

## ID 10

### SHROPSHIRE LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION

Representor unique Part A Ref *	A0636
Matter	Matter 6 (Green Belt and Safeguarded Land)
Relevant questions nos	ID1 Paragraphs 19, 20, 21, 22 and 23 and ID2 Paragraph 25

#### Stage 1 Hearing Statement

\*Your unique reference can be found in the Schedule of Respondents (Schedule 3 of document SD014.01) at:

<https://shropshire.gov.uk/planning-policy/local-planning/local-plan-review/draft-shropshire-local-plan-2016-2038-examination/examination-library/earlier-regulation-18-plan-making-stages-of-consultation/regulation-19-pre-submission-draft-of-the-shropshire-local-plan-consultation/>

- 1. ID1 Paragraph 19: We note that the Plan identifies some sites to be taken out of the Green Belt and allocated for development purposes. Proposals to re-draw Green Belt boundaries should generally follow a two stage approach. The first stage is the evidence gathering and assessment that leads to an in-principle decision by the Council that review of the Green Belt boundary is necessary to help meet development needs in a sustainable way, as set out in the NPPF1.**
- 2. ID1 Paragraph 20: The second stage determines which site or sites would best meet the identified need having regard to Green Belt harm and other relevant considerations. It is only after satisfactory completion of the two stages that exceptional circumstances are capable of being fully demonstrated.**
- 3. ID1 Paragraph 21: Typically, the first stage involves several steps, starting with a thorough investigation of the capacity of the existing urban areas and whether this has been maximised. Subtracting this from the local housing need (LHN) leaves the amount of development to be provided outside the urban areas. The next step is to consider whether there is any non-Green Belt rural land which could meet all or part of the unmet need in a sustainable manner and having regard to any other significant constraints. These two steps address the requirements of NPPF paragraph 142 and 143 and give a scale of unmet need which can only be met by Green Belt release.**

4. **ID1 Paragraph 22: In some situations, it may then be necessary to consider whether, in principle, this residual need is one which should be met by Green Belt release. This might involve examining not only the justification for meeting the LHN (or the consequences of not meeting it) but also addressing sustainability considerations and consistency with the overall strategy of the Plan reflecting NPPF paragraphs 142 and 143.**
- 4.1 Under section 13 of the NPPF (Protecting Green Belt Land), we consider the SC have not followed the two-stage approach correctly to warrant the need for the undertaking of a Green Belt Assessment/Review, under the sustainability appraisal we consider that allocations have not been properly assessed against other sites and no justification has been provided to explain the reasons for rejecting reasonable alternatives in the area.
- 4.2 As set out in paragraph 4.6 of SC's Green Belt Topic Paper (February 2022), it is SC's own admission that that the *"methodology used does not follow precisely that set out in ID1, the Council has nevertheless followed a robust sequential approach which has led to the proposed alterations to Green Belt boundaries in order to support sustainable development. In doing so, the Council considers it has met the requirements set out in the NPPF"*.
- 4.3 SC's reasoning on why a Green Belt review was initially conducted follows the recommendation of the Inspector in the Examination Report of 2015. This formed part of the first stage approach, which should inform the in-principle decision by SC that a review of the Green Belt boundary is necessary. We would like to understand from SC what evidence was collated prior to the undertaking of the Green Belt Assessment/Review, which they used to justify their housing/employment needs. The Green Belt Assessment (EV049.01) was published in September 2017 and the Green Belt Review (EV050.01) was published in November 2018. Both of these assessments were undertaken prior to SC's Local Housing Needs Assessment (August 2020) and SC's Economic Development Needs Assessment (April 2021). We cannot understand the justification for the Green Belt Review during the absence of these two key pieces of evidence, which have gone onto underline SC's housing/employment needs.
- 4.4 As set out under question ID1 Paragraph 20, the second stage determines which site or sites would best meet the identified need in relation to Green Belt harm and other relevant considerations. We consider that the second stage in determining SC's Green Belt release has not been undertaken in the correct manner. The purpose of the Green Belt Assessment (Stage 1) was to evaluate strategic options for sustainable development but not to advise on the suitability or potential of land in the Green Belt for development. Either, in the short term, or by safeguarding Green Belt land for future use. The following Green Belt Review provided 29 identified Opportunity Areas, but there is very little commentary to justify how sites within these areas have been scored against alternative sites, which are of more or less harm to the Green Belt.

- 4.5 It should be considered that Shifnal's evidence base was used to define the review process, this does not demonstrate how the proposed allocations for employment, housing and safeguarded land would have been properly assessed against other sites. No reasoning is provided to justify why other sites were rejected in the area and SC's exceptional statement (para 8.74) indicates that opportunities for industrial development within neighbouring Telford and the wider areas (Staffordshire, Wolverhampton, West Midlands etc), have not been considered.
- 4.6 Furthermore, the Green Belt Assessment sets out in paragraph 7.32 that "*the likely environmental and other effects of development in the Green Belt, such as impacts on landscape quality, biodiversity, heritage and consideration of flooding, traffic generation, infrastructure requirements etc were not taken into account as part of the Review on the understanding that these important matters would be considered and evidenced separately by Shropshire Council, alongside the consideration of exceptional circumstances*". SC have not provided the heritage assessments used to inform the site selection process. These have been requested throughout our Regulation 18 and 19 representations. An assessment demonstrating the implications of traffic generation caused by the proposed developments on Shifnal has also not been conducted by SC, which we are aware of, and a plan setting out SC's infrastructure requirements has only recently been published, in the Shropshire's Strategic Infrastructure and Investment Plan 2022. This was published after SC's Regulation 19 consultation, and respondents have not been consulted on the document to date.
- 4.7 We would like to ascertain whether the above assessments have been undertaken to inform the site selection process and understand how the late introduction of new evidence can retrospectively be produced at such a stage of the review process. Surely this indicates that the site selection process of Green Belt release has been predetermined.
- 5 ID1 Paragraph 23: Can the Council please provide a Green Belt topic paper which explains the steps taken by the Council prior to making the decision to allocate land in the Green Belt for development. This should include reference to relevant parts of the evidence base. Can the Council also set out in the topic paper how it has addressed NPPF paragraph 141 and where necessary, provide evidence to substantiate this. Also, please explain whether taking unmet need from the Black Country has led to the need to release land from the Green Belt. Furthermore, there is no reference to individual safeguarded plots and no justification for how these sites have been assessed and selected in the evidence base, sustainability appraisal and proposals map.**
- 5.1 With regards to the principal reason for the substantial release of Green Belt in Shifnal, SC have set out that the exceptional circumstances which warrants release relates to their underlying objective to expand the town to become a

strategic centre and to also allocate development, which will help Black Country authorities address their housing/employment need.

- 5.2 The proposed expansion of Shifnal is therefore not intended to meet the specific needs of the town, but to meet SC's and the Black Country's wider objectives. As set out in the Green Belt Exceptional Circumstances Statement, SC want to change the capacity of the town and for it to perform the same role as Bridgnorth. Shifnal is less than half the size of Bridgnorth and is surrounded by Green Belt (whereas Bridgnorth only has Green Belt on one side). Shifnal is only 2 miles from the major town of Telford which provides all major services and facilities. SC also needs to also acknowledge that the strategic site located at Ironbridge Power Station, will also affect the future development of Shifnal. This strategic site aims to deliver circa 1,000 dwellings, and around 6 ha of employment land.
- 5.3 Again, we would like to reiterate that addressing the Black Country's unsatisfied housing/employment need in itself should not justify an exceptional circumstance to warrant the release of Green Belt in Shifnal. Even though SC have stated that that the need will not be provided on a specific site allocation or within a specific settlement, we disagree with this statement as SC have consistently also stated that they consider that allocations in the principal settlements in the eastern areas of the County closest to the Black Country including Shifnal and Bridgnorth are well placed to meet this need. Paragraph 141 of the NPPF explicitly states that *"before concluding that exceptional circumstances exist to justify changes to Green Belt boundaries, the strategic policy-making authority should be able to demonstrate that it has examined fully all other reasonable options for meeting its identified need for development"*. This paragraph specifically relates to meeting SC's identified need and does not account for accommodating the unmet need of a neighbouring authority, so the validity of the release of Green Belt at Shifnal should be brought into question for this reason alone. In addition, we consider that SC that have presented a case for exceptional circumstances to justify proposed changes to Green Belt boundaries before their own local housing and employment need assessments were undertaken. How can allocations for housing, employment and safeguarded land for Green Belt release be presented in the absence of an established need and without an assessment of alternative specific sites.
- 5.4 Furthermore, SC have continually stated that the settlements located along the M54/A5 strategic corridor and those located in the east of Shropshire are therefore likely to play key roles in the delivery of housing to satisfy this 'unmet' need in Shropshire. Can we please raise the question as to why SC are accommodating a proportion of the Black Country's unmet need, when they also have a need within their own administrative boundary, over the plan period.
- 5.5 As part of the staged approach for assessing an exceptional circumstance for Green Belt release, we would again like to raise concerns over the timing and deadline for a response given to Local Authorities when SC sent out the letter (February 2020- Duty to Cooperate) regarding potential Green Belt release in

Shropshire, which requested a call for alternative sites. The deadline which sought Local Authorities to provide alternative sites to SC's Green Belt sites only allowed a 16 working day window for a response. Following this deadline, SC have stated that Telford & Wrekin Council have not made such an offer for alternative sites. We would like clarification from SC as to whether land to the west of Telford has been considered for Green Belt release, which is within the administrative boundary of SC.

- 5.6 On a separate matter, SC are still yet to also clarify our queries and question ID1 Paragraph 23 relating to the release of Green Belt for safeguarded land. SC state in their Regulation 19 Draft Plan that development of the safeguarded land during the Plan period will only be permitted in 'very special circumstances' to meet Shifnal's development needs in accordance with national and local Green Belt policies.
- 5.7 We would like the Inspector to seek clarification on why local Green Belt policies are still applicable to proposed safeguarded land, if the land is being released from the Green Belt. Will this land be afforded the same weight as Green Belt? If this is the case, we would like SC to consider the retention of proposed safeguarded land as Green Belt.
- 5.8 Under 8.76 of the Green Belt Release Exceptional Circumstances Statement, SC state that *"It would be fair to conclude that, in the context of this strategy, the only settlement with the capacity to function as an alternative location for development to meet the 'unmet' needs of Shifnal would be Shrewsbury as the Strategic Centre for the County"*. They go on to state in paragraph 8.77 that *"this approach is likely to raise a matter of principle in relation to national policy on Green Belts. To relocate the 'unmet' development needs of Shifnal to Shrewsbury as the Strategic Centre of the County would appear to satisfy the requirements of NPPF paras 137 to 138. This would then obviate the need to consider the existence of exceptional circumstances under NPPF para 136"*.
- 5.9 Firstly, we would like to stress that the level of development proposed already exceeds Shifnal's unmet need and that the unmet need identified relates to SC's and the Black Country's wider objectives for this and the next plan period. Secondly, we would like to understand why a larger proportion of housing and employment land has not been proposed at Shrewsbury, as SC admit that this approach would alleviate any need to release further Green Belt release and the test for exceptional circumstances.