



St Helens Local Plan 2020-2035 Examination in Public

Hearing Statement on behalf of Story Homes

Matter 2: Housing and Employment Needs and Requirements

May 2021

Relevant Site:

Land south of A580 between Houghtons Lane and Crantock Grove, Windle (Site 8HS)

Representor ID: RO1954

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 This statement has been prepared by Hive Land & Planning on behalf of Story Homes and responds to the Matters, Issues and Questions released by the Inspectors on 30th March 2021. In this submission Story Homes are responding to **Matter 2, Issue1 (Question 1) and Issue 2 (Questions 5, 6 and 7)**.
- 1.2 The involvement of Story Homes in the St Helens Local Plan Examination relates to the continued promotion of the Land south of A580 between Houghtons Lane and Crantock Grove, Windle, Ref 8HS (hereafter referred to as Site 8HS). Story Homes has promoted Site 8HS for the residential development of around 1,100 dwellings throughout the Local Plan preparation process. This promotion has been undertaken following an agreement with the landowners.
- 1.3 Site 8HS is currently located within the Green Belt and has been identified as a Safeguarded Site within the Submission Draft St Helens Local Plan 2020 -2035, to be reserved for future residential development until after the plan period, unless a subsequent Local Plan Review proposes to allocate the land for development. In safeguarding Site 8HS, the Council has recognised that Site 8HS represents a suitable and sustainable location for housing and Story Homes welcome and support this recognition.
- 1.4 In the 2016 Preferred Options Draft of the Local Plan however, Site 8HS was identified as a Housing Allocation to come forward within the current Plan Period. This further confirms the Council's acceptance that Site 8HS, as a matter of principle, is a suitable location in which to locate this scale of new housing.
- 1.5 The Council has therefore acknowledged the acceptability of Site 8HS for residential development at every stage of the plan-making process.
- 1.6 This Hearing Statement should be read in conjunction with all the statements being submitted by Story Homes in response to **Matters 1, 3, 4, 7, 10 and 11**.
- 1.7 We trust that this Statement assists the Inspectors in respect of the Examination.

2 Matter 2 – Housing and Employment Needs and Requirements

Issue 1: The Local Plan timeframe

1. Are there any comments on the alternative end dates of 2035 (submission) and 2037 (possible MM)?

- 2.1 Story Homes are supportive of the MM that is proposed to amend the plan period to account for the delay that has occurred, and this responds positively to the comments submitted by Story Homes in response to the Submission Draft consultation.
- 2.2 As set out in the remainder of this Hearing Statement however, the suggested uplift to the overall housing requirement by 972 is not agreed given the concerns that Story Homes has in respect of the adjustment that is needed to the LHN figure.

Issue 2: Housing Need and Requirement

Question 5: Do the circumstances, particularly relating to economic growth, support the requirement for housing of 486 dpa as an uplift on the LHN figure?

- 2.3 The Council currently propose a 12% uplift from the minimum Standard Method figure for St Helens of 434 dpa and the principle to pursue an uplift in order to support economic growth aspirations is welcomed. Story Homes do not however endorse the level of increase that is proposed and are of the view that a higher LHN is entirely appropriate in the current circumstances.
- 2.4 The rightly ambitious economic strategies being pursued endorsed by St Helens and across Merseyside are rightly ambitious and a failure to align job growth aspirations. For example, the Liverpool City Region Growth Strategy acts as the City Region's Economic Plan and sets out the economic ambitions until 2040, which can be summarise as:
- The creation of over 100,000 additional jobs by 2040
 - A net increase of 20,000 businesses over the next 25 years
 - An additional 50,000 people coming to live in the City Region by 2040
 - Nearly doubling the size of the Economy to £50billion by 2040
- 2.5 The LP needs to respond positively to these ambitions by adopting an appropriate uplift to the minimum Standard Method figure as otherwise these economic growth ambitions will simply not be realised.

Question 6: Should the housing requirement be further increased to take into account economic growth aspirations, choice and competition in the housing market and affordable housing need?

- 2.6 The LP has not successfully aligned the housing and employment land requirements for St Helens over the plan period. The Council have been rightly ambitious in respect of future employment growth aspirations and have allocated the land accordingly, so the same ambition needs to be applied when considering the quantum of housing growth needed to complement the employment allocations that have been identified. These are not mutually exclusive considerations. Alignment of these two critical requirements is necessary if a balanced approach is to be taken in respect of meeting St Helens future development needs and economic growth aspirations.
- 2.7 The housing requirement set out at Policy CH1 of the Core Strategy equates to 570 dwellings per annum. Recent completion rates suggest that this level of LHN is not appropriate for St Helens, as the housing market and developer interest clearly exists to achieve this level of housing delivery.
- 2.8 Story Homes are aware of housing needs assessments using the Chelmer model that have been undertaken by other developers participating in the Local Plan Examination. They have calculated an LHN upwards of 800 dpa for St Helens if applied to the various economic strategies currently in operation, such as the City Region's Economic Plan. Story Homes view is that this represents an unrealistic LHN for the borough and so a more balanced approach should be taken.
- 2.9 The current Core Strategy LHN figure of 570 represents a 31% increase above the minimum Standard Method figure and has been shown to be an appropriate and attainable housing target for St Helens. The uplift of 31% also represents a positive response to the need for alignment with economic growth aspirations and is ambitious, but crucially not unrealistic.
- 2.10 This approach is endorsed within PPG (Paragraph 010, Housing and economic needs assessment) which allows for increases to the minimum Standard Method in certain circumstances, namely:
- Growth strategies for the area that are likely to be deliverable, for example where funding is in place to promote and facilitate additional growth (e.g. Housing Deals);
 - Strategic infrastructure improvements that are likely to drive an increase in the homes needed locally; or

- An authority agreeing to take on unmet need from neighbouring authorities, as set out in a statement of common ground.

- 2.11 The Council have acknowledged that the minimum Standard Method figure of 434 is too low to support their economic and employment growth strategy aspirations, but the 12% increase is considered by Story Homes to be low in this circumstance. Given recent completion rates that have been achieved (775 in 2018/19 and 758 in 2019/20) it is clear that an increase of around 30% is entirely appropriate, which would result in a LHN figure of around 570 dpa, which aligns with the current Core Strategy housing requirement.
- 2.12 Adopting this approach will help to settle, and increase, the working age population in St Helens helping to marry up the job opportunities that will arise through the economic growth strategy. It would allow for more housing choice and competition, which will act as a stimulus for increased housing market activity and deliver the associated economic and social benefits that arise.
- 2.13 Not only would the increase align with recent completion rates in the borough, it would also reflect the typical level of housebuilding that was achieved prior to the 2008/09 recession and the previous assessments of housing need that have been undertaken, most recently as included within the Core Strategy.

Question 7. Is the change in the housing requirement during the Plan preparation process justified?1

- 2.14 It is necessary for the Local Plan preparation process to respond as best it can to changes in circumstance that occur, given the length of time that Local Plans are under preparation and so from a procedural perspective, Story Homes consider it entirely appropriate to respond proactively to such changes in circumstance. This will help to ensure that when adopted, the Local Plan aligns with the most up to date and available evidence.

Hearing Statement on behalf of Story Homes

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