

**Inspectors:**

Louise Crosby MA MRTPI,  
Carole Dillon BA (Hons) MRTPI and  
Nick Palmer BA (Hons) BPI MRTPI

Shropshire Council  
Shirehall  
Abbey Foregate  
Shrewsbury  
Shropshire SY2 6ND

**Programme Officer:**

Kerry Trueman  
Tel: 07582 310364, email:  
[programme.officer@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:programme.officer@shropshire.gov.uk)

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Dear Inspectors,

**Shropshire Council – Request for Clarification to ID36****1. Introduction**

- 1.1. Thank you for your correspondence of the 4<sup>th</sup> October 2023 (ID36), which addresses the additional Sustainability Appraisal (SA) work (GC29) undertaken by Shropshire Council, as part of our response to your Interim Findings (ID28) from the stage 1 hearing sessions.
- 1.2. The Council has sought advice from Barrister, Hugh Richards, and the Council's Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Miranda Garrard in providing this response.
- 1.3. By way of recap, in preparing the Council's response to ID28, the intention was to positively respond to your identified soundness issues and to progress the Examination of our Local Plan. Clearly, as documented within ID36, you have some concerns with some of the additional work undertaken by the Council. The Council wishes to address these concerns in a constructive and timely manner, and to enable the examination of the Local Plan to continue.
- 1.4. Having carefully considered the concerns you have raised and the additional work requested within ID36, the Council really needs further clarification on a number of points in order to proceed with confidence. The requested points of clarification will enable us to identify the timescales to undertake the additional work and ensure that it will address your concerns.



- 1.5. The purpose of this correspondence is therefore to identify those matters raised within ID36 about which the Council seeks clarification to confirm our understanding. It also provides a detailed summary of the process undertaken within GC29 (the additional SA work), which may address some of the concerns raised in ID36.
- 1.6. It is our understanding that you now **only** wish the Council to prepare additional SA work and where necessary update the Housing & Employment and Green Belt Topic Papers (Para 24, ID36). For the avoidance of doubt therefore, this letter is a request for clarification only. Where reference is made to the Council's conclusions when responding to ID28, this is intended only to articulate the work that the Council undertook in response to ID28. It is not intended to seek your views on the soundness of these conclusions.
- 1.7. However, the Council does have concerns with some of the issues raised in ID36, most notably the suggestion made at paragraphs 7 and 8 that the Council had sought to reduce the housing and employment land requirements in its recent submissions in July 2023.
- 1.8. The Council fully respects that you and others may have concerns over the soundness of conclusions reached. The Council considers the most appropriate mechanism for discussing these substantive issues of soundness is through a hearing session once we have provided any additional SA material requested in ID36, and following public consultation on this material. We would therefore welcome your confirmation the Council will have an opportunity to comment on any soundness concerns you and others have through the Examination process in due course.

## **2. Unmet Needs Forecast to Arise in the Black Country**

- 2.1. The proposed contributions to unmet needs forecast to arise in the Black Country were addressed in a number of places in ID28. Paragraph 13 specified *"the Council's intention to address some of the Association of Black Country Authorities (ABCA) unmet needs (1500 homes and 30ha of employment land), aligns with the spirit of the DtC."* It also included recognition that *"the Council and the ABCA authorities are all content with this contribution and this is set out in a Statement of*



*Common Ground (SoCG)”. Finally, it acknowledged “there is a lack of any prescribed formula in national planning policy for calculating any uplift to Shropshire’s housing need to meet some of this externally derived unmet need”.*

- 2.2. Shropshire Council had understood this to constitute endorsement of proposed contributions in Shropshire of 1,500 dwellings and 30ha of employment land, towards unmet needs forecast to arise in the Black Country.
- 2.3. However, Paragraph 14 of ID36 states *“As the plan proposes to meet some of the unmet needs of the Black Country, it is necessary for the SA to appraise reasonable alternative options for achieving this against sustainability objectives. We will then consider the outcome of that work, and the consultation comments on it, to determine whether meeting the needs is an appropriate strategy.”* (my emphasis).
- 2.4. With specific reference to your comments at Para 14 of ID36, it would appear that you have not yet arrived at a conclusion on whether meeting Black Country unmet needs is an appropriate strategy for the Shropshire Local Plan. We now understand that in order for you to arrive at a conclusion on this matter, you require the Council to undertake additional SA work, which as a separate exercise, assesses reasonable options for accommodating Black Country needs.
- 2.5. Clearly this is a critical point for the Council to understand and, in the Council’s view, impacts on the sequence of any further additional SA work required. For instance, it would seem logical to arrive at a conclusion on whether meeting needs from the Black Country is an appropriate strategy before any further SA work is undertaken to seek to identify sites to accommodate this need. Your confirmation of our understanding would be helpful.
- 2.6. It is recognised it is the responsibility of the Council to present reasonable options. In looking at a range of issues outlined below, we consider this would include the following:
  - For housing - Option 1: No contribution; Option 2: Contribution of 1,500 dwellings.
  - For employment - Option 1: No contribution; Option 2: Contribution of 30ha of employment land.

- 2.7. It is considered these options are responsive to the extensive duty to cooperate process undertaken by the Council with the Black Country Authorities; the various factors considered in determining appropriate proposed contributions to unmet need, as documented within the Housing Topic Paper (GC4i) and Employment Strategy Topic Paper (GC4n); and the agreements reached within the Statement of Common Ground between Shropshire Council and the Black Country Authorities (EV041).

**Clarification Question 1: Can you confirm you require further SA work to consider reasonable options for contributing to the unmet needs forecast to arise in the Black Country, as a distinct and separate exercise to the wider SA work on housing and employment requirements? Are you satisfied with the two options identified?**

### 3. Assessing Growth Options

- 3.1. It is recognised you have identified some specific concerns with respect to the Council's additional SA work, contained in GC29, submitted in July 2023. We also recognise this was an issue raised by Aardvark Planning Law in their Pre-Action Protocol Letter (PAPL) (OD004). In light of these concerns, we therefore feel it is important to provide you with an overview of what we believe this additional SA work provided, and how this **may** address some of your concerns.
- 3.2. In paragraph 11 of ID36 you question the approach of the Council's additional SA work, specifically questioning why additional growth options were considered. The intention of the additional SA work undertaken by Shropshire Council (GC29), was to assess a series of reasonable growth options, consistent with those assessed within the SA of the Issues & Strategic Options (EV003.03).
- 3.3. For the avoidance of doubt, the options assessed in the additional SA work (moderate / productivity growth, significant growth, and high growth (variations 1-3) **all** took account of the additional two years of the plan period and **all** included the proposed Black Country unmet need contribution. Again, for the avoidance of doubt, all five growth options assess housing and employment land requirements in excess of

the identified Local Housing and Employment Need, using the 2020 base date.

## Housing

- 3.4. The housing growth options identified and appraised in the Issues & Strategic Options (EV003.03) for the Local Plan Review process were moderate growth, significant growth, and high growth. The methodology for determining these growth options was explained within the Issues & Strategic Options Consultation Document (EV003.01):
- a. Paragraph 10 (bullet point 1) addresses moderate growth, stating *"This option represents a requirement 5% above the defined housing need"*.
  - b. Paragraph 10 (bullet point 6) addresses significant growth, stating *"This option represents a requirement 10% above the defined housing need"*.
  - c. Paragraph 10 (bullet 12) addresses high growth, stating *"This option represents a requirement 15% above the defined housing need"*.
- 3.5. Three of the housing growth options assessed within GC29 were consistent with the methodology used in EV003.03, applying the same **percentage uplifts** above the Local Housing Need figure; these being moderate (5%), significant (10%) and high growth variation 2 (15%). The two further variations of the high growth option (variation 1 and variation 3) were intended to ensure a complete and robust assessment, which sought to address your comments in ID28.
- 3.6. For the purposes of the updated SA assessment in GC29, the Local Housing Need used the 2020 baseline. This clearly represented an updated baseline position compared to the Issues & Strategic Options document, which relied upon a Local Housing Need (defined through the Full Objectively Assessed Housing Need) at the 2016 baseline.
- 3.7. High growth variation 1 represents around a 13% uplift on Local Housing Need (using 2020 base date information). This option aligns with the proposed housing requirement in the Submission draft Shropshire Local Plan (30,800 dwellings), which is why the Council considered it important for such an option to be explicitly assessed.

- 3.8. High growth variation 3 represents an option which is the housing requirement in the Submission draft Local Plan, plus an additional 1,500 dwellings representing the level of unmet housing need the Plan is seeking to accommodate from the Black Country (i.e. 30,800 + 1500), which represents around a 19% uplift on Local Housing Need (using the 2020 base date).
- 3.9. Within GC29 **all** of the growth options were based on uplifts to the Local Housing Need as calculated in 2020.
- 3.10. Paragraph 6.2 of GC29 sought to explain this by stating *"The baseline for these reasonable options was the local housing need for Shropshire of 25,894 dwellings over the 22-year plan period from 2016-2038 (equating to an annual average of 1,177 dwellings), as calculated using Governments Standard Methodology with a 2020 base date. This calculation is summarised within the Local Housing Need Assessment 2020 (EV069)." (my emphasis).*
- 3.11. Paragraph 6.3 of GC29 continued, stating: *"the assessment with a 2020 base date has been utilised to establish the baseline within this additional SA Assessment, as it was this calculation that underpinned the housing requirement at the time of the Regulation 19 Consultation and when Shropshire Council made the decision to submit the draft Shropshire Local Plan for examination." (my emphasis).*
- 3.12. The key distinction between the actual figures resulting from the growth options in EV003.03 and GC29 is therefore **not** due to a change to the growth options or reliance on the Local Housing Need assessed in 2023. The distinction arises from the fact that the growth options in EV003.03 were calculated using the 2016 Objective Assessment of Local Housing Need but in GC29 the growth options used the Local Housing Need as assessed in 2020 from the standard methodology.
- 3.13. Given your comments in Paragraphs 2 and 3 of ID36 regarding the soundness of Shropshire's Local Housing Need (being 25,894 dwellings over the plan period using the 2020 base date), we assume therefore you would also support the use of the 2020 base date for the purposes of updating the housing options in the updated SA work. It would be useful to receive your clarification on this issue.

- 3.14. Shropshire Council welcomes the confirmation within Paragraph 2 of ID36 that within ID28 you *"found that the Council's approach to identifying the housing and employment land needs derived within Shropshire itself to be sound."* Shropshire Council also notes that within paragraph 3 of ID36 you conclude that the proposed housing requirement figure in draft Policy SP2 of the draft Shropshire Local Plan *"is based on the Local Housing Need figure (LHN) assessed in 2020"*.
- 3.15. Therefore, we consider the housing growth options set out within GC29 are:
- a. Consistent with those assessed during the Issues & Strategic Options stage by applying the same **percentage uplift** in three of the options assessed in GC29 but adjusted to reflect the 2020 baseline position on Local Housing Need (as opposed to the 2016 position used in the original Issues and Strategic Options document)
  - b. Reflect the additional two years within the proposed plan period.
  - c. Allow for a contribution of 1,500 dwellings towards the unmet housing needs forecast to arise within the Black Country.
- 3.16. The Council was in no way seeking to retrofit the SA to suit predetermined requirements. With regard to high growth variation 1, we felt it important to explicitly assess a growth option equivalent to our current proposed housing requirement in the submitted version of the Local Plan (30,800 dwellings), as, in our view, this continues to constitute a reasonable option for growth. With regard to high growth variation 3, we believed this to be responding directly to the concerns expressed in your Interim Findings letter (ID28).

**Clarification Question 2: Could you please advise whether GC29 constitutes an appropriate identification and consideration of the reasonable housing growth options. If not, could you please provide further information on the issues affecting the assessment in GC29 and explain the growth options you consider the Council should assess?**

### **Employment**

- 3.17. In response to ID28, the Council clarified the employment land need for Shropshire to be 250ha between 2016 and 2038. This baseline position



is evidenced in the Council's Employment Topic Papers EV112 and GC4n. The additional SA material (GC29) assessed five reasonable options using this baseline position, and applying percentage uplifts, consistent with the approach for housing.

- 3.18. It is however important to note that when the original SA of employment options took place as part of the Issues & Strategic Options Document (EV003.01), there was no defined employment land requirements attached to these options. Instead, these were articulated as growth scenarios, i.e. significant growth, high growth, and productivity growth.
- 3.19. Whilst it is recognised paragraph 10 of ID36 raises concerns about the Council reviewing the baseline growth options for Shropshire itself, with respect to employment options, the Council clearly has more information available about its baseline position with respect to employment land needs, when compared to when the original Issues & Strategic Options Document was prepared in 2017. We therefore believe it sensible and appropriate to utilise this additional information in order to identify levels of growth associated with the stated growth scenarios, by applying percentage uplifts to the baseline position, consistent with the earlier SA methodology.
- 3.20. The additional SA material (GC29) assessed five options for employment land growth. Three of the employment land growth options were considered to be consistent with the growth options subject to SA at the Issues & Strategic Options stage (EV003.03), these were the productivity growth, significant growth and high growth (variation 2) options.
- 3.21. Two additional options were also tested; high growth variation 1, which is equivalent to employment land requirement of the submitted Local Plan (300 ha); and high growth variation 3, which takes the submitted employment land requirement and adds 30ha.
- 3.22. Consistent with our approach to the additional SA work for housing growth, the Council was in no way seeking to retrofit the SA to suit predetermined requirements. With regard to high growth variation 1, we felt it important to explicitly assess a growth option equivalent to our current proposed employment requirement, as, in our view, this continues to constitute a reasonable option for growth. With regard to



high growth variation 3, we believed this to be responding directly to the concerns expressed in your Interim Findings letter (ID28).

- 3.23. GC29 explained that the additional SA work, tested these growth options using progressive uplifts in 5% increments which were applied only to the Shropshire need of 250ha. The growth options therefore assessed increasing levels of growth in the Shropshire economy alone and sustained a constant 30ha contribution to the unmet needs forecast to arise within the Black Country.

**Clarification Question 3: Could you please advise whether GC29 constitutes an appropriate identification and consideration of the employment land growth options. If not, could you please provide further information on the issues within this assessment and explain the growth options you consider the Council should assess?**

## **4. The Housing and Employment Land Requirements**

### **Proposing a Housing & Employment Land Requirement**

- 4.1. Shropshire Council prepared a Housing and Employment Topic Paper (GC28) following completion of the additional SA work (GC29). This Topic Paper was intended to positively respond to ID28.
- 4.2. Paragraph 22 of ID28 stated *"It would therefore be helpful if, once the Council has carried out the additional SA work, the proposed strategy in relation to the housing and employment land requirement is set out in the topic paper requested at paragraph 12 above."*
- 4.3. For this reason, when preparing GC28, the Council included a consideration of the housing growth options assessed within GC29, and informed by consideration of the conclusions of the additional SA material and other relevant considerations, exercised planning judgement to identify the proposed strategy in relation to the housing and employment land requirement.
- 4.4. However, we note the comments in paragraph 9 of ID36 which state that within ID28 you *"did not ask the Council to review its own housing requirement figure"*. This is echoed within paragraph 13 of ID36. Clearly in this instance the Council has misunderstood the intentions of paragraph 22 of ID28.

- 4.5. Paragraph 13 of ID36 explains the scope of main modifications is *"not to enable Councils to propose a different approach to matters which have already been promoted as sound and found to be so by an Inspector."* The Council agrees with this, and as stated in paragraph 2 of ID36, it is acknowledged you have not found the housing and employment requirements sound.
- 4.6. Within paragraph 24 of ID36 you have requested that the Council *"carry out additional SA work and where necessary the Housing and Employment Topic Paper and Green Belt Topic Paper"*.
- 4.7. Furthermore, within paragraph 22 of ID36, you state *"the SA should contain, among other things, the likely effects of the implementation of the plan and the reasonable alternatives, including cumulative effects, mitigating measures, uncertainties and risks as well as the reasons for selecting the proposals in the plan and rejecting the alternatives and then conclusions and recommendations as well as implementation and monitoring measures."*
- 4.8. Whilst the Council clearly wish to respond positively to your requests for additional material, there is some uncertainty as to scope of this material, and importantly, if it should include conclusions on housing and employment land requirements. Clarification on the scope of the additional work is therefore requested.

**Clarification Question 4: Given that the housing and employment requirements have not been found to be sound, are the Council now being requested to propose alternative housing and employment land requirement figures for Shropshire, reflecting the outcome of the additional SA work?**

## **5. Assessment of Sites**

- 5.1. Within paragraphs 15-22 of ID36 a number of concerns are raised regarding the assessment of sites undertaken by the Council within the additional SA work (GC29) undertaken.
- 5.2. The Council would like in the first instance, to provide some explanation of the work undertaken in GC29. Hopefully this will help in providing clarification on the extent of any additional work now required.



## **Location of Sites to Meet Black Country Needs**

- 5.3. Within paragraph 15 of ID36 concern is raised about the adequacy of the additional SA material (GC29) with regard to the assessment of reasonable alternative sites to meet the unmet needs of the Black Country. The work provided in GC29 sought to directly respond to comments in the Interim Findings Letter (ID28) at paragraph 21.
- 5.4. Paragraphs 9.2-9.29 of Section 9 of GC29 details the methodology undertaken by the Council to determine an appropriate geography within which reasonable options for sites to accommodate proposed contributions to the unmet needs forecast to arise within the Black Country may be located.
- 5.5. Paragraph 9.4 of GC29 sets out what these considerations are:
  - a. Geographic proximity and the location and quality of main road and rail transport links between Shropshire and the Black Country.
  - b. Migration patterns between sub-geographies (Place Plan Areas) within Shropshire and the entirety of the Black Country.
  - c. Commuting patterns between sub-geographies (Place Plan Areas) within Shropshire and the entirety of the Black Country.
  - d. The extent to which Travel to Work Areas (TTWA's) associated with the Black Country penetrate into Shropshire and vice versa.
- 5.6. This assessment concluded that reasonable options for sites to accommodate the proposed contributions to unmet housing and employment land need forecast to arise within the Black Country are **in the east and central parts of Shropshire** at the larger settlements where growth is proposed and potential strategic settlements/sites. This conclusion is detailed in paragraphs 9.21 and 9.22 of GC29.

**Clarification Question 5: Having reviewed paragraphs 9.2-9.29 of GC29, does this assessment and the conclusions reached achieve your expectations regarding the identification of an appropriate geography for sites to accommodate proposed contributions to the unmet needs forecast to arise in the Black Country? If not, please could you help us by indicating what we have failed to consider.**



## Sites Considered

- 5.7. In paragraph 15 of ID36 concern is also expressed regarding the specific sites which have been selected to accommodate proposed contributions to the Black Country as these were already the subject of SA in the context of Shropshire needs and objectives, with reference made to paragraph 9.31 of GC29.
- 5.8. The intention of paragraph 9.31 of GC29 was to recognise that through the Local Plan Review process, a significant range of sites were identified. Sites were initially identified using various sources referenced within national guidance. A formal 'call for sites' was then undertaken and further opportunities for site promotions were provided during the five Regulation 18 consultations undertaken to inform the development of the Local Plan.
- 5.9. The Council therefore feels there is a comprehensive range of sites to assess for this purpose without the need to undertake any further 'call for sites'.
- 5.10. Importantly, paragraph 9.31 of GC29 was **not** suggesting that consideration of potential sites to accommodate proposed contributions to unmet needs forecast to arise in the Black Country was limited to proposed allocations. This was not what we did.
- 5.11. For the avoidance of doubt, following identification of what the Council considers to be a reasonable assessment geography, the Council re-assessed **all** available sites within it. This involved assessment of around 450 sites at Stage 2a and around 230 sites at Stage 3 **as potential** locations to accommodate proposed contributions to unmet housing needs forecast to arise in the Black Country; and around 350 sites at Stage 2a and around 160 sites as Stage 3 **as potential** locations to accommodate proposed contributions to unmet employment land needs forecast to arise in the Black Country. This assessment work is captured within appendices 1-10 of GC29.
- 5.12. Paragraph 15 of ID36 appears to raise concern about the dual nature of the sites assessed to accommodate the unmet Black Country needs i.e. that sites selected underwent SA assessment to meet the needs of Shropshire as a whole and not the specific geographical needs of the Black Country. For the avoidance of doubt, the Council's additional SA

material (GC29) reassessed **all** site options available within the geographical area outline above. Without specifically seeking a new 'call for sites' to identify entirely new site options specifically to accommodate the Black Country unmet need, which the Council considers would be disproportionate, the Council are unsure how to proceed on this matter beyond what has already been provided in GC29.

**Clarification Question 6: Does this further explanation on the content and purpose of GC29 alleviate concerns regarding the extent of the assessment undertaken when determining appropriate sites to accommodate proposed contributions to unmet needs forecast to arise in the Black Country? If not, we would be grateful for further clarification on your concerns on this matter, together with appropriate guidance, in order to understand the extent of further work required.**

### **Stage 2b of the Site Assessment Process**

- 5.13. Within paragraph 21 of ID36 concerns are raised regarding the Council's decision not to update the 'filters' applied within Stage 2b of the site assessment process and specifies that matters such as size and strategic suitability are of direct importance when identifying proposed allocations and that these considerations will be different when considering sites to accommodate the needs and objectives of Shropshire and the needs of the Black Country.
- 5.14. During Stage 3 of the site assessment process, these matters were considered and informed decisions on the proposed status of each site within this process. Paragraphs 9.56-9.60 and Appendices 3-10 of GC29 detail the Stage 3 SA assessment carried out on this issue.
- 5.15. The intention of the 'filters' applied in Stage 2b of the site assessment process are to 'narrow down' the sites considered in Stage 3 of the site assessment process. This is consistent with all previous iterations of the SA undertaken to inform the Plan. The Council considered that these filters remained logical to both the consideration of sites to accommodate the needs and objectives of Shropshire and the needs of the Black Country.

5.16. Dealing with each of the three filters in turn:

- a. **Size:** Sites were 'filtered out' of the site assessment process where they were less than a specified size (unless there was potential for allocation as part of a wider site). The site size 'filters' applied are 0.2ha in Community Hubs and Strategic/Principal/Key Centres within/partly within the Green Belt or Shropshire Hills AONB, and 0.5ha for other Strategic/Principal/Key Centres. No other filters on size were applied.
- b. **Availability:** Sites were 'filtered out' of the site assessment process where there remained uncertainty about whether the site is available for relevant forms of development, despite best efforts to ascertain site availability.

**Strategic Suitability:** Sites were 'filtered out' of the site assessment process where they were identified as being subject to a significant physical, heritage and/or environmental constraint (identified within the Strategic Land Availability Assessment). These constraints are such that it was considered they were unsuitable for development.

-Significant physical constraints include where the site is landlocked (cannot be accessed); some distance from the built form (unless it could represent a potential strategic site); or the majority of the site is in flood zones 2/3, an identified open space, or has a severely adverse topography.

-Significant environmental/heritage constraints include where the majority of the site has been identified as a heritage or natural environment asset.

5.17. Further information on each of these 'filters' is provided within Chapter 4 of the Sustainability Appraisal and Site Assessment Environmental Report of the draft Shropshire Local Plan (SD006.01).

**Clarification Question 7: Does this explanation alleviate concerns regarding the approach to the 'filters' in Stage 2b of the site assessment process, in the context of determining proposed allocations to accommodate proposed contributions to unmet needs forecast to arise in the Black Country? If not, we would be grateful for more explicit guidance as to what we should do to the filters.**

### **Stage 3 of the Site Assessment Process**

- 5.18. Within paragraph 20 of ID36 concerns are raised regarding whether stage 3 of the site assessment process has been updated. We can confirm this update has been undertaken and forms appendices 3-10 of GC29.
- 5.19. Furthermore, we can confirm that within stage 3 of the site assessment process, **all** available site options within the reasonable geography identified for accommodating contributions to the Black Country unmet need, on **both** Green Belt and non-Green Belt sites were considered. This assessment also explicitly considers the outcome of the Green Belt assessment and review undertaken to inform the preparation of the draft Shropshire Local Plan.
- 5.20. However, the Council acknowledges that there will of course need to be consideration through the examination of the conclusions it has reached through this process.

**Clarification Question 8: Can you please advise whether this explanation alleviates your concerns regarding the update of Stage 3 of the site assessment process of reasonable site options to accommodate proposed contributions to unmet needs forecast to arise in the Black Country?**

### **Green Belt**

- 5.21. Within paragraphs 17, 18 and 19 of ID36 concerns are raised about how Green Belt has been addressed in the updated SA assessment. Specifically, we understand these concerns relate to:
- 1) the assessment process which led to the identification of the site at Shifnal (SHF018b & SHF018d) to accommodate the 30ha employment unmet need from the Black Country Authorities, and if other non-Green Belt sites or sites in the Green Belt but with less harm were considered (para 17);
  - 2) the evidence that has been relied upon to demonstrate exceptional circumstances for the release of this site for the purposes of meeting Black Country unmet needs (as opposed to only Shropshire needs) (Para 18);



- 3) the assessment of Sites P26 Amended and P26 Amended v2 (para 19); and
- 4) whether the Council indeed did undertake SA Stage 3 as indicated in para 9.42 of GC29 (para 20).

- 5.22. The Council considers it has demonstrably assessed **all** available site options within the reasonable geography identified for accommodating contributions to the Black Country unmet need, on **both** Green Belt and non-Green Belt sites. The reasons for identifying SHF018b/SHF018d to accommodate the 30ha contribution are summarised in Table 9.3 of GC29, with the detailed SA Stage 3 assessment and conclusion for this site included at appendix 8 of GC29 on pages 25-27 (site SHF018b) and pages 33-35 (SHF018d). Specifically, the additional SA assessment at Stage 3 explicitly considers the outcome of the Green Belt assessment and review undertaken to inform the preparation of the draft Shropshire Local Plan. It also specifically assesses the relationship with the Black Country.
- 5.23. Within paragraph 19 of ID36 you also queried the conclusion reached by the Council on sites P26 Amended and P26 Amended V2 (two variations of an omission site located within the Green Belt), given that the allocation proposed to accommodate the proposed contribution to the unmet employment land needs forecast to arise in the Black Country (SHF018b & SHF018d) is located within the Green Belt.
- 5.24. The location of site SHF018b & SHF018d within the Green Belt was recognised and informed the additional site assessment work. Ultimately, having considered all other reasonable options through this process (including sites P26 Amended and P26 Amended V2), the Council concluded that SHF018b & SHF018d was an appropriate location to accommodate the unmet employment land needs forecast to arise in the Black Country and that exceptional circumstances exist to justify the release of this site from the Green Belt.
- 5.25. With regard to sites P26 Amended and P26 Amended V2, these sites were promoted for either mixed use development or employment development. As such, the suitability of these sites was considered in the context of both housing and employment development.
- 5.26. The Council acknowledges that there will of course need to be consideration through the examination of the conclusions it has reached

within the site assessment process, but strongly feels that reasonable alternative sites have been considered in the additional SA material, which has led to our conclusions on this matter.

**Clarification Question 9: Does the clarification on the work carried out as part of Stage 3 of the additional SA material address your concerns regarding the Council’s consideration of alternative reasonable sites either not in the Green Belt or in the Green Belt but with less Green Belt harm in the same geographical location? If not, we would be grateful for more explicit guidance as to what we should do next.**

## **6. The Role of Sustainability Appraisal**

- 6.1. The Council appreciates your guidance on the scope of SA within paragraph 22 of ID36.
- 6.2. With regard to proposed growth options, sections 6 and 7 of GC29 summarise the assessment of the likely effects (including cumulative) of the reasonable growth options and identifies where there are uncertainties or risk. It then draws conclusions on the sustainability of each option.
- 6.3. These conclusions have subsequently directly informed the planning judgement exercise undertaken when the Council reached conclusions and recommendations regarding growth options (including housing and employment land requirements); this exercise is summarised within the Housing and Employment Topic Paper (GC28). It is acknowledged in ID36 you have confirmed that consideration of the housing requirement was beyond the expectation of the ID28, we have addressed this issue earlier in this letter.
- 6.4. GC29 includes an assessment of updated draft Policies SP2 (GC29, pages 156-159) and SP13 (GC29 pages 160-163), which contain the proposed housing and employment land requirements. This assessment summarises the assessment of the likely effects (including cumulative) of these proposed policies and identifies where there are uncertainties or risk. It then reaches conclusions on the sustainability of each draft policy, including consideration of the need for mitigation measures.

- 6.5. With regard to proposed site allocations to accommodate proposed contributions to unmet needs forecast to arise in the Black Country, GC29 section 9 incorporates an updated site assessment process for all reasonable sites within the identified reasonable assessment geography.
- 6.6. This assessment process is considered to fully integrate the consideration of these matters, including the reasons for selecting the proposals in the plan and rejecting the alternatives, followed by conclusions and recommendations. This is provided within section 9 and appendices 3-10 of GC29.
- 6.7. Implementation and monitoring of the draft Shropshire Local Plan is addressed within Chapter 13 of SD006.01 and is considered to remain applicable.

**Clarification Question 10: To ensure compliance with your requirements for the SA, the Council would like to seek your clarification on whether firstly, the additional SA material should arrive at conclusions on a preferred housing and employment land requirements (noting your comments in paragraph 9 of ID36)? Secondly, should a planning judgment on this matter now be appropriate, we would like to seek your clarification that these conclusions are reached in the Housing and Employment Topic Paper, where the conclusions of the SA and other material factors are considered in arriving at conclusions?**

## **7. Consultation**

- 7.1. The Council notes that paragraph 14 of ID36 now references the need to undertake consultation on the further SA work.
- 7.2. ID36 specifically addresses the further SA work (GC29) undertaken by the Council, alongside the Housing and Employment Topic Paper (GC28) and Green Belt Topic Paper (GC30).
- 7.3. The Council's response to ID28 included a range of other information to inform soundness issues raised.



**Clarification Question 11: Can you confirm the extent of the consultation you expect to happen in relation to the additional material prepared by the Council in July 2023, and any additional material now required in response to ID36?**

## **8. Minerals and Waste Issues**

- 8.1. Following the completion of the mineral and waste hearing in May 2023, the Council has had an exchange of correspondence with you regarding proposed main modification to mineral and waste policies.

**Clarification Question 12: Can the Council confirm that subject to the latest schedule of main modification to the mineral and waste policies, whether you require any further work to be undertaken on this issue?**

**Kind regards**

**Edward West**

**Planning Policy and Strategy Manager**

**Shropshire Council**

