

WYG Ref: HP120007

27th August 2020

Planning Policy
Test Valley Borough Council
Beech Hurst
Weyhill Road
Andover
SP10 3AJ

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: Consultation response to Test Valley Borough Council's (TVBC's) Refined Issues and Options Consultation June 2020 on behalf of the Trustees of the Captain Busk Grandchildren Settlement

On behalf of our client, the Trustees of the Captain Busk Grandchildren Settlement, I write in response to the Council's consultation on the Refined Issues and Options Document (June 2020). This follows the Issues and Options consultation in 2018. My client continues to have an interest in the land known as 'Land north of Stevens Drove'. The site was previously submitted as part of and included within the Council's Strategic Housing & Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) under reference 238. This representation will focus on Section 5 of the refined issues and options document (June 2020) titled 'Section 5: Living in Test Valley (Housing and communities)'. More specifically, this representation will demonstrate that the Council should seek the dispersal of housing to smaller settlements towards the heart of Test Valley to meet local need and also respond to some of the questions contained within this section.

We support the acknowledgement in paragraph 5.4 which states that in areas where house prices are high compared to associated incomes, more homes will need to be built. This is particularly relevant to the land at north of Stevens Drove, located in the village of Houghton. A review of the Houghton Parish profile notes that approximately only half of the properties fall within the lower end of the property market (Bands A-E) compared to the Test Valley average of 83%. Additionally, only 15% of Houghton properties are at the lower end of the property market (A-B). It also states that almost 40% of households in central rural Test Valley (such as Stockbridge) cannot afford to buy a private property, house prices have also risen by almost 18% in the last 5 years where the average house price is £788,594. It was also noted that by 2021, 43.5% of the parish would be aged 65 and over. These factors combined highlight the problems smaller villages such as Houghton are facing in providing

inclusive communities and ensuring the sustainability and viability of services within it. This runs contrary to the Council's vision noted in paragraph 5.10 where it is stated that there is a need to provide for a supply of homes to meet the community's needs of the Borough.

The refined issues and options document states that the housing requirement is 550 dwellings per annum, but the Council accept that this is expected to change following the Government's update to the standard methodology. The Government have since published the new standard method for calculating housing requirement (August 2020) which will increase the Council's requirement to 813 dwellings per annum. Although this has not yet been formally adopted, this demonstrates the Government's commitment to boosting housing supply. More locally, this will likely result in the need to allocate more sites currently outside of the settlement boundary. The Council should seek to allocate sites that relate well physically and visually and should be seen as the primary options for new housing development. The land North of Stevens Drove would respond positively to both of the above and should be considered an appropriate location for new development.

We are pleased that paragraph 5.13 recognises that the distribution of housing and achieving an appropriate balance of the scale of development between larger settlements and the 'rural area' is a key decision. This is a positive step forward from the previous unbalanced strategy which led to only 9% of housing being delivered in rural areas. This leads into paragraph 5.16 which recognises the need for new housing to be more widely distributed, including the provision of housing sites across rural areas and villages, such as Houghton. Houghton is located within Stockbridge which has been identified as a centre for a number of rural communities and an important destination for services and facilities, this clearly demonstrates that the Council consider it a sustainable location. The site is in close proximity to the café at Houghton Lodge, the Boot Inn, the village hall, and has access to the bus service to Andover. Stockbridge itself acts as a hub to the surrounding communities and so would also be affected if no new people are attracted to the area.

Paragraph 5.19 notes that the current adopted local plan does not make any specific allocations to the rural area. This has had an adverse impact on rural communities in relation to affordability and sense of community as noted above. The Refined Issues and Options document goes on to state that the next Local Plan will consider the future scale of growth for the rural area and the strategy options for housing development which is supported. It is important that rural areas such as Houghton are allowed to grow and are not left behind where the socio-economic issues in relation to housing are exacerbated. This would run contrary to the aims and objectives of section 5 of the Refined Issues and Options document. Paragraph 5.20 states that neighbourhood plans have an important role in making provision of new housing, but it should be highlighted that this approach has not been sufficient in addressing the issue to date, especially in rural areas. Houghton Parish are currently progressing their Draft Neighbourhood Plan, however there is no indication of when this will be adopted.

In response to Question 7, we believe that rural settlements which are close to other larger settlements should be seen in a positive light for the allocation of housing. It is important to encourage development in these locations to support local facilities and services so they remain viable. This would result in the more appropriate dispersal of housing and enable rural villages and settlement to not rely so heavily on market towns which are unaffordable. This can lead to unbalanced communities which can affect services and facilities in addition to housing and employment.

In response to Question 9, we continue to support the decision to review settlement boundaries and express that settlement boundaries should be defined through a contextual analysis and review of existing built development. Settlement boundary revisions should also consider sites that are currently located outside of the settlement boundary but relate well physically to the existing built environment and sites that do not fulfil the role of the countryside. This is the case with the land north of Stevens Drove defined by strong defensible boundaries including built development on three of its four sides. It hence represents a sensible location for residential development. The development of this site would also form a natural extension and essentially 'round off' the settlement and give a more consistent boundary along the west of the village. The strong tree/hedge lined boundary separates the site from the open countryside beyond and this boundary could be enhanced with additional planting. It should also be noted that the current settlement boundary for Houghton includes land to the east of the settlement which is located within the floodplain, therefore, it will not be possible to provide the required development needs at that location as the land within the floodplain is unlikely to meet the sequential test where other, more suitable, sites in the village are available, such as the land north of Stevens Drove. Instead, the land north of Stevens Drove is relatively free of constraints and available for development.

Land North of Stevens Drove, Houghton

The Land north of Stevens drove is suitable and achievable for housing and would respond positively to the aims and objectives of section 5 of the Refined Issues and Options document. The land was previously promoted within the SHELAA, reference 238. This site relates well physically to the existing built environment and it does not fulfil the role of the countryside. This site presents a sensible location for residential development and would form a natural form of infill development and respond positively to the built form of the settlement. Therefore, the land north of Stevens Drove presents an appropriate site for new residential development of around 45 homes which would represent modest sustainable growth to the village to help alleviate the demographic and affordability issues identified within the rural areas.

Conclusion

In summary, we strongly support the decision to better distribute development throughout the borough, especially within rural areas where the socio-economic issues in relation to affordability and sustainability are most relevant and at most risk going forward. Settlements such as Stockbridge and the villages contained within such as Houghton are vital locations, located in close proximity to the key service centre and the provision of housing would help sustain the remaining services and facilities and support new ones. The Council's current strategy limits the choice of location for home buyers, concentrating development in one place which severely limits the growth of rural settlements which runs contrary to the NPPF which notes that LPAs should deliver a wide choice of quality new homes. The Government's recent commitment to boosting housing supply will result in the Council being required to deliver in the order of 813 homes per annum, a 263 increase. This will only put further pressure on the Council to allocate sites in 'rural areas'. Overall, we welcome and support the Council's decision to deliver homes that meet community needs, specifically in rural areas.

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