-submission version of the Plan that is.

2.8. Based upon the draft figures published by the Government, utilising 2014 based household projections, the housing requirement for South Northamptonshire would be 491 dwellings per annum, an increase of 40% against the 351 dwellings per annum currently utilised. Additional land will therefore need to be identified to deliver this. The Local Plan Part 2 therefore needs to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate any future changes to the housing requirement for the District.

2.9. In either scenario, using the current housing targets or the standardised methodology, the direction of growth needs to be reviewed. The local economic profile for South
Northamptonshire\(^1\) states that Brackley and Towcester make up just 26.1% of the district’s population, however 67% of the overall housing supply is directed to these two towns.

2.10. In contrast, 73.9% of the district’s population live in the rural area, however just 33% of the overall housing supply is directed to these areas.

2.11. The scale and distribution of housing across the district should meet the housing needs of both urban and rural communities. This is recognised in the revised NPPF, with the inclusion of a new section on ‘rural housing’, which states that “in rural areas, planning policies and decisions should be responsive to local circumstances and support housing developments that reflect local needs” (paragraph 77). Paragraph 78 goes on to add that “to promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. Planning policies should identify opportunities for villages to grow and thrive, especially where this will support local services”.

2.12. The Rural Service Centres (Brackley and Towcester) have accommodated the majority of new development in the rural area. This pattern of development is not necessarily sustainable and places great pressure on the existing infrastructure. It is considered that the second and third tiers are able to accommodate development.

2.13. It is clear that more growth should be directed to the rural communities which need it, this being through (i) the higher housing requirement in line with the standardise methodology, as well as (ii) the distribution split of growth between urban and rural communities.

**Policy SS1: The Settlement Hierarchy**

2.14. The identification of Brafield on the Green as a Secondary Service Village is supported. It is agreed that the village has good local social infrastructure, as well as access to the larger service centres.

2.15. Objections are however raised to material changes which have been made to the settlement hierarchy. The classification of ‘Secondary Service Villages’ has been extended to take into account the level of services and facilities available in the higher scoring settlements compared to those who score lower. The Secondary Service Village classification has been divided into Secondary Service Village (a) and Secondary Service Village (b). The split appears to have been made arbitrarily. There is no evidence provided which analyses how the settlements should be split between the two classifications. The Settlement Hierarchy scoring is set out in the Settlement Hierarchy Methodology and the Settlement Hierarchy Matrix, however this does not differentiate between the two classifications. As such the classifications should be removed from the Local Plan given that it has not been positively prepared in accordance with the 2018 NPPF (paragraph 35).

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\(^1\) https://www.southnorthants.gov.uk/info/275/strategy-and-research/169/local-economic-profile
2.16. In addition, the scoring matrix for Brafield on the Green is considered incorrect. The following inaccuracies have been noted:

- **General Store** – Matrix scored 0, however there is a licenced general store, ‘Brafield Stores’ on Bedford Road selling groceries, fruit & vegetables, greetings cards, magazines, newspapers, bakery as well as DIY/ hardware goods. **As such 5 points should be attributed to Brafield on the Green.**

- **Broadband** – Matrix scored 0, however the Ofcom website as referred to in the Settlement Hierarchy Methodology (http://maps.ofcom.org.uk/) demonstrates that Superfast Broadband is available in Brafield on the Green having been rolled out by BT recently. **As such 5 points should be attributed to Brafield on the Green.**

2.17. The Matrix scores Brafield on the Green with 42 points. However as set out above, an additional 10 points should be added to this, providing a total of 52 points. This would be more comparable to Blakesley and Yardley Gobion (both with 53 points) as well as Charlton and Newbottle and Denton (both with 51 points).

2.18. Yardley Gobion (53) and Charlton (51) are classified in the Submission Plan as Secondary Villages category (A), whilst Blakesley (53) and Denton (51) are categorised as Secondary Villages category (B). Indeed, Old Stratford is categorised as Secondary Villages category (A) with 47 points, whilst Hartwell, scoring 54 points, is classified as category (B). It is clear from this brief analysis that there are major inconsistencies with the split between A and B categories. These have not been consulted upon to date either, only this Regulation 19 consultation.

2.19. As noted above, it is considered that the categorisation split of the Secondary Service Villages should be removed. Failing this, further analysis of the settlements should be undertaken, providing detail as to why each settlement in within each category. This should then be consulted upon. We would expect that Brafield on the Green, scoring 52 points would be categorised in the higher of the two tiers.

2.20. The Settlement Hierarchy policy in the Pre-Submission Plan (Settlement Hierarchy 1: Settlement Hierarchy), set out that there is scope for limited development within or adjoining the village confines of the Secondary Service Villages, limited to meet any identified local or specialist need including starter and self build homes or where there are opportunities for the redevelopment of brownfield sites which will result in a positive environmental improvement. This element has been removed from the Settlement Hierarchy policy and been reconfigured and moved elsewhere in the Plan. This is not objected to per se as it simplifies the settlement hierarchy policy.

**Policy LH1: Development Within Town and Village Confines**

2.21. Despite the policy name, this policy enables some development outside of village confines (clause 3), including:

(a) if it is a made Neighbourhood Plan allocation
(b) starter homes (in accordance with Policy LH2)
(c) meets the exception test of Policy LH3
(d) a single dwelling (in accordance with Policy LH4)
(e) self or custom build (in accordance with Policy LH5)
(f) specialist housing (in accordance with Policy LH6)
(g) a proposal for residential/nursing care (under Policy LH9).

2.22. Some principles of this policy are supported, however Policy LH2 and Policy LH4 for instance are not supported. This is discussed later, but the repercussions of those objections mean that Policy LH1 should also be amended.

Policy LH2: Starter Homes Outside Settlement Confines

2.23. The principles of Policy LH2 is supported, however the detail is not. The policy (1) allows for starter homes outside of village confines, on sites immediately adjoining defined settlement confines, where the site is underused or unviable industrial and commercial land, and where the mix of dwellings reflect identified housing needs. This is supported.

2.24. However, criterion (2) is not supported. This has been amended since the pre-submission version, setting out that where it can be demonstrated that market housing is required to enable development it will be supported, but only where the full development can be accommodated on previously developed land. This is considered is irrelevant and illogical and not consistent with national policy.

2.25. The redevelopment of brownfield land is generally considered acceptable in principle, in accordance with the brownfield first agenda. Indeed, one of the core planning principles within the NPPF 2012 is to encourage the development of previously developed land which is not of high environmental value. The revised NPPF (2018) sets out that substantial weight should be given to using suitable brownfield land.

2.26. As such the acceptance of market housing on previously developed land through this policy seems irrelevant and illogical and it is considered that clause 2 (i) should be removed.

2.27. The policy is also fairly illogical in any event as the likelihood of previously developed land being outside of / on the edge of defined settlement confines is low. Ordinarily such land would be included within the confines given its developed status, again it is considered that clause 2 (i) should be removed.

2.28. It is considered that on starter homes sites that require an element of market housing to enable such development to come forward, then as long as this meet the criteria in (1) eg immediately adjoining the settlement confines, then they should be considered acceptable.

2.29. This would enable sites such as those identified in Brafield on the Green, land previously put forward in the earlier call for sites exercise, to be brought forward for residential development whilst supporting the existing services and bringing new benefits to the village, such as the incorporation of pedestrian crossings and a formal village gateway to reduce the speed of traffic along Bedford Road. The promoted sites could deliver both market and affordable homes and are considered to be suitable sites for development. As previously stated, the meeting of the rural requirement so early in the
Plan period is indicative of the significant levels of unmet needs in the rural areas, and that the strong market conditions that exist in the rural could deliver a far greater level of growth to support thriving rural communities, in accordance with paragraph 17 bullet 5 of the NPPF 2012, and paragraph 77 of NPPF 2018. Neither of these principles refer to the need for development to be on previously developed land.

2.30. It is considered that the detail specifics of the policy should be more flexible to allow for locations that can support growth should be viewed favourably, ensuring that there is adequate affordable and market housing in rural areas; again it is considered that clause 2 (i) should be removed.

Policy LH4: Single Dwellings in the Open Countryside

2.31. Whilst this policy allows the conversion of redundant buildings to residential use, for single dwellings, this is overwritten by the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2018 in many cases which allow for the conversion of redundant buildings (agricultural, storage/distribution, office) for up to five homes (Class Q).

2.32. Due to the repetition in part, and the GDPO overriding the policy, it is considered that section (a) of the policy should be removed.

Policy LH8: Affordable Housing

2.33. The policy sets out that:

On sites with 10 or more dwellings should achieve:

- 40% affordable dwellings in the market towns of Towcester and Brackley; and
- 50% in the Rural Areas.
- 35% in the Northampton Related Development Area

2.34. This is in line with the Joint Core Strategy, however the policy then defines the tenure split to be:

- 75% Social /affordable rented provision
- 25% intermediate provision; the intermediate provision will include the expectation that 10% of provision will be for discounted market sales homes

2.35. It is considered that the tenure split should be considered on a case by case basis and not defined by policy. Indeed, the draft text to the policy even states that the affordable housing mix for development schemes shall be negotiated on a case by case basis taking into account any necessary viability considerations. Given this statement it is considered pointless in setting out a tenure split when in fact this is to be negotiated. As such this element of the policy should be deleted.
Policy LH9: Build to Rent

2.36. The principle of Build to Rent properties is supported, with its intention to increase the supply of high quality homes available for market rent in the private sector. Objections to the content of the policy are however raised.

2.37. It is considered that the Build to Rent alternative approach to affordable housing provision should not limit these development typologies to within settlement confines. The opportunity for housing development in existing built up settlements are now few and far between. There should be an acknowledgment that edge of settlement development is going to be needed to deliver housing need and the flexibility for development to occur within, or immediately adjacent to settlement boundaries should be provided.

2.38. It is therefore considered that the policy is reworded to states that housing schemes will be permitted on suitable suites within the confines, or immediately adjacent to Rural Service Centre, Primary Service Villages and Secondary Service Villages.

Policy LH10: Housing Mix and Type

2.39. The proposals for a mix of housing is supported, however the wording of the policy is considered overly prescriptive.

2.40. The policy is worded to provide for the provision of 5% bungalows on all developments of 10 or more dwellings. This approach is considered too arbitrary as in many cases bungalows may not be desired, and in other locations the proportion may well be higher. It is considered that each application/settlement should be considered on its own merit and that this element of the policy should be deleted.

Policy Locally Objectively Assessed Needs (LOAN)

2.41. The deletion of Policy LOAN is supported.

2.42. The LOAN policy is not considered to be sound as it is reliant upon discussions and input of the relevant Town or Parish Council. In some villages this could be a positive way of delivering housing, however in some villages the relevant town or parish council maybe response negatively to such proposals and as such establish a HNA, and any such subsequent LOAN, for the area will be extremely difficult.

2.43. The Pre-Submission Plan outlined that an approved assessment would have a lifespan of five years. The Assessment would be tied to the applicant for two years to ensure that they had the opportunity to obtain and implement a planning permission, rather than another site being able to come forward. However, after this period if an application was not made, determined or implemented for whatever reason this would mean that an alternate site could come forward utilising the Needs Assessment undertaken by the initial applicant. In practice it seems that applicants will need to be dealt with on a first come first served basis and take the financial risk of undertaking a needs assessment. This approach and the whole ethos of the policy would not encourage development to come forward which goes against the ethos of the NPPF (Paragraph 17 bullet 5) which seeks to support thriving rural communities.
2.44. It is therefore considered overall that the policy is not reflective of the NPPF, is too restrictive in its approach and would restrict development. As such it is considered that the deletion of the policy is sound.
3. **Summary**

3.1. The Plan needs to move towards a more positive rural strategy, it needs to be sufficiently flexible and allocate sites, or reserve sites to meet future development needs. Alternatively, it is suggested that the Local Plan Part 2 should be abandoned until it reflects updated housing needs through the standardised methodology process.