

EiP Statement

St Helens Delivery and Allocations Local Plan

Taylor Wimpey UK Limited

Representor ID RO1154

Our ref 41874/04/CM/MKR

Date May 2021

Subject **Matter 7 – Specific Housing Needs and Standards**

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Lichfields is instructed by Taylor Wimpey UK Limited [TW] to make representations on its behalf to the St Helens Borough Local Plan 2020-2035 [SHLP].
- 1.2 This Statement has been prepared in response to the Matters, Issues and Questions raised by the Inspector for the Matter 7 Examination in Public [EiP] hearing session.
- 1.3 Separate representations have been submitted in respect of the following Matters:
- 1 Matter 1 – Legal Compliance, Procedural Requirements and the Duty to Cooperate
 - 2 Matter 2 – Housing and Employment Needs and Requirements
 - 3 Matter 3 – Spatial Strategy and Strategic Policies
 - 4 Matter 4 – Allocation, Safeguarded Land and Green Belt Boundaries – Bold, Eccleston, Sutton Manor, Thatto Heath and St Helens Core Area
 - 5 Matter 5 – Housing Land Supply
 - 6 Matter 9 – Generic Policies
 - 7 Matter 10 – Infrastructure and Delivery
- 1.4 These Matter Papers representations should be read in conjunction with previous submissions on the SHLP [Representator ID RO1154] as well as those made on other Matters listed above.
- 1.5 TW is seeking to bring forward a high quality, well designed and sustainable strategic residential site at Gartons Lane, St Helens [Local Plan Site Reference: 5HA] and a site at Gorsey Lane, St Helens which forms part of the wider Bold Forest Garden Suburb [Local Plan Site Reference: 4HA]. Taylor Wimpey is supportive of the allocation of the sites in the SHLP and considers that the identification of both sites as residential allocations will assist in boosting the supply of housing in St Helens. It will also assist in delivering sustainable development by contributing towards meeting the needs of market and affordable housing, creating employment during the construction period and mitigating any impact on the environment.
- 1.6 This statement expands upon TW's previous representations made throughout the Local Plan preparation process in light of the Inspector's specific issues and questions. Where relevant, the comments made are assessed against the tests of soundness established by the National

Planning Policy Framework [NPPF] and the National Planning Policy Practice Guidance [Practice Guidance].

2.0 Planning Issues

Issue 1: Housing Mix

Policy LPC01 indicates that housing should address a range of house types and sizes as informed by the latest SHMA. Section 3 of the policy refers to 5% of homes on larger greenfield developments being bungalows. However, the SHMA Update (HOU001) indicates that it is difficult to quantify the need/demand for bungalows.

Q1: Is Section 1 of Policy LPC01 positively prepared, justified and effective in reflecting the needs of different groups in terms of size and type of housing?

2.1 TW is supportive of the need to provide a range of homes to meet the local needs of the area and consider Policy LPC1 to be effective as it allows for the range of types, tenures and sizes of homes to be informed by relevant evidence.

2.2 However, for the reasons set out in our response to Q3, TW objects to the 5% requirement for bungalows on larger greenfield sites in Policy LPC01.

Q2: Does the reference to the 'latest SHMA' in Policy LPC01 result in a positively prepared and effective policy?

2.3 The SHMA provides a useful indicator of local housing need and reference to the "latest SHMA" is helpful in ensuring that the most up to date information is considered and will deliver a scheme in accordance with the latest evidence. Part 1 of the policy is therefore considered to be positively prepared and effective.

Q3: Taking into account the findings of the SHMAs and the need to make effective use of land, is the 5% requirement for bungalows on larger greenfield sites in Section 3 of Policy LPC01 justified (see SHBC001 – PQ60)?

2.4 TW objects to Part 3 of the policy as it is unjustified and not based on national policy. The 2016 SHMA identified a demand for bungalows (but does not support this with evidence on the number required) and the 2019 SHMA states that it is difficult to quantify the need/demand for bungalows as Census data (which is used to look at occupancy profiles) does not separately identify this type of accommodation. Therefore, there is no sound evidence base to support this policy requirement.

2.5 The Council's response to PQ60 also fails to provide sufficient evidence to justify this 5% requirement. It states that analysis of local demographic data and RSL and Council housing waiting lists demonstrate the need for bungalows within the Borough but does not provide sufficient detail to justify this stance, and how this equates to a 5% requirement. It refers to one RSL only as an example and the example provided does not provide any clear justification to support bungalow provision. It simply confirms that the RSL currently has 789 applicants on their lists who need a ground floor property. It does not consider the ability of alternative forms of accommodation to bungalows, such as ground floor apartments, which would help to address this need and would be a more efficient use of land. In this respect the 2019 SHMA notes that retirement apartments can prove very popular if they are well located in terms of access to facilities and services, and environmentally attractive.

- 2.6 Furthermore, the provision of 5% of bungalows across all greenfield sites does not allow for flexibility to address site constraints and characteristics or the implication of applying the densities associated with Policy LPA05. The provision of bungalows affects the achievable density on sites and as such, it will be difficult to achieve the Council’s density standards with the requirement for bungalows. This point was acknowledged in the SHMA Update 2019 (§7.40) which stated that *“the downside of providing bungalows is that they are relatively land intensive for the amount of floorspace created”*.
- 2.7 For the above reasons, it is considered that Part 3 of Policy LPC01 should be deleted.
- Q4: Does Policy LPC01 make sufficient provision for the housing needs of older people?*
- 2.8 Part 5 of the Policy states that the *“Council will work with partners to facilitate the provision of specialist and supported housing for elderly and vulnerable people”*. However, no explicit target for special needs/elderly housing is provided, so it is not clear what needs to be delivered. As noted in our response to Q7, it is also unclear how the contribution of specialist accommodation (such as retirement homes, sheltered homes or care homes) could reduce the need for adaptable housing.
- 2.9 TW therefore considers that further clarification on the targets for provision of this accommodation should be provided
- Q5: Does Policy LPC01 make sufficient provision for the housing needs of those who wish to build their own homes?*
- 2.10 Part 6 of the policy states that the Council will support the delivery of suitably designed and located self-build and custom-build schemes in the Borough where they would conform with all relevant local and national policies. However, it is not made clear whether such provision would be expected on sites being developed by volume housebuilders.
- 2.11 Taylor Wimpey do not consider that self-build and custom-build should be required on large scale strategic sites which are generally brought forward in accordance with a comprehensive masterplan. Market Housing development and self or custom build rarely work together. Providing self or custom build on market housing sites is likely to severely impact upon scheme layout. It will also create issues with the apportionment of planning obligations between the housing market area and self -build plots.
- 2.12 In addition, limited evidence has been presented by the Council to justify that there is a sufficient demand for such a requirement. In this regard, the SHLP¹ notes that there has been very limited demand to be included on the Self-Build Register.
- 2.13 It is noted that another North West authority, West Lancashire Council², indicated that it did not intend to implement a requirement for self and custom build housing after consultation feedback indicated that it would not be advisable, prior to ceasing work on its emerging plan.
- Q6: Should Policy LPC01 make reference to a need for detached houses based on the low number of such homes within the housing stock (paragraph 2.5.1 of the Plan refers)?*
- 2.14 TW does not consider that it is necessary for the Policy to make specific reference to detached houses. Whilst the SHLP indicates that the percentage of detached houses is lower than the regional and national averages, there is nothing in the SHMA to specifically indicate a need for

¹ St Helens Borough Local Plan 2020-2035 Submission Draft (January 2019) §6.3.13

² West Lancashire Local Plan Review Preferred Options (August 2018) §5.19

this house type. It is likely that detached properties will come forward as part of an overall mix of house types on development sites.

Issue 2: Housing Standards/Sustainable Design

Section 2 of Policy LPC01 seeks to apply the optional standards set out in Parts M4(2) and M4(3) of the Building Regulations. Section 4 of Policy LPC13 requires that strategic housing developments meet 10% of their energy needs from renewable/low carbon sources.

Q7: Is the application of the optional standards for accessible and adaptable standards and wheelchair users for larger greenfield developments through Section 2 of Policy LPC01 justified having regard to paragraph 127 of the Framework, the PPG and the evidence base?

- 2.15 TW generally supports the provision of homes that are suitable to meet the needs of older people and disabled people. However, we object to the standards proposed in Part 2 of the Policy which states that where a development is for 25 or more new homes on a greenfield site the Council will apply optional standards for accessible and adaptable homes with at least 20% required to be to M4(2) standard and 5% to be to M4(3) standards. Insufficient evidence has been provided to justify these thresholds.
- 2.16 The Practice Guidance³ sets out the type of evidence which can be used in order to justify these requirements, including: the likely future need for housing for older and disabled people (including wheelchair user dwellings); size, location, type and quality of dwellings needed to meet specifically evidenced needs (for example retirement homes, sheltered homes or care homes); the accessibility and adaptability of existing housing stock; how needs vary across different housing tenures; and, the overall impact on viability.
- 2.17 The 2019 SHMA indicates that St Helens has a higher level of disability when compared with the national position, and that an ageing population means that the number of people with disabilities is expected to increase substantially in the future. However, it is not clear how the contribution of other forms of specialist accommodation (such as retirement homes, sheltered homes or care homes) over the coming years could reduce the need for adaptable housing.
- 2.18 In addition, TW is concerned that the suitability of existing housing stock has not been properly assessed against the future requirements identified. There does not appear to be any assessment of whether the current dwelling stock would be suitable for adaptation to meet this need.
- 2.19 The evidence provided on the need for wheelchair user dwellings also fails to provide sufficient justification for the 5% provision sought. The 2019 SHMA⁴ notes that information about the need for housing for wheelchair users is difficult to obtain and also questions the validity of regional evidence available. It therefore relies on national evidence which may not provide an accurate reflection of local need.
- 2.20 TW considers that the most effective way to provide sufficient housing to meet M4(3) category requirements in the correct locations would be to increase the proportion of this type of accommodation in specialist housing for older people. We recognise that not all wheelchair housing will be provided through such specialist housing and consider that any requirements for M4(3) dwellings on market housing sites could be based on assessments of local need at the time of a planning application.

³ Planning Practice Guidance ID: 56-007-20150327

⁴ SHMA Update 2019 §6.27

- 2.21 We are also concerned that the viability implications of pursuing these optional building standards have not been properly assessed and this could undermine the deliverability of some sites. An allowance of £1,100 per house is proposed to meet the requirements of Building Regulations Optional Standards M4(2) relating to accessible and adaptable dwellings and £5,500 per house to achieve M4(3A). A build up has been provided for each of these additional cost items. Whilst these costs are generally appropriate it is not clear what assumptions have been made on the impact on the net sales values of the adapted properties as the appraisal summaries have not been included within the Economic Viability Assessment [EVA].
- 2.22 For the above reasons, we consider that the percentage provisions for M4(2) housing and M4(3) housing are not justified and do not accord with national planning guidance, and cannot therefore be sought through policy LPC01.
- Q8: Is there any justification for the use of the Nationally Described Space Standard (see SHBC001 – PQ61)?*
- 2.23 The Practice Guidance⁵ sets out the evidence local authorities should provide if they wish to apply the Nationally Described Space Standard [NDSS]. The Council’s response to PQ61 confirms that it did consider utilisation of internal space standards through the NDSS in the plan-making process, however, there was a lack of sufficient local evidence available to the Council that would justify their inclusion.
- 2.24 TW considers that the Council’s approach is correct as there is no justification for the use of the NDSS.
- Q9: Should Policy LPC01 refer to a transitional period for the introduction of the optional standards?*
- 2.25 For the reasons set out in our response to Q7, we do not consider that the optional standards identified in the policy are justified.
- 2.26 However, if it is determined that the standards are to be retained, a transitional period should be introduced. This would accord with the Practice Guidance⁶ which states that there may need to be a reasonable transitional period following adoption of a new policy on space standards to enable developers to factor the cost of space standards into future land acquisitions.
- Q10: Is the requirement within Policy LPC13 for strategic housing sites to provide at least 10% of their energy needs from renewable/low carbon sources justified and consistent with national policy?*
- 2.27 TW is committed to sustainable development and recognises the need to minimise carbon emissions or include renewable or low carbon energy sources, where practical. However, TW objects to the wording of Part 4 of the Policy.
- 2.28 Part 4 states that within strategic employment and housing sites, unless shown to be unpractical or unviable new development must “ensure that at least 10% of their energy needs can be met from renewable and/or other low carbon energy sources”.
- 2.29 Whilst TW welcomes the reference to practicability and viability in the Policy, it is not considered that inclusion of this 10% requirement is justified or in accordance with national policy. No clear evidence has been provided to confirm why a 10% requirement has been

⁵ Planning Practice Guidance Reference ID: 56-020-20150327

⁶ Planning Practice Guidance Reference ID: 56-020-20150327

identified and TW notes that the Building Regulations set out requirements concerning the conservation of fuel and power in buildings.

2.30 In this regard, TW notes the forthcoming changes to housing construction standards to achieve the wider objectives of combating climate change. The position on the changes as currently proposed are set out in the January 2021 report published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government ‘*The Future Homes Standards: 2019 Consultation on changes to Part L (conservation of fuel and power) and Part F (ventilation) of the Building Regulations for new dwellings. Summary of responses received and government Response*’. There is now a set timetable by which all new homes will need to be constructed to the Future Homes Standards and be zero carbon ready by June 2025. In the interim, a requirement for all new homes to achieve a 31% reduction in CO2 emissions is to be introduced.

2.31 In this regard, we note that the EVA makes no allowance for the costs associated with achieving either the interim or zero carbon ready Future Homes Standards. It is therefore currently under assessing the total development cost to achieve all national and local policy standards. Further details on this matter and the cost implications are provided in the Grasscroft Report which accompanies our response to Matter 10.

2.32 For the above reasons, it is not considered that the 10% policy requirement for energy from renewable/low carbon sources is necessary and this part of the policy should be deleted. The SHLP should take into account the interim and zero carbon ready Future Homes Standards and the cost associated with meeting these standards should be considered in the EVA.

Q11: Is Section 4 of Policy LPC13 consistent with the Government’s current policy on energy performance set out in the Written Ministerial Statement of March 2015?

2.33 As noted in our response to Q10, the Building Regulations set out requirements concerning the conservation of fuel and power in buildings and the forthcoming changes to housing construction standards are intended to achieve the wider objectives of combating climate change, and should be considered in the SHLP and EVA.

Issue 3: Affordable Housing

Policy LPC02 includes a zonal approach to the provision of affordable housing based on the findings of the EVA. Sites in Zone 1 (Town Centre and Parr Wards) would not be expected to provide any affordable homes despite the provisions of paragraph 64 of the Framework (see SHBC001 – PQ62).

Q12: Is the zonal approach to the provision of affordable housing within Policy LPC02 positively prepared and justified by proportionate evidence, including the EVA?

2.34 Taylor Wimpey does not have any specific comments to make on the zonal approach taken in Policy LPC02. However, we have a number of concerns in relation to the affordable housing requirement as detailed in our responses below.

13. In particular:

a. Is the provision of 30% of affordable homes on greenfield sites in Zones 2 and 3 justified?

2.35 Policy LPC02 requires all proposals for new open market housing developments of 11 units or more to provide at least 30% of new dwellings on greenfield sites in Affordable Housing Zones 2 and 3 to fall within the definition of ‘affordable housing’; this falls to 10% on brownfield sites in Affordable Housing Zone 1.

- 2.36 The SHMA Update concludes that there is an overall need for affordable housing equal to 117 units per annum over the 17 years to 2033. It concludes that the typical cost of buying a house in St Helens is sufficiently affordable so there is no need for a discounted new-build product. TW has concerns over the assessment for calculating affordable housing that has been carried out as part of the SHMA update, this was detailed further in the Technical Note on Housing Need SHMA submitted with our representations to the SHLP Submission Draft. In summary these main concerns relate to:
- 1 The increase in household income estimates – it is not clear where this increase has come from and it does not align with ONS’ Annual Survey of Hours and Earning; and,
 - 2 It is unclear whether the report is based on the 2016-SNHP or the 2014-SNHP to inform its estimate of gross household formation, which plays a key role in affordable housing need calculations.
- 2.37 As noted above, the SHMA suggests that St Helens has an affordable housing need of 117 dpa. In simple terms, this would equate to 24% of the overall housing target of 486 dpa, which sits below the 30% target in Part 2i; and does not provide clear evidence base for the Policy requirement.
- 2.38 Taylor Wimpey also has concerns in relation to the viability assessment of affordable housing in the EVA which should be addressed for the Local Plan to be deemed sound. These concerns are detailed in the Grasscroft Report which accompanies our response to Matter 10. Based on the information currently available it is not clear whether the 30% affordable requirement on greenfield sites is justified.
- 2.39 We would advise that prior to the examination hearings updated viability appraisals are completed for the main site typologies. These updated appraisals should test viability based on up to date market values and costs and be inclusive of the costs of all policy and S106 obligations. They should also include for the forthcoming costs associated with meeting the Future Homes Standards.
- 2.40 As identified in both national planning guidance and the latest RICS guidance, an appropriate up to date assessment of viability is required at the plan making stage and development should be viable from adoption of policy. If this is not the case then the current approach to viability will continue with the ongoing need to complete site specific viability assessments in a significant proportion of individual planning applications and lead to the continuing uncertainty and delay to the delivery of new housing developments.
- 2.41 To fully inform the local plan process the updated appraisals should test a range of affordable housing provision from the proposed policy requirement of 30% in increments of 10% to zero percent and any viability surplus or deficit stated once the cost of all S106 and other policy costs have been taken into account.
- 2.42 At present, the analysis of affordable housing provision in the EVA is confused. For example the table 6.19 on page 101 of the EVA summarises the results of the viability testing completed by Keppie Massie on 9 proposed housing allocations. It would appear that the level of surplus or deficit stated in the table when appraising the sites inclusive of 30% affordable housing does not take into account the costs associated with other S106 obligations or proposed policies. This approach seems to imply that these items are somehow “optional” and not actually required to make an application acceptable.

- 2.43 Using site reference 9HA as an example our interpretation of the KM viability results for this site is that with ZERO affordable housing provided on site the viability appraisal produces a surplus of £28/m². This small surplus however is before the cost of S106 obligations and other policies are included. The cost of these items is assessed by KM at £36/m² and therefore when these costs are taken into consideration there is actually a small viability deficit.
- 2.44 This matter needs to be debated in further detail at the EiP hearing sessions as it is essential that the viability position is clarified.
- 2.45 In addition, it is considered that the Affordable Rent and Low Cost Home Ownership bid prices adopted for testing should be set as follows:
- Affordable Rent 40% of market value
 - Intermediate 65% of market value
- 2.46 Further detail on Taylor Wimpey's viability concerns in relation to affordable housing are detailed in the Grasscroft Report which accompanies our response to Matter 10.
- b. Are the differences between Zones 2 and 3 in relation to brownfield sites justified and clear to the decision maker?*
- 2.47 TW has no comment on this matter.
- 14. Is Policy LPCo2 sufficiently flexible to take into account that circumstances will vary site-by-site (Section 4 refers)?*
- 2.48 The opportunity to relax the provision of affordable housing through site specific viability appraisal is welcomed. However, TW wishes to stress that first and foremost, the affordable housing requirement should be based on robust evidence which limits the need for site-specific viability testing at the application stage. In this regard, we note the Practice Guidance⁷ which states that policy requirements, particularly for affordable housing, should be set at a level that takes account of affordable housing and infrastructure needs and allows for the planned types of sites and development to be deliverable, without the need for further viability assessment at the decision making stage. Similarly, the recent RICS guidance on assessing viability in planning⁸ states that further financial viability assessments [FVAs] should not be necessary where planning applications comply with the up-to-date policies set out in the plan.
- 2.49 It is therefore essential that the viability assessment undertaken by the Council's advisors is robust and reflects the fact that schemes should be viable from the adoption of the plan. It is important to get this right at this stage in the plan making process and we request that it is debated in full at the examination.
- 15. Is there any justification for a rural exceptions site policy for affordable housing (see SHBC001 – PQ63)?*
- 2.50 TW has no comment on this matter.

⁷ Planning Practice Guidance Reference ID: 10-002-20190509

⁸ Assessing viability in planning under the National Planning Policy Framework 2019 for England (March 2021)

ISSUE 4: Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople

Q16: Is the evidence base supporting the need for 8 residential pitches and 3 transit pitches robust, taking into account factors such as existing provision, household growth, hidden need (those in bricks and mortar housing), unauthorised sites and encampments and any engagement with the traveller community?

2.51 TW has no comment on this matter.

17: Should Policy LPC03 be modified so that it sets pitch targets for gypsies and travellers (paragraph 9 of Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (PPTS) refers)?

2.52 TW has no comment on this matter.

18: Is the need identified for the next 5 years or for later in the Plan period?

2.53 TW has no comment on this matter.

19: Depending on the response to Q18, is the allocated residential site deliverable or developable?

2.54 TW has no comment on this matter.

20: Are the criteria within Section 4 of Policy LPC03 fair and consistent with national policy in PPTS?

2.55 TW has no comment on this matter.