

Statement of Common Ground

Land to east of Shifnal Industrial Estate
Sites: SHF018b and SHF018d

Ruckley Estate, Harrow Estates & Shropshire Council

13 May 2022

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) has been prepared by Terence O'Rourke Ltd (TOR) on behalf of Ruckley Estate (RE) as the landowner and Harrow Estates (HE) as the site promoter/developer.
- 1.2 HE have control over the land subject to the employment allocation being confirmed. Control over the land is achieved via a promotional agreement with the site owners RE. Shropshire Council (SC) is the Local Planning Authority
- 1.3 The SoCG sets out the joint position between RE, HE and SC in relation to the proposed employment allocations SHF018b and SHF018d on land to the east of Shifnal Industrial Estate. These proposed employment allocations are defined in the Regulation 19, Pre-Submission Draft of the Local Plan 2016-2038 as.
- Land east of Shifnal Industrial Estate, Upton Lane, Shifnal (SHF018b and SHF018d) comprising 39ha with a net developable area of 15.6ha.
- 1.4 Details relating to the delivery of the employment allocation are contained within the Draft Local Plan, specifically within the Shifnal Place Plan Area at Schedule S15.1(ii). This SoCG is presented in general support of employment allocations SHF018b and SHF018d and the development guidelines in Schedule S15.1(ii).
- 1.5 It is recognised that RE and HE will prepare Hearing Statements to be submitted by TOR to the Stage 1 Hearings, specifically pertaining to Matters 2, 3, 4, 6 and 8. This SoCG is provided without prejudice to matters of detail the parties may wish to raise during the Examination.
- 1.6 All parties reserve their right to suggest updates to the SoCG in relation to issues identified during the Examination and in consultation with the other parties to the SoCG.

Location

- 1.7 The sites are located at the eastern fringe of Shifnal, adjacent to the settlement boundary around the Shifnal Industrial Estate, the edge of which forms the western boundary of the site.

- 1.8 The wider allocation, made up of two sub-sites, is split east and west by Upton Lane. The northern limit of the site is formed by Stanton Road which provides the primary highway connection to the M54. The Shrewsbury to Birmingham rail line delineates the southern boundary.
- 1.9 As identified in Figure 1 below, the proposed employment allocation consists of two sites located to the east of Shifnal around Upton Lane which connects Stanton Road to the north with the A464 Wolverhampton Road to the south. Stanton Road runs to the east of Shifnal where it connects with the A41 which links directly with Junction 3 of the M54.

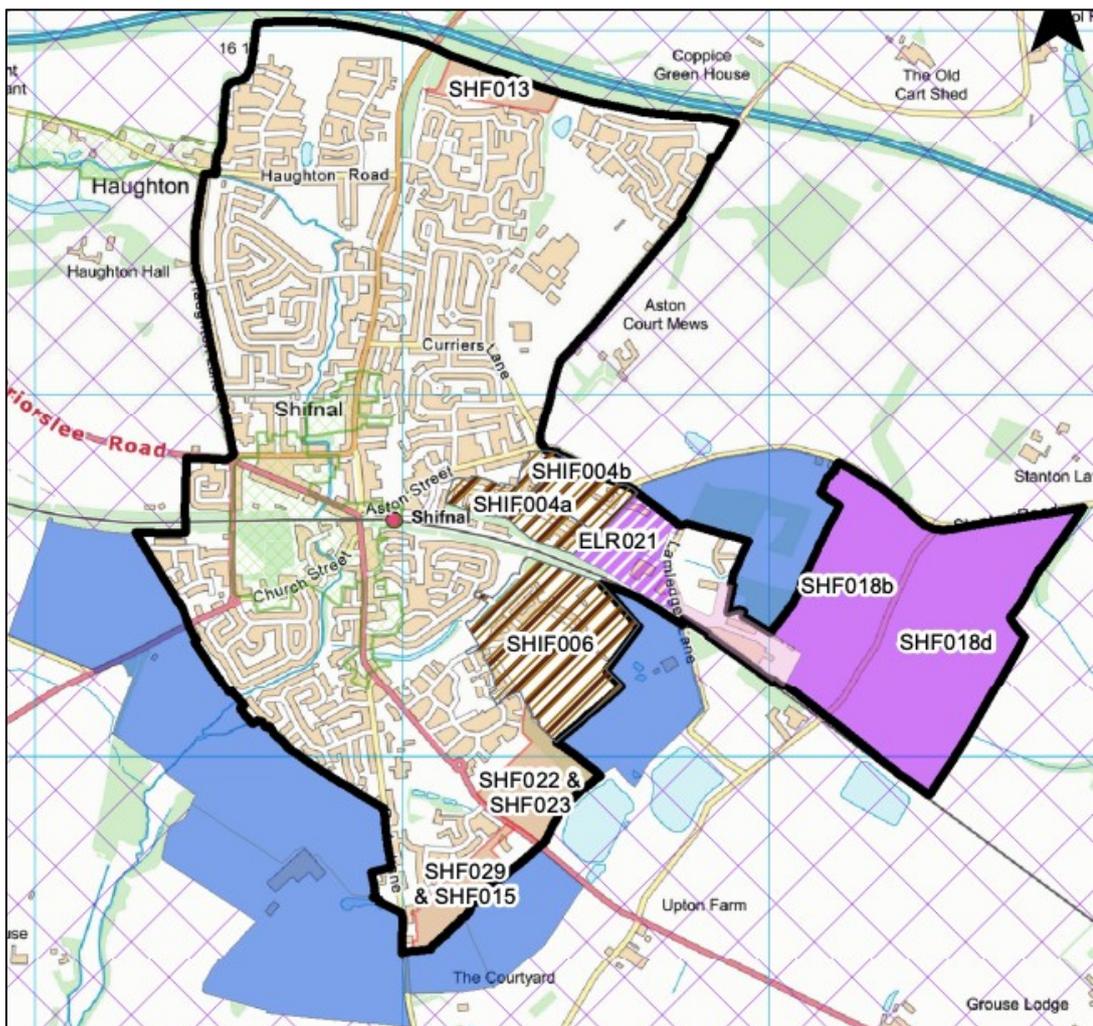


Figure 1.0: Draft policies map extract demonstrating the employment allocation at SHF018b and SHF018d

1.10 Together sites SHF018b and SHF018d provide a strategic development site, extending over an area of 39ha, and providing potential for the delivery of a net employment space of 15.6ha comprising 40% of the overall land area.

Strategic Considerations

1.11 The sites are currently located within the West Midlands Metropolitan Green Belt.

1.12 It is agreed between the parties that:

1. there is clear evidence that exceptional circumstances exist for the release of land from Green Belt to facilitate development for employment purposes.
2. the existence of these exceptional circumstances supports the wider spatial strategy of the Shropshire Local Plan and, more specifically, the release of sites SHF018b and SHF018d.
3. the submitted strategy complies with the requirements of Paragraphs 140 - 143 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

1.13 As explained further below, the parties agree that the proposed new boundary to the Green Belt, with respect to the release of sites SHF018b and SHF018d, complies with the requirements of NPPF paragraph 143.

1.14 Beyond their current status as Green Belt, the sites are not otherwise constrained or protected by restrictions contained within the NPPF or other statutory provisions.

1.15 The allocation promotes a sustainable pattern of development, and its delivery is necessary to support both local and strategic employment needs.

1.16 Sites SHF018b and SHF018d are agreed to provide a sustainable direction of growth at Shifnal and provide employment development that can directly contribute towards meeting identified local and strategic employment needs. The allocation represents a sound and deliverable strategy for employment growth at Shifnal, and within Shropshire more generally, which can balance the

needs of the town and contribute towards realising the strategic economic objectives of the Draft Local Plan.

- 1.17 It is agreed that, the strategic approach to the sites is fully justified, positive and effective and complies with the sustainable development objectives of the NPPF.

2.0 Planning Policy Context

- 2.1 The employment allocation of sites SHF018b and SHF018d responds positively to the strategic policies of the NPPF (para 20), to make sufficient provision for employment needs in accordance with the wider principles of sustainable development.
- 2.2 Specifically, the allocation will help to realise the goals of NPPF Section 6, 'Building a strong, competitive economy'. It is agreed that SC has set out a clear economic vision and strategy, based on the evidence, which focuses employment provision within the M54 Strategic Corridor, taking into account specific locational requirements of the employment sector demand across Shropshire. The identification of the allocation of sites SHF018b and SHF018d, is clearly set within this strategy and is of a scale to meet anticipated needs, with some flexibility. The allocation accords overall with NPPF paras 82 and 83.
- 2.3 Notwithstanding this broad agreement, TOR has suggested amendments to the allocation policy which would effectively provide flexibility to facilitate a rapid response to changes in economic circumstances (See Paragraphs 5.4 & 5.5).
- 2.4 As previously stated, the site currently falls within the Green Belt and it is agreed that exceptional circumstances exist to remove the site from the Green Belt to facilitate sustainable economic growth by way of an employment allocation. The need for employment and housing provision and land for future development needs, and the lack of alternative reasonable development options, provides appropriate justification for the release of Green Belt land at Shifnal in accordance with Paragraphs 140 and 141 of the NPPF.
- 2.5 In meeting the requirements of NPPF paragraphs 140 and 141, Shifnal is an appropriate location for development as a town which is inset within the Green Belt. The allocations represent a sustainable pattern of growth, including when considered against access/transport requirements and the nature of the existing settlement pattern, including the potential to improve the sustainability (in NPPF paragraph 8) and self-containment of Shifnal. This accords with NPPF para 142.
- 2.6 It is agreed that the development of the site will establish new enduring and defensible boundaries to the Green Belt, in accordance with NPPF para 143(f). This will be planned through a considered master-planning layout, including the

provision of a Green and Blue Infrastructure Network around (and through) the site to establish a permanent Green Belt boundary that will endure in the long term.

- 2.7 The policy requirements at S15(ii) of the Shifnal Place Plan Area for the allocation of SHF018b and SHF018d are to be implemented through the development management process upon the submission of a detailed planning application for the sites. The requirement in S15(ii) to prepare a masterplan responds to the strategic considerations in the delivery of the employment allocation and ensures appropriate engagement with the detailed policy requirements.

3.0 Spatial Strategy

- 3.1 The Draft Local Plan justifiably seeks to achieve a balanced approach to economic and employment development, with a focus for employment development at Principal and Key Centres, including Shifnal and Strategic Corridors, such as the M54 Corridor, within which Shifnal is located.
- 3.2 The employment spatial strategy at Shifnal, which includes the allocation of SHF018b and SHF018d, is an appropriate and deliverable approach for both the town and the M54 corridor.
- 3.3 Not only is the site located within the M54 corridor, but Shifnal offers the opportunity to better balance employment and housing provision, to create a more sustainable pattern of development in Shropshire. It is agreed that there is an acute need for local employment land at Shifnal, to balance against the significant housing delivery experienced at Shifnal over the current Plan period. This will achieve greater internalisation of employment opportunities within the town, reduce out-commuting and foster a more sustainable approach to employment accessibility.
- 3.4 The employment allocation at Shifnal is strategically significant. The M54 corridor functionally connects Shropshire with the West Midlands conurbation. Hence, the allocation can provide cross-border flexibility by contributing towards accommodating the cross-boundary unmet employment need from the Black Country Authorities.
- 3.5 The economic functionality of Shifnal as part of the M54 corridor and its potential role in helping to accommodate identified unmet needs represents a positive approach to planning and supports the legal soundness of the Plan through the satisfaction of the Duty to Cooperate.

4.0 Master-planning Principles

- 4.1 The emerging policy relating to the delivery of the employment allocation at Shifnal, S15(ii) sets out a series of development criteria, including master-planning principles to respond to the site's characteristics and its context.
- 4.2 The indicative masterplan is considered to have demonstrate the potential for a deliverable layout. It indicates a comprehensive development with a central access point between the two parcels with a complementary verdant landscaping scheme. The approach taken to the indicative master-planning of the employment sites is strongly influenced by its landscaping response. The indicative layout has been guided by the specific characteristics and form of the site as well as responding to the "campus-style" layout as required within the Draft Local Plan.
- 4.3 The indicative green infrastructure has been designed to be naturalistic and create an appropriate landscape setting for 'pavilion' buildings to sit within. Strong green corridors have been incorporated to sensitively align with the site's topography, resulting in a layered response, and mitigating the visual impact of the sloping site. The inclusion of new woodland, connecting to the existing, will also provide a tree-lined backdrop to the development.
- 4.4 The proposed design approach has been developed to be consistent with the development guidelines for the site. It will include the provision of high quality and flexible employment floorspace to respond to the needs of a range of occupiers and current market requirements. The indicative employment masterplan delivers on the aspiration of a landscape-led 'campus' where development sits within a strong landscape framework. Overall, the sites are deliverable and considered to have a critical role in supporting the economic growth potential of Shifnal in this strategic location within the M54 corridor.
- 4.5 The principles outlined in the emerging Draft Local Plan have underpinned the indicative masterplan produced to date. However, parties intend to work constructively together to implement the policy through further technical assessments, discussions and consultation during the detailed master-planning stage.

5.0 Site Delivery and Land Use

- 5.1 RE and HE emphasise the availability, suitability and developability of the sites and support their inclusion as an employment allocation by SC. All parties agree the sites demonstrate a deliverable location for new employment development.
- 5.2 As a readily available site, once the site has been released from the Green Belt upon adoption of the Shropshire Local Plan, the site can be brought forward for delivery. Commercial support for, and interest in, the allocation assists in demonstrating that the allocation meets the locational needs of growth industries.
- 5.3 The site will be able to deliver high quality employment space and therefore provide potential for skilled jobs to the residents of Shifnal, as such establishing internalisation of the employment market within the town. The sites will be able to meet the identified strategic needs of Shropshire, local requirements of Shifnal as well as the cross-boundary, unmet need arising from the Black Country Authorities.
- 5.4 It is agreed the land uses identified in Schedule S15.1(ii) represent a suitable range of uses for SHF018b and SHF018d that will be considered further in the master-planning / planning application process for the proposed employment allocation. HE draw out one exception to this position in relation to the identified primary uses. The site will provide for the current Class B uses in Classes B2 and B8 but these primary uses should also include new Class E(g) for (i) office uses, (ii) research and development and (iii) light industrial uses.
- 5.5 Whilst the primary focus on Class B2 and B8 will ensure the strategic function of the proposed employment allocation, the further inclusion of Classes E(g)(i),(ii),(iii) will assist in the delivery of the policy objective of internalising the employment market within Shifnal. HE therefore ask that Schedule S15.1(ii) be further modified to include Class E(g)(i),(ii),(iii) uses to more closely reflect the provisions of strategic employment policy SP13. The Council do not disagree with this proposed modification to Schedule S15.1(ii).

6.0 Site Considerations

6.1 The master-planning approach to the delivery of the site has been informed by site characteristics to ensure the development of a sustainable employment site at Shifnal.

Heritage

6.2 The delivery of the site will be in accordance with policy requirements regarding heritage and archaeological considerations.

6.3 It is agreed between the parties that actions to discharge these obligations should be proportionate to their significance but must be achieved within national and local policy requirements. This will include enhancements to the eastern boundary treatments of SHF018d.

6.4 In broader terms, the approach to securing the conservation of heritage assets and their settings will be addressed at the master-planning stage but the provisions in S15(ii) are considered to be justified and effective.

Highways and Access

6.5 The Transport Assessment, conducted by mode Transport Planning (dated September 2020) submitted to SC in February 2021 in support of HE Regulation 19 representations supports how the delivery of SH018b and SH018d can sustainably manage the increase in vehicle trips because of the employment development.

6.6 This accords with the emerging requirements of the Shifnal Place Plan to minimise impacts on the restricted capacity of junctions in Shifnal Town Centre. The development of the sites at East Shifnal will contribute towards the town centre strategy to improve the road network and mitigate possible impacts.

6.7 Generation of HGV movements from East Shifnal will be directed away from Shifnal town centre, as outlined in Transport Assessment, with all traffic manoeuvred eastwards on Stanton Road towards Junction 3 of the M54. This will be achieved via a routeing agreement. The same assessment establishes that there is significant reserve capacity on the junctions along Stanton Road as well

as Junction 3 of the M54, but this will be subject to further consultation with National Highways.

- 6.8 Notwithstanding the highway interventions required at the Upton Lane/Stanton Road junction, these can be achieved through a more detailed analysis at the master-planning stage.
- 6.9 The employment allocation at Shifnal East is appropriate and will not result in harm to the local highway network.

Transport

- 6.10 The employment allocation at Shifnal East will deliver appropriate public transport links to Shifnal, including bus connectivity. A Demand Responsive Transport service to move people between the town centre and the development at times of peak demand will be investigated.
- 6.11 The policy wording within the Shifnal Place Plan and the requirement for Master-planning will enable the viability and practicality of delivering transport enhancements to be explored further in relation to the strategic significance of delivering new employment opportunities at Shifnal.

Green Infrastructure

- 6.12 The masterplanning approach to the development of the employment allocation will incorporate significant Green Infrastructure to offset ecological impacts and provide a landscaped scheme that responds to its location at the fringe of the Green Belt.
- 6.13 The proposed parkland / campus style development scheme will provide for ecological enhancements in accordance with the master-plan and the design code to be approved by the Council following consultation with the public. An ecological strategy, informed by technical assessment and investigation will explore the links with existing woodland, and other environmental assets to create a comprehensive and enhanced green and blue infrastructure network.

Drainage

- 6.14 A Sustainable Urban Drainage System will be implemented on the site, the details of which will be determined through the planning application stage, informed by technical assessment and investigation.
- 6.15 The policy wording and requirements establish an appropriate framework for the delivery of the allocation and sustainably manage drainage considerations. This includes provisions relating to the Source Protection Zone and the existing pumping station and the sensitivity around the north-west corner of the allocation.

7.0 Site and Infrastructure

- 7.1 Delivery of the sites at SHF018b and SHOF08d will include provision for infrastructure upgrades to facilitate the development of the employment allocation. These will be secured through the development of the site through the planning application process via legal obligation.

Electricity Supply

- 7.2 Parties agree on the requirement to deliver upgrades to the local electricity network to ensure adequate capacity to ensure power to the employment allocation at Shifnal East. Mechanisms for the delivery of these upgrades should be determined through the master-planning / planning application process. Parties agree that a policy framework is needed to ensure that deliverability can be maintained and that infrastructure improvements are appropriately realised in advance of any development on the employment allocation.

Green Belt Boundary and Enhancement

- 7.3 Provision of structural landscaping to soften the development edge with the revised Green Belt boundary is indicated in the indicative masterplan for the site. The parties agree that this masterplan-led approach is the most appropriate and effective method in achieving the sustainable development of the site and to effectively mitigate any harm to the Green Belt. This accords with the guidance contained within the Shropshire Council's revised Green Belt Release Exceptional Circumstance Statement published December 2020, which has appropriately informed Policy S15.1(ii).
- 7.4 Parties agree that a structural landscaping strategy and enhancement of the Green and Blue Infrastructure within the site, through enhancement of the existing eastern woodland belts and provision of new SUDs features towards the south-east of SHF018d will establish new defensible and permanent boundaries to the Green Belt. This will also aid in mitigating harm as a result of the sites release from the Green Belt.
- 7.5 Strengthening of the eastern boundary will provide enclosure from the countryside beyond. This will be complemented by the wider landscape strategy implemented within the site to achieve high quality Green Infrastructure, utilising

native trees and shrubs and will echo existing field boundaries and other natural features.

- 7.6 The strengthened eastern boundary and its green infrastructure links through the site will also function as a permeable network and boundary facilitating pedestrian access for the site employees and the Shifnal community for amenity, leisure and recreation purposes. This provision will serve as a compensatory improvement to the Green Belt providing an enhanced beneficial use of the adjacent Green Belt land. This will create a parkland character within and around the site to help bring the recreational opportunities of the Green Belt closer to the local community as an outcome of the proposed development.

Upton Lane Interventions

- 7.7 The primary access into the employment allocation will be via Stanton Road from the existing junction with Upton Lane. This sole entrance into the site and delivery of the allocation will exhibit enhancements to the highway and junction to ensure safe vehicular and HGV movements.
- 7.8 Upton Lane will be incorporated into the comprehensive development of the allocation as the primary spine road ensuring adequate circulation within the site through a network of secondary distributor roads and yards. These are indicatively shown in the masterplan. The significance of Upton Lane as an historic thoroughfare will be recognised in the internal highway layout of the development. The incorporation of Upton Lane into the internal highway layout of the development will be recognised through the maintenance of a north-south highway route and the retention of the name Upton Lane in the same approximate locality.
- 7.9 The provisions contained in relation to downgrades to Upton Lane viaduct are supported and this is reflected in the masterplan produced for the employment allocation. Details in the implementation and management of the downgrades will be achieved via the master-planning process.
- 7.10 These downgrades will comprise part of a wider mobility and connectivity strategy for the employment allocation and its immediate context within Shifnal East.

Connectivity

- 7.11 Interconnection of Shifnal East with Shifnal Industrial Estate will be realised through the provision of secondary highway access points between the sites and the Shifnal Industrial Estate. This will allow for an increase in capacity of the existing highway network within the industrial estate, providing alternative access points and opportunity for vehicular circulation. These will be supported through new pedestrian and cycle routes, enhancing permeability, and promoting alternative modes of transport.
- 7.12 The parties agree that the downgrade of Upton Lane, particularly restricting access across the viaduct to cycle and pedestrians only, will comprise a significant component of the wider comprehensive strategy to achieve high quality connectivity within the employment allocation as well as with its context.

Signatories

Signed:

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Company: Shropshire Council
Date: 6 June 2022

Signed:

Name: Tim Noden

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Position: Planning Director
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