

Newark & Sherwood Allocations and Development Management DPD

Day 4 – Matter 5, Area Specific Matters – Newark Area (Sutton on Trent)

15. Do the policies include adequate and appropriate safeguards with regard to the potential effects of development on the historic environment, flooding and local services? Has satisfactory provision been made in respect of transport and other infrastructure requirements?

18. Is the location and size of the Main Open Area appropriate and is it justified? Would the policies provide sufficient protection from future development in these areas?

Impact on the Sutton on Trent Conservation Area

Sutton on Trent is a village of unusual character in that it is a settlement made up of numerous but distinct parts. Whilst it has a main core that has been defined for many years, that core is punctuated by a number of large open areas that form an integral part of the overall form, structure, character and appearance of this Principal Village.

The main core is surrounded by a large number of open areas, including traditional orchards beyond which to the south and west there are then large areas of village which are currently considered part of the open countryside. These areas are home to large parts of the village community and their exclusion from the village boundary potentially prevents their redevelopment or consolidation through appropriate infill.

To the north of the main core is an area of recently enhanced and expanded employment, beyond which is the village Sports facilities. Sutton on Trent as an overall village does not have a nucleated form, it is an expansive settlement measuring around 1.8km from the southern extent around Roy Walker Furniture to the northern extent around the Sports Ground. It measures some 1.5km from the western extent around Mercia Garden Products to the Holmes to the east. A footprint of some 2.7km² is a large footprint for a settlement of the population that Sutton on Trent has.

The village has no defined centre with Main Street being home to several services and facilities including the Pub, the Butchers, the Hairdressers, the Library, the Post Office and Marshalls Bus Depot. Church Street continues north from Main Street and this is where the Church and Primary School are located. Ingrams Lane which then runs further north contains the Cemetery and Hutchinson Engineering.

High Street no longer has the range of services and facilities that it once housed, only the Lincolnshire Co-operative store now exists, the Old England Inn still operates as a bed and breakfast but at a much lower level of operation than historically, the Methodist Church and Church Hall are also located along here. Palmer Road has no services and facilities; the Doctors Surgery is located at the junction between Hemplands Lane and Hounsfield Way.

Joined onto the main bulk of the settlement is the quadrant of the village along Old Great North Road, Crow Park Avenue and Grassthorpe Road. This area contains the village children's play area, and the Snell Close Community Centre (soon to be the Post Office). To the north further along Grassthorpe Road slightly separated by 120m are the newer industrial premises containing Kybotech and other businesses. Then a further 300m to the north is the Sutton on Trent Sports Club and football pitches where the proposed Village Community Centre is to be built.

It is considered that the character, form and layout of Sutton on Trent as a village are unique within the District and as such it requires a modified approach to the choice of any site(s) for future development. The more outlying parts of the village include residential, industrial, recreation, tourism and agricultural uses. These are integral land uses to the future success of the settlement as a defined Principal Village. Any new site(s) chosen for a housing or mixed use allocation should reflect the traditional spread out village form and should not seek to remove the core open areas which underpin the form of the southern 'gateway' and the main bulk of the village.

Sutton on Trent has a low density of development due to its spread out nature, that density has been increased in some parts through infill development and through development in rear gardens. Any new site(s) for development should be at a low density to reflect the character and appearance of the village.

The character of the Conservation Area is not set out in a Conservation Appraisal but in appeal APP/B3030/A/09/2106075 the Inspector Mel Middleton stated *"it seems to me that its dominant features are the vernacular cottages and former farmsteads that are largely but not exclusively in linear form along the streets, together with their vegetated gardens and orchards, interspersed with paddocks."*

In the same appeal the LPA's statement set out an assessment of the character of the Conservation Area, the LPA stated in its evidence:

"The character of the Sutton on Trent Conservation Area can be defined as period dwellings and former farmsteads and vernacular cottages in frontage form, facing on to the High Street and other village streets, where the built form has grown up over the years. The village dwellings are interspersed with outbuildings and connected with boundary walls creating a very compact form and with few 'gaps' in the built fabric. To the rear of the village properties, where the appeal site is situated, the character is completely different being much more open and undeveloped, and where the green spaces – gardens, orchards and paddocks - merge with the open countryside beyond. The green spaces are fundamental in establishing the setting of the village and its character and they are typified by being open, free from development, and with a high level of tree cover and hedges, unlike the village streets where there are fewer trees. In the case of the appeal site, the green area to the rear of the frontage properties is particularly important as it is viewed from the north across the open playing fields and where the preservation of the open character is vital to the rural character of the village and the setting of the Conservation Area."

The western part of the site opens onto both Great North Road and Hemplands Lane providing clear views into the area from two important roads within the village. It is effectively the main open core around which a large part of the village has developed around the edges. The area is crossed by a whole network of public footpaths linking Hemplands Lane to Nursery Lane, High Street, Witch Lane/Palmer Road and Main Street. This concentration of public footpaths means that the area is utilised as a significant public facility. In the last few years the owner has erected a fence along the edge of the footpath running east from Hemplands Lane to prevent access to the wider area which was often used by children to play.

The site is overlooked by around 50/60 houses directly and provides an open outlook to houses along Great North Road, Hemplands Lane, Hounsfeld Way, Nursery Close, High Street, Main Street, Rose Farm Drive, Willow Holt, Witch Land, and Palmer Road. This area is overlooked by more properties than any other main open area within the village, and more properties overlook the western part of the site to the eastern part of the site.

The western part proposed to be removed from the designation is bisected by the well-used public footpath which runs alongside a dominant and well-established hedge which is home to scores of nesting birds. The road frontage to Hemplands Lane is also mostly made up of a long-established hedge with further tree planting behind.

Proposed Mixed Use Allocation ST/MU/1

The Local Residents of Sutton on Trent consider that this proposed allocation is not appropriate for the village and local community. Whilst it is widely agreed that the Doctors Surgery should have a larger car park in order to remove parked cars from both Hemplands Land and Hounsfield Way, it is not necessary to allocate more development purely to facilitate this improvement to an important local facility.

The potential positive community benefit of new retail facilities for the village is well understood, although the existing Co-operative foodstore was enlarged and it had a small car park created some half a dozen years ago.

However a new larger Lincolnshire Co-operative foodstore perhaps incorporating a post-office and the library would be very useful for the village. At present Sutton on Trent has no village centre with facilities being dispersed right across the village as we described earlier.

The Doctors location on Hounsfield Way is some 750m from the Primary School/Church and some 800m from the proposed Post Office on Snell Close and Butchers on Main Street. The proposal to create a new village centre will inevitably move the foodstore further away from the other facilities on Main Street and Church Street. The proposed mixed use allocation is some 250m further away from Main Street than the existing Co-operative site.

The issue of a village centre was a matter of a local referendum when the location of the proposed new Sutton on Trent Community Centre was first mooted in 2006 as then formulated through planning application 08/00305/FUL for the Erection of Community Building and Associated Works to be known as 'Sutton on Trent Village Centre'. This permission has just been extended through 11/00906/FUL for a building incorporating a main hall, a meeting room, the Youth Club, sports facilities and a Police room. This is to be built at the existing Sports Club on Grassthorpe Road.

The current proposed allocation does nothing to assist in delivering the Village Centre project at the Sports Ground which was supported by 91% of all respondents.

With the advent of the localism agenda, planning is now locally driven with the choices made by local residents taking precedence over the wishes of the District Council. In this Allocations DPD the Council is trying to impose development in an area where the local community has firmly said that development was not acceptable when a local referendum was undertaken. This appears not to be in line with the statements made by the Government for the new planning system.

It is considered that the creation of an access here will raise a considerable number of road safety issues with poor visibility and the need to remove the entire roadside hedge along with the planting to the rear and internal hedge and the loss of the public footpath. The site is only proposed to have a single point of access serving some 38 dwellings plus retail development, however the County Council standards for a residential accessway indicates that no more than 25 dwellings should be served off a single access point. This is a limiting factor which does not appear to have been considered. The development will not therefore be deliverable in its current form unless a higher class of road is created.

If a higher class of road, a residential access road, is to be constructed to allow the planned amount of development then this would have an even greater impact on the character and appearance of the streetscene of Hemplands Lane. Such a road would need a carriageway width of 6m in width to allow for service vehicles to access the retail facilities, together with footways along both sides of the carriageway. The site only has a road frontage of some 48m to Hemplands Lane, the existing footway is less than 1m in width, to create purely a residential development here would require a visibility splay of at least 25m according to the County Council standards which requires a total site frontage of $25+25+6+1.5+1.5 = 59\text{m}$ some 11m more than the site frontage actually has.

The overall distance between the Hounsfield Way junction and the Great North Road junction is only 90m in total. No standards are indicated for mixed use developments or retail schemes but it is likely to require a visibility splay greater than the 25m for a residential only scheme. As the guide indicates a B1 business use would require a 45m visibility splay, if the County Highway Authority wanted a visibility splay of this length then it would take the entire road frontage between Hounsfield Way and Great North Road.

The mixed use allocation therefore appears to be undeliverable and unrealistic. It also proposes some 37 dwellings plus retail facilities on a site of around 1.7Ha. At least a fifth of the site would be needed for a retail centre and car parking based on the similar proposals currently being advocated at Collingham, this would then leave a density of development of at least some 28 dwellings to the hectare which is considered to be too intensive and urban in nature for Sutton on Trent which is of low density character. Hounsfield Way is built at a density of 19 dwellings to the hectare; Rose Farm Drive is built at a density of 21 dwellings to the hectare, as is Hemplands Lane. The more traditional development on High Street and Main Street are at a typical density of around 12 dwellings to the hectare. The proposed mixed use development site allocation would be at a density completely at odds with the local area by some considerable margin.

We therefore consider that the whole of the site ST/MU/1 should be removed from the Plan and an alternative area for mixed use development should be considered as we have indicated previously.

Potential Alternative Locations for a Mixed Use Allocation to replace ST/MU/1

The document appears to have not considered any possibility of extending the village towards the existing Sports Ground where the new village centre Community Centre is proposed to be built, or any other alternative site outside of the existing village boundary.

The plan does not look at how any mixed use allocation, the employment along Grassthorpe Road and the Sports Ground including the new Community Centre could be included within the village itself. Indeed the provision of a new retail centre on for example the field to the south of the Sports Ground could incorporate not only a larger Co-op and other retail units for the Post Office and the library, but could in fact incorporate the Community Centre itself in a proper mixed use development along the lines of the Co-op scheme currently being promoted in Collingham. This could potentially help to deliver the Village Centre concept which has so far struggled to attract the funding to be delivered.

Alternatively it could be that the retail and residential parts of the proposal should be split across a number of sites. Whilst it is understood that there would be potential issues with the 500 metres distance that the existing Sports Ground is from the village edge at Bulham Lane this is already an important community facility that could do with being brought into the village, particularly with the further enhanced facilities to be provided there.

Alternatively other sites within the overall village built up area could be considered, an example of such a location would be the Lindens Farm site which is a previously developed industrial site now partially used for leisure activity in part. Another option would be to look at road frontage development along for example Great North Road to join the separate parts of the village to each other. Whilst this could be seen as ribbon development which is traditionally resisted it would replicate the unique character of Sutton on Trent, leaving the open areas to the rear which form much of the character to the village.

Alternative options should have been considered, including sites not assessed within the DPD options, for example along Grassthorne Road that could be allocated to allow a new community hub to be developed associated with the existing Sports Ground and the proposed Community Centre.

Main Open Area Designations

We object to the rationale for the removal of the Main Open Area Designation from site ST/MU/1. The document which reviewed those areas noted *“that the area of the designation is a large area of farmland and paddocks which is overgrown and which as a result is not considered as important in terms of its value as the western section of the designation which is recommended for retention. The assessment therefore considers the release of the site from the designation and its identification for a mixed use scheme incorporating housing to be appropriate.”*

This area of land is an area of natural scrubland which has been in this same state since it was first designated in the former Newark and Sherwood Local Plan. It has not changed in character over the years but has remained a natural wilderness which has provided an open green heart to the village and is a key feature in the overall Conservation Area.

The eastern end which has been proposed to be retained has been made into paddocks for horses where that intensive use has seen all of the biodiversity and landscape conservation features removed. Local residents can attest to the fact that the character has not changes since the original designation; planning permission to develop the area for around 50 dwellings was refused in the early 1990s.

The western part of the site however has retained its unmanaged semi-natural state which has made it an area which provides home to a whole raft of flora and fauna. The area is a foraging ground for numerous Bats which can often be seen at twilight on the site and in the neighbouring gardens. As you will be aware Bat roosts and foraging grounds are protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act from disturbance. The adjacent farm buildings which the open area encircles on two sides provide numerous opportunities for bat roosts with little opportunity for disturbance.

The semi-natural area provides home to a wide range of biodiversity including nesting birds, rabbits, hares, frogs, toads and even a deer which frequents the area as well as the woods around the village. Its loss would have a detrimental effect on the local ecosystem. It is noted that the Council has not undertaken any phase 1 habitat assessment to underpin or justify its decision to remove the open area designation and as such the evidence base is **flawed and unsound**.

The decision to remove the main open area designation appears to be driven by a desire to allocate the site as opposed to consideration of whether the area is still worthy of being a main open area. This approach appears to lack justification and renders the whole conclusions of the open area study as ineffective.

The review document describes a main open area as: “Predominately open land within settlements which play an important role in defining their form and structure”. This site as a whole, both the western and eastern half, fully meets these broad criteria. Sutton on Trent is dominated by a whole series of open areas around the village, some of which are visible from public roads and other that are behind properties. These large open areas make up the overall character of the village and the Conservation Area. The contribution that this area makes to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area appears not to have been considered as it is not referred to in any of the assessment.

Deliverability of Plan Proposals

We do not consider that the Council has properly examined the potential development sites in and around Sutton on Trent which renders the plan deficient in that it has not explored the reasonable alternatives. Neither has the DPD taken into account the option of under-providing in Sutton on Trent with consequential over-provision elsewhere, for example in Collingham. Such an approach has been taken in Lowdham where it has not been possible to find suitable sites to meet the level of provision set out in the Core Strategy.

The proposed allocation does not have the support of any party in its current form:

- Local Residents – Both individual residents and a Consortium do not wish to see the site allocated for development in the DPD;
- Sutton on Trent Parish Council – Consider that the allocation should be amended to include the Village Centre Community Building and the Village Library which would necessitate a substantially different configuration or larger site;
- Cllr Christine Rose – Also considers that the allocation should be amended to include the Village Centre Community Building which would necessitate a substantially different configuration or larger site;
- Persimmon Homes – Do not wish to see the delivery of housing constrained by the phasing of the retail facilities, they also consider that the site needs to be extended to include all of the main open area to the east in order to be commercially viable given the constraints on the current site. In addition Persimmon does not support the inclusion of the Local Centre element of the allocation as they do not consider such a scheme to be commercially deliverable.

It is interesting to note that the Local Centre allocation has not attracted any recorded interest or representations in support from the Co-op who have an existing store, or the Post Office who are just in the process of opening a new facility in a property owned by the Council through Newark & Sherwood Homes. In previous consultation whilst the Doctors Surgery supported the need for an extension to the car park they did express concern that the Local Centre could result in a Pharmacy being promoted which would detrimentally affect the viability of the Surgery.

The LPA has not properly considered the alternative sites including those suggested by our clients, the Local Residents Consortium and by others including Mrs S Moody who proposes land on Grassthorpe Road.

Tests of Soundness

The DPD fails to be sound as it is ineffective, not justified and contrary to the NPPF.

Anthony Northcote
24th November 2012