

NORTH DORSET LOCAL PLAN 2011 TO 2026 PART 1 EXAMINATION

HEARING STATEMENT OF GRASS ROOTS PLANNING LTD ON BEHALF OF HOPKINS DEVELOPMENTS LIMITED

17th February 2015

- 1.1 This statement is made in relation to the Inspector's questions and issues paper connected to the above examination. It is made on behalf of Hopkins Developments Limited and relates to their land interests at Kingsmead Business Park in Gillingham. Accordingly this statement relates exclusively to the issues connected to the proposed Southern Extension to the Town.

Q8.7: Is there any evidence that the proposed Gillingham Strategic Site (or any part of it) is not available, sustainable or deliverable? If such evidence exists what alternatives are available to the Council? Is the proposed boundary of the SSA justified?

- 1.2 Our previous representations to the Plan outlined broad support for the neighbourhood centre which is generally located (albeit the plan is illustrative) straddling the Shaftesbury Road which includes land owned by Hopkins. However we had significant concerns with regards to the delivery and phasing of the centre because at that stage no active discussion with the development consortium, who are progressing proposals for the southern extension, had been held and no direct contact with my client initiated.
- 1.3 Currently my clients land at the Kingsmead Business Park benefits from commercial use, either by virtue of planning permission or previous local plan allocation. It has been on this basis that it has been marketed for over 12 months.
- 1.4 Within this context a number of offers for land within the business park have been received. In particular an offer from Aldi is at an advanced stage. Their proposals for the site will include a food store which is not seen as incompatible with the neighbourhood centre envisaged.
- 1.5 Our main issue relates to the delivery of the other uses that the Council identify as being needed as part of the local centre. As outlined in emerging policy 21 the following uses are sought:

- Primary School;
- Small Convenience Shops;
- Pre-school Nursery;
- A Community Hall;
- Health Facilities to Include doctors surgery, a dentist and pharmacy; and
- Other undefined 'essential local facilities'.

- 1.6 Many of these uses are not commercially attractive and if they are required to support wider housing growth in this area then the developers of that land should be contributing towards their delivery. Such contributions should be to a level which reflects land values applicable to either the current land use allocation or that of other employment generating uses which the Council can support.
- 1.7 Accordingly we met with the council to discuss how the neighbourhood centre could be delivered and ascertain what progress had been made by the developer consortium in formulating plans to deliver the facilities identified as part of emerging policy 21. At this meeting we outlined that the proposal by Aldi was likely to be pursued for the site and how this could underpin the viability of the neighbourhood centre.
- 1.8 It was also identified that Hopkins would not rule out the delivery of the neighbourhood centre on their land if an appropriate value could be attributed to it via a purchase or land equalisation agreement. The council advised us to liaise directly with the developer consortium in relation to the potential for land equalisation in respect to facilities that clearly do not have any significant commercial value.
- 1.9 In August 2014 a meeting was held with the key representatives of the consortium to obtain further information in relation to how the neighbourhood centre would be phased, funded and delivered.
- 1.10 At this meeting it was made apparent that no firm proposals to deliver the neighbourhood centre had been considered and that the developer consortium were considering alternative locations for certain elements of the neighbourhood centre, such as the primary school. Furthermore it was identified that an outline planning application was being prepared which specifically excluded the neighbourhood centre, which it was thought would be delivered by others.
- 1.11 Given this position we wrote to the consortium in an email dated the 24th October 2014 (see appendix A) outlining Hopkins intent to pursue current offers for the site and to withdraw support for the neighbourhood centre being accommodated on their land. This email was also circulated to the council to make them aware of this stance. This position remains unchanged until more

lucid proposals for the delivery of the neighbourhood centre, which incorporates the appropriate land equalisation or other mechanism, comes forward.

- 1.12 In light of this position we would question whether the southern extension is deliverable in its current form because the land needed to accommodate the neighbourhood centre is not available. If more appropriate proposals are put forward Hopkins would be willing to reconsider this position.

Q8.8: Are all the infrastructure requirements related to the southern extension (as set out in policy 21) justified, viable and deliverable? For example the off-site highway improvements; other off-site measures and the improvements relating to social infrastructure, including the proposed local centre. Is it sufficiently clear how a decision maker should re-act to a proposal – the 'what, where, when and how'?

- 1.13 We have not seen a robust evidence base that clearly identifies how the 'wish list' for the neighbourhood centre has been formulated. For example we have not seen evidence to suggest that the nearby Barns medical centre is at capacity, in fact their website indicates that they are accepting new patients. Therefore more work is required to understand existing capacity and then set appropriate triggers for the provision of facilities which the evidence suggest are directly required by the southern extension.

- 1.14 Our previous representations also questioned the proposals to restrict the scale of convenience shopping to be located in any neighbourhood centre. Our concerns remain in this regard and we would reiterate that an anchor food store would offer the optimal option for delivering a viable centre that could incorporate additional elements such as the dispensing pharmacy, if required.

Q8.9: Are the proposals identified on the Concept Plan (Fig 9.3) justified and sufficient to ensure the provision of a sustainable development?

- 1.15 For the reasons given above we would question whether the neighbourhood centre is currently fully justified.

Q8.10: Are the contents of the Concept Statement (Fig 9.2) and the Design Principles (Fig 9.4) justified?

- 1.16 No. The concept statement clearly identifies that *'Essential infrastructure and services will be fully integrated in the design of the place from the outset and delivered in phase with the building work'*, as we have outlined there is no mechanism for doing this.

Q8.11: What are the risks to the delivery of the southern extension at Gillingham and does the Council's approach ensure that they are, as far as possible, minimised? What is the trajectory for the provision of the housing and what is the Council's fall-back position should the southern extension not deliver housing at the rate currently anticipated?

- 1.17 The risks include the significant issues that would arise if community and shopping facilities are not delivered to support large scale housing in this area. The consequence of this would be that the southern part of Gillingham located south of the railway line would become further unsustainable (existing residential areas are poorly served by shops) as most residents would be overly reliant on the private car to access services and shops located a significant distance away in Gillingham Town Centre.
- 1.18 That concludes our statement however we hope to further inform the debate on these issues at the forthcoming hearing sessions.

APPENDIX A

From: Matthew Kendrick

Sent: 02 September 2014 08:59

To: simon.coles

Cc: 'David Lohfink'; 'Lynn.Mciver@taylorwimpey.com'; Andrew Hodgson; 'nigel.jones@chesterscommercial.com'; 'THoskinson@savills.com'; 'Will Edmonds'; 'ep@edwardpreece.co.uk'; bill@hopkins.uk.net

Subject: RE: Gillingham: Southern Urban Extension

Dear Simon,

Thank you for your email below.

Hopkins have further considered the emerging allocation of its land as a neighbourhood centre and have concluded that this is no longer something it wishes to support. Whilst the recent meeting provided some further detail on the overall plans and the consortium's intentions to submit an outline planning application on land it already controls (which was confirmed would exclude the neighbourhood centre land) there is no benefit for Hopkins for such an allocation nor any compelling proposal from the consortium to encourage Hopkins to consider otherwise.

Accordingly Hopkins intends to progress the current offers for the land from Wickes and Aldi and continue to promote the balance of the land for other commercial uses rather than the low value community uses that have been identified (which are likely to be the only outstanding requirements under a neighbourhood centre allocation once the retail element has been achieved which would be the case with an Aldi on the site). Hopkins will also be instructing us to make representations to NDDC against this allocation as part of the forthcoming examination.

It was clear from the meeting that the consortium feels it has sufficient land already under its control to provide for the balance of the neighbourhood centre uses so we don't expect that this decision will have any material impact on your scheme. In fact, being able to control where such uses can be allocated and demonstrate the delivery of this within the impending outline scheme is likely to be an advantage to the consortium as will Aldi's intentions to provide for the retail element of any southern extension.

We will inform the council of this decision so they are aware of Hopkins position in advance of the Local Plan Examination.

Regards

Matthew Kendrick
Director

The logo for Grassroots Planning Ltd, featuring the word 'Grassroots' in a green, lowercase, sans-serif font. The 'o' in 'Grassroots' is stylized with a small green sprout growing from its top. The word 'planning' is in a smaller, brown, lowercase, sans-serif font.

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