

Submission to the
Consultation on the
City of York Council's
Draft Local Plan

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Part I – Greenbelt Policies

Fundamental to the Council’s approach to the draft Local Plan has been the repeated argument that if York does not have an adopted Local Plan with a defined greenbelt in place by 2015, the greenbelt could be subjected to unrestrained development and that the Council are defining the greenbelt for the very first time. It will be argued in Part I of this submission that this is not the case. York does have an established greenbelt, which the Council are not seeking to define, but ‘re-define’. The government have also been clear that the York greenbelt policies of the now-revoked Regional Spatial Strategy will be retained until the greenbelt is defined within a Local Plan. While York’s greenbelt very clearly needs to be adopted in the form of a Local Plan, the need for urgency on this should not be used as an excuse or a mandate to radically alter what has for so many years been York’s greenbelt. The following points will reiterate this in greater detail:

- 1.1.1 Para 79 of the NPPF explicitly states “The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.” Great weight is attached to the importance of greenbelts in protecting both our cities and our rural communities from urban and suburban sprawl. However, the Council appear to be disregarding this fundamental aspect of the NPPF by proposing so much development on York’s long-established greenbelt.
- 1.1.2 York’s greenbelt is vital in protecting and promoting the character and setting of the City. Not only is the beautiful open countryside surrounding York a key part of its identity for all those who live here, it is also as important as the historic architecture within the City in promoting the area as a prime tourist destination. The greenbelt is also as important in protecting the identity of the City as it is in protecting the surrounding rural communities from suburban sprawl. York’s greenbelt is very important for the local agricultural economy, with 30% of the land Grade 1 or Grade 2, i.e. some of the best and most versatile land. It is also home to a lot of wildlife, including protected species such as crested newts and water voles. York’s greenbelt is also important in encouraging regeneration within the City.
- 1.1.3 Para 87 of the NPPF states that “inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.” It is therefore the contention here that much of what has been proposed within the draft Local Plan is inappropriate and should be withdrawn from the Plan.
- 1.1.4 Para 84 states that local planning authorities should “consider the consequences for sustainable development of channelling development towards urban areas inside the Green Belt boundary, towards towns and villages inset within the Green Belt or towards locations beyond the outer Green Belt boundary.” The Council are very clearly not adhering to this guidance and in many cases they have actively pursued an opposite strategy, by prioritising brownfield sites in the City for employment based development and pushed additional housing out onto York’s established Greenbelt. The prioritisation of brownfield sites for employment based development should be reviewed as part of the consultation process.
- 1.1.5 The NPPF states in para 82 that “The general extent of Green Belts across the country is already established.” Para 83 goes on to say that “local planning authorities with

Green Belts in their area should establish Green Belt boundaries in their Local Plans". This infers that York's greenbelt is already established, if not formally defined within a Local Plan yet. In York, the Council are not merely formally defining the greenbelt which is already established (under the retained Regional Spatial Strategy policies), they are radically altering the boundaries. Ultimately, the Council are not defining York's greenbelt, but redefining it. The NPPF is clear that the essential characteristic of greenbelts is their permanence and the inference here is that York's already established greenbelt should remain largely as it is for many years to come. The removal of 2400 acres of greenbelt land for the development of houses and safeguarded land is therefore contrary to the clear policy guidance within the NPPF.

1.1.6 Despite the Council's insistence that York does not have a greenbelt and the adoption of the Local Plan will formally define the greenbelt for the first time, York does currently have a greenbelt which informs planning decisions and the established greenbelt will continue to do so until the Local Plan is adopted.

1.1.7 This established greenbelt exists within legislation, as the government stepped in to retain the York greenbelt policies when the Regional Spatial Strategy was revoked (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2013/117/made>) (<http://democracy.york.gov.uk/documents/s49664/Annex%20A%20-%20Core%20Strategy.pdf>).

1.1.8 The Assistant Director of Development Services, Planning and Regeneration at the Council, Michael Slater agreed with this point in a recent email to Councillor Jenny Brooks, stating that "the York Green Belt has been established for many years". He went on to agree that this established greenbelt still informs planning decision making, with paragraphs 87-92 of the NPPF informing planning decisions. No strong arguments have been made to justify the radical changes to York's established greenbelt that the Council are pursuing.

1.1.9 In a letter from Nick Boles MP, dated 29 January 2013, he said:

I am pleased to inform you that today we have laid in Parliament an Order to revoke the Regional Strategy for Yorkshire and Humber. This is in line with our policy to revoke existing regional strategies outside London, subject to the outcomes of an environmental assessment process in each region.

You will wish to know that, as part of the revocation, we are retaining the York Green Belt policies to allow for the necessary protections of the Green Belt around York to be put in place in an adopted local plan. This reflects the Government's commitment to protecting the Green Belt.

At the heart of these responsibilities is the requirement to have in place up-to-date local plans, which are the cornerstone for delivery. That is why I have already written to Councillor James Alexander, leader of City of York Council, to impress on him that the retention of the Green Belt policies is not an opportunity for further delay in updating the York City Local Plan and it is now essential that York City gets on with putting its plan in place.

I fully expect the City Council to complete the process of preparing a local plan at the earliest possible date.

- 1.1.10 The Minister clearly expresses his desire that York's greenbelt be adopted in a Local Plan and for this to happen as soon as possible. However, nowhere in the above letter does the Minister state that York's greenbelt policies will be revoked and the established greenbelt will be subjected to unrestrained development, if the Council do not have a Local Plan in place by 2015. The Council administration have persistently misinformed York residents that this would be the case, presumably as an attempt to ensure the Plan faces the minimum resistance from affected residents. This point should be considered very carefully, as urgency should not be at the expense of good plan making.

Part II – Gypsy, Traveller and Showpeople Policies

The Department for Communities and Local Government's (DCLG) *Planning Policy for Travellers' Sites* (PPFTS) (March 2012) is the main piece of governmental guidance for local authorities wishing to make permanent provision for Gypsies, Travellers and Showpeople within their areas of jurisdiction. It replaced the previous policies *ODPM Circular 01/2006: Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Caravan Sites* and *Circular 04/2007: Planning for Travelling Showpeople*. PPFTS states that it 'must be taken into account in the preparation of development plans'. DCLG are also clear that this document should be read in conjunction with their *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF) (March 2012): 'Local planning authorities preparing plans for and taking decisions on traveller sites should also have regard to the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework so far as relevant.' However, several of the Gypsy, Traveller and Showpeople policies put forward in the City of York Council's draft Local Plan seem to disregard planning policy within both PPFTS and the NPPF. The ways in which the Council's policies contrast with national planning policy will be discussed in the below sections.

Calculation of 'Need'

- 2.1.1 PPFTS suggests that local authorities should 'plan positively' and 'make their own assessment of need' for Gypsies, Travellers and Showpeople in their jurisdiction but 'maintain an appropriate level of supply'. Planning policy clearly places the onus on local authorities in determining the need for Travellers sites in the area, using a 'robust evidence base', but the contention in the following points will be that the evidence base is flawed and the Council are providing over and above the 'appropriate level of supply' needed.
- 2.1.2 The Local Plan Preferred Options Draft key evidence base contains the *North Yorkshire Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment* (NYGTAA) (2008) and the *North Yorkshire Accommodation Requirements of Showmen* (NYARS) (2009). However, in calculating the level need in York over the life of the Plan, the Council's *Gypsy, Traveller and Showpeople Accommodation Needs Supporting Paper* (2013) fails to take into account key information within the NYGTAA and NYARS
 - a. On Gypsies and Travellers, the Council have correctly taken into account the current shortfall, identified in the NYGTAA, of 36 pitches. However, they fail to make any mention or take into account those projected as preferring to move from sites into housing between 2008 and 2015, which the NYGTAA states is 33. So, while the projected need from household formation from sites (or concealed households) in this period is 16, the additional need to 2015, outlined in the NYGTAA is -17. This figure should be taken into account in the Local Plan and the 'needs' assessment should in turn be considerably reduced.
 - b. The 2013 supporting paper suggests that in the NYARS survey, 19 Showpeople expressed a preference for having a permanent plot in York. NYARS identifies that 24 Showpeople felt that York was a first or second preferred location for a new permanent yard. Based on those surveyed, NYARS identifies the level of need across York and North Yorkshire as 54 new plots. Of these 54 plots, based on the same

percentages of first and second preferences, NYARS suggests only 13 new plots for York. It is not clear why the Council have proposed NYARS' need assessment as 19 plots and this figure should be reviewed.

- 2.1.3 Gypsies, Travellers and Showpeople are by nature travelling people. It is not clear why their preference for having permanent plots in York has been taken into account to such a degree by the Council. There is a common concern, particularly in the rural communities in which Traveller and Showpeople sites have been proposed by the Council, that positive discrimination in favour of Gypsies, Travellers and Showpeople is taking place, at the expense of those in the settled communities. It is not for the Travelling communities themselves to identify the need for pitches, but for the Council to do this in consultation with the Travelling communities. In doing so they should try to maintain fairness between the Travelling and settled communities in a way they have not done thus far.
- 2.1.4 The 2013 supporting needs paper (3.14) identifies 18 concealed Gypsy and Traveller households. The paper says 'within the Gypsy & Traveller community there is a strong tradition of children seeking independent accommodation close to their family, preferably on the same site.' Again this could be construed by the settled communities as positive discrimination, as those concealed households in settled communities have to make financial decisions in order to afford their own accommodation and will continue to have to do so, regardless of what the Local Plan proposes in terms of housing allocations.
- 2.1.5 These 18 concealed households are defined as 'families that currently live on over crowded pitches... or Gypsy & Travellers accommodated in bricks and mortar who wish [to] be on a local authority site'. There is no justification provided for why the wishes of settled Travellers in bricks and mortar are being taken into account. Again this could be construed as positive discrimination against settled communities and should be reviewed.
- 2.1.6 The following line in paragraph 3.14 states that 'It is not possible to ascertain whether there is an overlap between concealed household figures and the unmet demand identified through the NYGTAA.' It then says that the *assumption* among Council officers is that much of this figure could be additional and the level of concealed households could be higher. If the evidence base is not clear or watertight, then it should not be used to justify such important decisions. Either this potential discrepancy must be investigated further or new research should be carried out to ensure the calculation of need is accurate. It should not rely on assumptions on data from potentially out of date research.
- 2.1.7 Similar discrepancies occur in paragraph 3.13 of the supporting paper. On the 36 pitch current shortfall, the paper says 'discussions with specific experts in the council's Housing Options and Homelessness team have suggested that this need has remained unmet and should... be carried forward into the Local plan time period 2015-2030.' No details of these discussions have been provided or who these 'specific experts' are. The information here is inadequate and should not be used to justify including the shortfall identified in 2008 in the Local plan period.

- 2.1.8 The NYGTAA states, in paragraph 6.25, that ‘the likely growth in households on sites is unlikely to outstrip the turnover of sites if the current trend of households moving off sites continues.’ The NYGTAA also says, in paragraph 6.25, that ‘no account has been taken of the strong preference of Gypsy and Traveller households in conventional housing to move onto sites’. By contrast the Council’s supporting paper, in paragraph 3.14, indicates that the Council do take into account those in conventional housing, as part of what they deem to be concealed households. If the NYGTAA chose not to take into account those in conventional housing, it cannot be justified, other than by dubious political motivations, that York Council should take these households into account in their figures. The scope of what is deemed to be a concealed household should be reviewed by the Council.
- 2.1.9 Paragraph 3.13 refers to consultation with the Gypsy & Traveller community during the consultation, but not the settled community. Paragraph 3.17 discusses the involvement of the York Traveller Trust in helping to calculate need. Their own impression of concealed households ‘exceeds the 18 predicted by City of York housing officers’.
- 2.1.10 On population growth among Gypsies and Travellers, the assumption is made that each of the 11 new families will require a pitch. How can this be proven? Gypsies and Travellers are, by nature, travelling people and it is not guaranteed that the population growth will want to remain in the York area.
- 2.1.11 The numbers of those living in unauthorised encampments is also estimated by Council officers as 3 families, who are homeless and moved on from unauthorised encampments every 2-3 weeks. While unauthorised encampments do occur, they are sporadic often involving families who are in transit and are not indicative of an additional need for permanent pitches in the City.
- 2.1.12 In the introduction and policy A of the PPFTS document, it is clear that local authorities should cooperate with other local authorities and work collaboratively, when formulating their Local Plans, to provide for the Travelling communities’ needs. Based on the figures other neighbouring local authorities are proposing in their Plans, it is clear that York’s efforts to collaborate and cooperate thus far have been inadequate.
- 2.1.13 For example in Harrogate, the District Council are proposing 7 Gypsy and Traveller pitches over the life of their plan and 0 Showpeople pitches. In Hambleton, the net requirements for public and private Gypsy and Traveller pitches has been assessed at 26 over the 15 year life of their Plan. These figures are distinctly lower than what has been proposed in York and as a result, the Council should review their figures and communicate with other local authorities to come up with a more suitable, realistic and achievable target of pitches to deliver.
- 2.1.14 NYARS identifies a need for 11 new Showpeople pitches in Hambleton. Since NYARS was published in 2009, according to Graham Banks, Planning Policy Manager at Hambleton District Council: ‘there has been no provision made... and there have been no proposals coming forward’. Mr Banks suggests that a lack of suitable sites coming forward has prevented the authority from putting forward plans for new pitches and he says that ‘a

recent call for sites has not given rise to any suitable... site suggestions'. Hambleton's example shows that if suitable and appropriate sites cannot be found, there is no legal obligation on the local authority for not providing permanent pitches for Gypsies, Travellers and Showpeople.

- 2.1.15 In a written answer in Hansard (25 April 2013: Column 1133W) Brandon Lewis MP, the Minister responsible for Travellers was explicit in stating that 'for the avoidance of doubt, unmet need does not in itself constitute the "very special circumstances" necessary to permit inappropriate development in the Green Belt.' This suggests that in the case of the proposed 20 pitch Knapton Showpeople site, which has now been withdrawn by the owner, or even in the case of the Dunnington site, the Council should not pursue other sites in York's Green Belt or other options, like compulsory purchase, to provide for what they perceive to be unmet need.

Suitability

- 2.2.1 The NPPF and PPFTS are very clear on the need for development to be appropriate for the surrounding environment and the settlements in which Gypsy, Traveller and Showpeople sites are proposed. Indeed PPFTS goes further to explicitly state (in para 14) that "Inappropriate development is harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved, except in very special circumstances. Traveller sites (temporary or permanent) in the Green Belt are inappropriate development." It is therefore the contention here that the proposed sites in Dunnington, Osbaldwick, Knapton and Huntington are absolutely inappropriate and should be reviewed in light of their divergence from existing greenbelt policy.
- 2.2.2 PPFTS states (in para 15) that "Green Belt boundaries should be altered only in exceptional circumstances." The government have been clear, as referenced in para 1.15 above, that unmet need does not constitute these exceptional circumstances.
- 2.2.3 PPFTS also states (in para 12) that "When assessing the suitability of sites in rural or semi-rural settings, local planning authorities should ensure that the scale of such sites does not dominate the nearest settled community." The proposed site in Knapton would dominate the village, as it would be of a comparable size to the village. In Dunnington, the suggested site is of a similar size to the adjacent residential estate and would also therefore dominate the nearest 'settled community'. In Huntington, the proposed site at Chowdene would clearly dominate the very small hamlet of houses adjacent to it and this site should therefore be reviewed.
- 2.2.4 PPFTS states that Gypsy, Traveller and Showpeople sites should 'promote peaceful co-existence' of the settled and travelling communities. It is the contention here that the four sites put forward would not promote such peaceful co-existence, which therefore makes the sites inappropriate. The existing 12 pitch site in Osbaldwick is the cause of deep concern to local residents and the Police and Council are regularly contacted by residents who are distressed by anti-social behaviour emanating from the site. This includes fly grazing, fly tipping, violence and theft. It is a widely held assumption that these issues would diminish if the Council were to manage the site better and take tougher action on unruly

tenants. If the site were to be extended, it is highly likely that the existing tensions between the settled and travelling communities would deepen.

2.2.5 The draft Local Plan is unclear on whether the proposed sites would be privately run or Council owned and managed. However, the NYGTAA suggests that the majority of Travellers would prefer to live in Council managed sites. If it is the case that the Council seek to own and manage the suggested sites themselves and their management of these sites is as poor as it is in the case of Osbaldwick, then the sites will undoubtedly fail to promote peaceful co-existence.

2.2.6 PPFTS insists on the need to pursue brownfield sites first, yet all of the proposed sites are in the greenbelt. It is the contention here that the proposed sites should be reviewed and replaced with much more suitable and appropriate brownfield sites.

Sustainability

2.3.1 The NPPF is clear on the need for development to be sustainable. It is the contention here that the proposed sites will put too much strain on the existing infrastructure and are not therefore sustainable.

2.3.2 While the Council's intention is to have one caravan per pitch, this is not the case on existing sites and particularly the Osbaldwick site which currently has double the number of caravans than the number of supposed pitches. If York were to cater for the needs of other local authorities and over-provide for Gypsies, Travellers and Showpeople, the City could attract members of the Travelling communities from across the Country. This could potentially cause overcrowding on the sites, similar to what is experienced in Osbaldwick at present. This would undoubtedly put great strain on our existing infrastructure and there are no guarantees that any of the proposed sites would bring with them improvements to our infrastructure.

2.3.3 By the nature of their businesses, Gypsies, Travellers and Showpeople often have heavy vehicles and trailers. The addition of several hundred vehicles to already congested roads such as the A19, A1237, A1079, Malton Road (A1036) could make existing congestion issues even worse. The effect of increases in congestion could have a profound economic impact on our City, with businesses opting to relocate away from the City.

2.3.4 Concern among constituents The proposed sites could also place additional pressure on our education and health resources. There are also a number of 'site specific' concerns over the impact on existing drainage, sewerage, flooding and environmental concerns, which will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Proposed Dunnington Travellers Site

2.4.1 Not only is this proposed site on greenbelt land, but it is also a particularly important 'green gateway' into the village and it acts as an essential buffer between the village and the neighbouring business estate.

- 2.4.2 The site would also impair visual amenity in the area and negatively affect the character and appearance of the village. In doing so it would go against the advice contained within the Dunnington Village Design Statement 2006. The contrasts between the appearance of the caravans and the residential properties upon entering the village would fail to respect the character and nature of both sets of properties. The development would harm the visual amenity of the properties in the immediate vicinity, particularly the houses on Greenside, Greenside Close, Greenside Walk, Deerstone Way and Cedar Glade which is contrary to many other policies within the draft Local Plan.
- 2.4.3 The local environmental concerns are manifold and it is felt that the proposed site would go against the Council's duty to protect biodiversity. Protected species including the Water Vole and Great Crested Newts are present in the waterways surrounding the proposed site and in the adjacent Hassacarr Nature Reserve. The proposal therefore fails to take into account the protection of endangered species and their habitats.
- 2.4.4 Increases in traffic as a result of the proposed site could exacerbate existing congestion and safety concerns on Common Road and the A1079. With the high numbers of children in the immediate vicinity, due to the nearby location of the village playground and the Sports Centre, the safety risks presented to young children crossing the road could increase dramatically.
- 2.4.5 East Yorkshire Council identified no need for any Traveller pitches in the area to west of East Yorkshire Authority and particularly the Pocklington and Stamford Bridge area. Yet York Council have identified the need for 15 pitches in the very nearby village of Dunnington. The Council should work with other local authorities when identifying Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs.
- 2.4.6 The site put forward is a recognised flood plain and could put the safety of the occupants at risk. Surface water from the whole village travels very near to the site which could further increase the risk of flooding. Yorkshire Water have expressed concerns over the existing drainage and sewerage facilities in the area, with two zones in the immediate proximity to the proposed site being designated as 'pollution areas'.

Proposed Knapton Showpeople Site

- 2.5.1 While the Knapton site has been withdrawn by the landowner and her agents, the following objections will be put forward to try to ensure that the Council does not continue to pursue the site through compulsory purchase.
- 2.5.2 The Knapton site appears to have been put forward by the Council because no other sites were forthcoming. The Council have not clearly demonstrated what makes the Knapton site suitable for a Showpeople yard and many factors, particularly the PPFTS guidance on traveller sites in the greenbelt, would suggest the site is wholly unsuitable and inappropriate.

- 2.5.3 The proposed site is not only on greenbelt land but it also has special status as being part of the green corridor into the City. The field is a key to ensuring the City retains its open, rural character.
- 2.5.4 The proposed site could also have a detrimental effect on the preservation of the history and heritage of the village, which features in the Domesday Book. Knapton's village identity is particularly important as it is the only settlement within the ring road which has not been encompassed by suburban sprawl.
- 2.5.5 The village is also of a distinctly quiet, peaceful and rural character. The industrial impact of the proposed site, particularly the noise and light, would have a detrimental effect on this character.
- 2.5.6 The land is also prime arable farmland. It is the contention here that no high grade, productive agricultural land should unnecessarily be taken out of cropping for housing needs. With global food security becoming increasingly important on the political agenda and presenting itself as one of the main challenges facing the future of the human race, it would be unsustainable to further high grade agricultural land out of production.
- 2.5.7 The addition of several large vehicles and machinery on the surrounding road network is also unsustainable. The area is popular among dog walkers and horse riders and the additional traffic could place them at greater safety risk. How the site will be accessed has not yet been clearly stated and the traffic implications on Bland Lane could be very significant.

Proposed Malton Road Travellers Site

- 2.6.1 Again the proposed Huntington Travellers site is inappropriate as it is located within what has hitherto been considered York's greenbelt. Malton Road again marks an important green corridor into the City and proposing development of any kind in this area contradicts the policies within the draft Local Plan.
- 2.6.2 Malton Road is one of York's major highways and the increases in traffic flows generated by a new Travellers site could increase congestion issues and put the lives of pedestrians and cyclists at risk.
- 2.6.3 The potential impact on existing congestion issues in the area will likely be amplified by the additional 4000 homes proposed at Clifton Gate on the A1237 and the 5500 homes at Whinthorpe on the A64. Malton Road is important in that it feeds into the convergence point for both of the above roads.
- 2.6.4 The proposed sites is adjacent to a nature reserve in which protected species, including the Crested Newt, are present.
- 2.6.5 PPFTS is implicit in stating that Traveller sites should not be of a scale greater than the nearest settled community. The proposed site borders a very small settled community of

only a few houses and the Traveller site will clearly be of an equal or larger scale. Planning guidance suggests such a site should not be pursued.

2.6.6 The site could have a negatively impact on the local economy by deterring the public from visiting the Monks Cross retail park. If the site is poorly managed and anti social behaviour levels are high, the impact on Monks Cross could be even worse.

2.6.7 Concern among constituents School places in the area are already in high demand and no information has been provided by the Council on how they intend to relieve the additional burden placed on existing schools.

2.6.8 The site was very recently refused permission for 20 touring caravans on the grounds of access onto Malton road. Why does the same planning criteria not apply to the site now?

Proposed extension to Osbaldwick Travellers Site

2.7.1 As already detailed, the Osbaldwick site is very poorly managed, with high levels of anti social behaviour emanating from the site. This clearly has a negative effect on the local community and the local economy, with businesses in the nearby Industrial estate regularly being subjected to thefts and burglaries. The Osbaldwick site should not be extended by 6 pitches if the Council cannot prove it is being properly managed and peaceful co-existence is being promoted.

Proposed Elvington Showpeople site

2.8.1 Neighbouring residents at the site believe the existing site in Elvington was granted temporary (5 year) permission by the Planning Inspectors because no other appropriate sites could be found. By contrast, the Local Plan supporting paper suggests that the Planning Inspectors were supportive of the site. However, the Inspectors stated in their 2010 report that the site was “inappropriate [and] would erode openness and conflict to some degree with the purposes of Green Belt designation”.

2.8.2 The Inspector also stated that “the substantial harm to Green Belt objectives is such that I do not find that other considerations in this case clearly outweigh the harm identified, and they do not therefore amount to the very special circumstances which would justify the grant of permanent planning permission”.

2.8.3 The supporting paper omits the information that the Council themselves objected to 2010 applications for planning permission. Temporary planning permission was only granted on appeal and then subject to an extensive list of conditions, coupled with a clear statement that at the end of the five year period the site should be returned to York’s greenbelt.

2.8.4 It is not therefore clear why the Council are now proposing to take this site out of the greenbelt and give it permanence when the Inspectors were so careful not to.

Part III – Housing Policies

As will be argued in the following sections, the proposals to build 1090 new homes per year throughout the life of the Plan are of a scale much too high to be workable for the historic City of York and its surrounding communities. These housing targets are based on grossly inaccurate calculations of need and unrealistic assumptions on potential future economic growth and job creation in York. Because the targets are so high, they will have potentially disastrous effects on the City by causing immense strain on the local infrastructure and having a hugely detrimental impact on York’s character and rural setting. Far from growing our local economy, these unsustainable and inappropriate housing targets could put York’s future economic prospects at severe risk.

Calculation of ‘Need’

3.1.1 On Local Plans, the NPPF states that they should be “aspirational but realistic”. The Council’s draft Local Plan fulfils the former but completely ignores the latter. The driving force behind the calculation of ‘need’ for the number of homes proposed is not the potential population growth that will happen in York over the 15 year life of the Plan, but the 1000 jobs the Council are proposing to create each year. While the Council should be ambitious about York’s future economic prospects, the figure proposed is highly unlikely to be achievable. Population growth estimates tell a very different story about York’s future housing requirements.

3.1.2 The below table is taken from the Office for National Statistics’ *Interim 2011-based Subnational Population Projections*. It represents the population forecasts for the area within the City of York Council’s Jurisdiction. (The figures represent persons in the 000s to 1 decimal place)

Component	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Population	197.8	199.8	201.6	203.2	204.8	206.3	207.7	209.0	210.3	211.4	212.6
Natural change		0.5	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.5
Births		2.2	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.2
Deaths		1.6	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.7
All migration net		1.5	1.2	1.1	1.0	0.9	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.7	0.6
Internal migration in		11.4	11.5	11.5	11.5	11.5	11.5	11.5	11.4	11.3	11.2
Internal migration out		10.9	11.1	11.3	11.3	11.4	11.4	11.5	11.5	11.5	11.4
International migration in		2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5
International migration out		1.6	1.6	1.6	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.7
Cross border migration in		0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6

Cross border migration out		0.5	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6
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3.1.3 Despite the Council's persistent claims that the new housing proposed is to meet the demand emanating from the 'natural' increase in York's population, the above table clearly shows that 'natural change' in York's population remains relatively static at 500-600 more people per year throughout the above decade.

3.1.4 Indeed the ARUP report clearly states that "population growth in York between 2010 and 2030 is ultimately driven by the scale of international migration into the authority". Regardless of whether this is indeed the case, 'all migration net' in the above table deteriorates from 1500 people per year in 2011 down to only 600 people per year in 2021. In the, less up to date but longer spanning, ONS *2010-based Subnational Population Projections*, 'all migration net' rises again after 2021 to reach 900 people per year by 2030.

3.1.5 Regardless of what is driving population growth in York, the average annual population growth figures suggested by the Office for National Statistics does not suggest that it is enough to justify the Council's 1090 homes per year target. The above 2011-based projections suggest that the annual population growth in the City will be 1,480 people to 2021. The ONS 2010-based projections span further into the future, to 2035 and suggest that in the 15 year life of the Plan (2015-2030), annual population growth in York will average 1,750 persons. Based on the ONS calculation that the average household size in the UK is 2.3 people per household (based on the 2011 census), projected population growth from the ONS' 2010-based projections could at most support a target of 760 new homes per year.

3.1.6 Predicted economic and employment growth is therefore a key driver behind the Council's targeted 1090 new homes per year, however the Council's research into potential economic growth does not appear to have been worked around estimated population growth. The key objections to the Council's employment growth predictions are that they are unrealistic and would rely on vastly increasing inward migration into the City. As a historic City with already strained infrastructure and limits on the extent to which it can be improved, York would not cope well with sharp increases in the population and its economy could be damaged as a result, with some large employers potentially opting to move to other cities with better existing infrastructure. The Council have failed to provide adequate justification for wanting to house York's new employees within the Authority and as a result, commuting into the City has unnecessarily been discouraged.

3.1.7 The supporting paper *Economic and Retailing Growth Analysis and Visioning Work* (June 2013) (hereon referred to as the Eskogen report), is exceptionally optimistic about York's economic growth potential but sadly not realistic. It largely fails to account for why the City should expect so many new jobs to be created and only makes vague comparisons to other similar historic Cities like Bath and Exeter. The argument here is not that York as a City should not be optimistic about its future economic potential. The government are taking the right steps to getting our economy going again and we have recently seen strong evidence of the beginning of an economic recovery, with unemployment falling and

economic growth of 0.6% last quarter. However, the Eskogen report appears to confuse optimism with idealism and it fails to provide the adequate justification behind its economic growth scenarios. While the UK economy is in good hands, there still remains some uncertainty about the European and Global economies. The base scenario is therefore the most suitable to justify future housing needs.

- 3.1.8 While the Eskogen report clearly states the contraction in employment in York suffered since 2003, the Council appear to ignore it when trying to justify their housing targets. Employment in York was at approximately 115,500 jobs in 2003 and since then has contracted down to approx 102,500 in 2011 (Eskogen, page 6). Following the baseline scenario in the Eksogen report, employment in York will recover to its 2003 level by around 2018. From then until 2030, York will create approx 10,100 jobs, or an average of 673 jobs per year throughout the 15 year life of the Plan, which will be in addition to regaining the jobs the City has lost over the past 10 years. Even by providing additional housing to meet existing needs, the figure for new post-recovery jobs does not justify the 1090 new homes per year proposed by the Council. As will be seen, this target has ultimately been generated because of a desire within the Council leadership to achieve higher affordable housing numbers.
- 3.1.9 The supporting paper *Housing Requirements in York* (May 2013) (hereon referred to as the ARUP report) is clear on the political decision-making which has influenced the Council's annual housing target. It clearly states, on page 38, "the baseline economic forecast and baseline housing requirement are aligned, but this does not necessarily realise the objectives of CYC".
- 3.1.10 These objectives include the desire to reduce inward commuting into the City and yet, as previously discussed, the Council have failed to provide adequate justification for wanting to house York's new employees within the Authority.
- 3.1.11 Another of the Council's objectives, according to ARUP, is to "provide the choice of housing for those with jobs in York to live in York". It is the contention here that the reasoning behind the Council's inflated annual housing target stems from a desire to see much more affordable housing in the City and to ensure that the Council's already very high affordable housing targets are deliverable and the contracts are still desirable to large-scale developers.
- 3.1.12 The Council have assessed there to be a large amount of existing need for affordable housing in the City, which they plan to address in years 0-5 of the Plan, with arising need being addressed in years 5-15. Because, as the ARUP report states, "a lower level of affordable housing is likely to be achieved than that set in the target", the Council have inflated the Plan's annual housing target to address this shortcoming in the deliverability of their affordable housing targets.
- 3.1.13 Regrettably, the Plan does not include an option for reviewing the Council's affordable housing policy in favour of reduced and more easily deliverable affordable housing targets. The number of stalled developments and the slow rate of house building

presently experienced in the City is evidence of the difficulties developers are experiencing in trying to deliver the Council's high affordable housing targets.

3.1.14 A damning indictment of the Council's affordable housing policy was recently delivered by the Planning Inspectors when approving the Grain Stores site in Clifton with 0% affordable housing obligations on the developers. This came after the developers had offered to deliver 15% affordable, which the Council refused.

3.1.15 Affordable housing can also mean that housing becomes cyclically less affordable, as developers place premiums on the cost of ordinary houses in order to pay for the affordable housing. If affordable housing obligations are high, the premiums placed on the cost of ordinary housing are also high. If the Council are desirous to enable our younger population to afford their own homes, they should consider reducing affordable housing targets and reversing one of the factors which is increasing the cost of houses.

3.1.16 It is therefore the contention here that by reducing the Council's very high and above average affordable housing targets, the annual housing target in the Local Plan could be reduced to a more sustainable level.

Suitability

3.2.1 The draft Local Plan proposes 22,000 new homes within the Authority, of which 16,000 have been proposed on York's established greenbelt. As a result 1400 acres of greenbelt land is to be developed upon and a further 1000 acres will be taken out of the established greenbelt and 'safeguarded' for future development. This marks a severe intrusion onto what has for many years been an integral part of City's identity and character. Whilst offering up so much of the greenbelt to developers may bring short term economic benefits, the long term impact could be disastrous for York's economy, by changing the nature of the City irrevocably.

3.2.2 York is an internationally celebrated City, known for its history, architecture, Minster and the green environment which surrounds the City. The draft Local Plan proposes to place too much of a development burden on the surrounding green environment and it will damage not only its character and setting, but also its worldwide reputation for being the home to both architectural and environmental beauty. In this sense the Plan, if adopted in its current form, could significantly harm York's tourism industry.

3.2.3 In the same way the inappropriateness of the proposals could harm one of the City's main economic driving forces: the University of York. The City's economic growth depends on our ability to attract the right workforce for our high value professions. Many of these professions are in the technological and service-based businesses which are associated with the development of the University. The University of York's attraction to high achieving students, experienced academics and high value businesses relies heavily on the City's image as a small, historic Cathedral City with a rural, green environment surrounding it. The significance of the greenbelt in helping to develop good universities is implicit in the fact that all of the 20 English Russell Group Universities are located within greenbelt-protected towns and cities. By redefining and reducing the extent of York's established greenbelt, the

University and its importance to York's economy could deteriorate. Given York economic reliance on its Universities, the long term economic impact of the Plan in its current form could be disastrous for the City.

3.2.4 As a result of concreting over thousands of acres of greenbelt land which has been successfully protected for decades, in return for short-term but unsustainable economic gains, the local environment and particularly the thriving local wildlife will pay the ultimate cost. Not only will thousands of acres of prime agricultural land be developed upon, but also thousands of trees will need to be cleared and the habitats of many creatures will be destroyed. Of particular concern are the protected species including the crested newts and water voles, which reside in the same areas where development has been proposed, for example Whinthorpe and Hassacarr Lane, Dunnington. 3% of York's established greenbelt is registered as Sites of Special Scientific Interest, alongside a further 50 acres devoted to local nature reserves. The importance of York's established greenbelt in protecting our environment should be recognised and heeded in a way that the draft Local Plan fails to do.

3.2.5 The draft Local Plan is ultimately unsuitable and inappropriate for York. It will not promote the right type of economic growth that the City needs and it could be hugely detrimental to the long term economic success of the City. All of the strategic and general housing proposals should be reviewed as a result. In order to significantly reduce the development burden on York's greenbelt, the Council should look to reprioritise brownfield sites for housing rather than employment-based development, as has currently been proposed.

Sustainability

3.3.1 Not only is the siting of many of the proposals within the draft Plan unsuitable, the scale of development proposed is also unsustainable and it will place York's already strained local infrastructure under more pressure than it can cope with. The NPPF places great importance on the need for development to be sustainable. Yet in York, the draft Local Plan proposes wholly unsustainable development for the area.

3.3.2 Global food security is swiftly becoming one of the most important issues facing the future of the human race and the importance of productive agricultural land in helping to secure our food supplies is recognised within the NPPF. In York's Greenbelt, 30% of the land is Grade 1 or Grade 2 and some of the best and most versatile land. This is nearly double the national average. 56% of this agricultural land is subject to Natural England funding supporting environmentally sensitive farming. The Council have failed to acknowledge the importance of productive agricultural land when drafting the Local Plan and this should be reviewed.

3.3.3 Transportation around in and around the City already suffers many day to day problems. As a City built many hundreds of years ago, the road network within the City centre suffers with severe congestion. Around York, the road networks are little better, with the outer ring road and particularly the A1237 section very slow moving for large periods of the working week. Many of the roads leading into the City are also severely congested at peak times and are major routes through the County for HGVs. The road networks in York's

Greenbelt are of particular concern. The Campaign for Rural England reports that it has only 8 metres of public rights of way per hectare, which is just over half the national average.

- 3.3.4 Verbal communication with North Yorkshire Police has revealed that, if an accident occurs where the A1237 and A59 intersect, traffic will 'back up' at a rate of one mile per minute, which is the same assumption the Police apply to the A1. By adding potentially tens of thousands of cars to our road network without any guarantees that the road infrastructure will be improved, could be hugely damaging to the local economy. It could mean that existing and well established large scale employers in York opt to move to other Cities where the infrastructure is more adequate.
- 3.3.5 While the A1237 is highlighted for dualling in the draft Local Plan, there is no guarantee that the necessary investment will be achieved and there is no reasonable suggestion for how the Council plan to achieve this investment, other than relying on the Leeds Local Enterprise Partnership. Plans have been made in the past to dual other roads in the area, including the A64 to Scarborough and they have not been achieved. The focus should be on achieving the infrastructure improvements that York already requires and then deciding how much further development would be sustainable. The Council sadly appear to be putting the cart before the horse.
- 3.3.6 The plans for new train stations at Haxby and Strensall are desirable but unlikely to both be deliverable. The Council have already had their first bid for New Station Funding at Haxby refused. While the Haxby Station may still be achievable, it is unlikely that any of the train companies on the route would consent to having an additional small station just 3 miles to the north in Strensall.
- 3.3.7 On the whole, York's Schools are already well subscribed. However, by adding so significantly to the population, it is likely that they would very soon become oversubscribed. No guarantees have been provided that new schools would be built. Developers could potentially be expected to build smaller primary schools, however by placing obligations on them to build much needed new secondary schools, the sites could be deemed unprofitable and undeliverable by developers. Again this could have a damaging effect on the City's long term economic future as our currently very well performing schools would likely struggle to cope with the additional pressure on their resources. The quality of education provided in York could suffer and it could become a less attractive place to live and work.
- 3.3.8 Of deep concern to many York Outer constituents is the ways in which our health services are supposed to cope with the development proposed. Again, York hospital and the variety of other health facilities in the City are already strained and to add so many new homes without the guaranteed investment in our health services could place the quality of healthcare in York at severe risk.
- 3.3.9 York has a widely documented history of being susceptible to flooding. Flooding regularly affects not just the City Centre, but also the rural communities surrounding York, such as Naburn. It has both a negative emotional and economic impact on the victims and the City as a whole. Development of the scale proposed within the draft Local Plan will undoubtedly increase flood risk in the area, as the cumulative effect of surface water run off

from the development will increase the load in our water ways and the burden on our existing drainage and sewerage infrastructure. This will undoubtedly have an impact on cost of home insurance and flooding cover in the York area and unless flood defences are improved it could deter future employers from coming to the City or current employers from staying in the City.

3.3.10 Specific sites within the Plan are at risk of flooding and these will be discussed in further detail below.

3.3.11 The above comments aim to provide more generalised objections to what the draft Local Plan proposes for the whole York area. The below is a list of more 'site specific' objections, although it is in no way complete, both in terms of the sites and the objections. Instead it details a few of the more localised concerns that have been raised by many York Outer constituents. Where not listed below, it can be taken as a given that the some or all of the above objections will apply to proposals.

'Whinthorpe' (ST15, SF3):

3.4.1 Much of the land identified both in ST15 and SF3 is category three floodplain, categorised by the Environment Agency as experiencing 'flooding from rivers or sea without defences'. Indeed in the past 12 months it has been subjected to deep flooding on several occasions. By developing this land, the Council would be unnecessarily subjecting the new homes and the existing nearby households to the risk of flooding. To mitigate this risk could cost the developers considerable investment, potentially making the site undeliverable.

3.4.2 The land in question is important as a habitat to protected water voles and the Tilmire is a nature conservation site of national importance that should be protected by the Council and not safeguarded for future development.

3.4.3 The new town could impact on the parish community, causing permanent division, as access between Heslington village and Whinthorpe would likely be cut off.

3.4.4 The probable 10 years of construction work would place the existing amenities in the area under great strain and could detrimentally affect congestion issues on nearby roads.

3.4.5 The impact of the additional thousands of cars on the A64, A19 and A1079 has not properly been assessed when drawing up the plan. The new town would at least need two access points, which means congestion issues on either the A19 or the A1079 or both could be made much worse and the effects could spill over onto other country lanes such as Wheldrake Lane. The Highways Agency have made clear that they would need traffic restrictions on the A1237 as it meets the A64 at the Hopgrove roundabout. With the nearly 2000 new homes proposed at Huntington and the 4000+ new homes proposed at Clifton Gate. Congestion around the whole of the ring road could be tremendous. It would impact not only York's economy, but also the quality of life for those living in and around the City.

3.4.6 It is not clear, which schools would serve the children of Whinthorpe. Fulford School could be the most suitable option, however, the School was very recently refused targeted

basic need funding for an extension to cater for the rising need. It is not clear how the Council have come to the conclusion that they would achieve funding for school extensions or an entirely new secondary school.

'Clifton Gate' (ST14, SF2)

- 3.5.1 In the village of Skelton, many residents are deeply concerned about the impact that the urbanisation of such a large portion of nearby greenbelt land will have on their small rural village and they feel it will result in a loss in their shared sense of identity as a community.
- 3.5.2 Concerns also centre on the local infrastructure and existing amenities in the village and how Moor Lane and Moorlands road will cope with the increased traffic, as well as the obvious impacts upon the A1237.
- 3.5.3 The Safeguarded Land appears on the map to encompass and engulf the Skelton Cemetery. No clear explanation has been made as to how the development will occur in this area and how the resting place of the dead will be respected.
- 3.5.4 The Clifton Moor retail and business park already appears to be encountering some economic difficulties, with a number of the premises empty. It may be said that this is largely due to difficulties of access because of congestion on the A1237. By adding over 4000 new homes directly to the north west of this site and without guaranteeing the necessary investment in the northern outer ring road, the future of Clifton Moor can at best be described as uncertain.

Osballdwick (ST7)

- 3.6.1 Osballdwick was in the past a rural village separated from the rest of the built up areas of the City. Over time it has become engulfed by suburban sprawl and it is now largely a suburban community. With the addition of 1800 new homes, local residents fear the character of their historic village will change irrevocably.
- 3.6.2 Residents in the Meadlands area of Osballdwick have experienced standing water in their gardens for many months over the winter and spring, which they feel is implicitly linked to the development of the Derwenthorpe site. If development were to begin on the nearby land east of Metcalfe Lane, then residents could face further drainage issues. Full environmental assessments should be carried out on the site before the Local Plan goes any further in the adoption process.
- 3.6.3 When coupled with the 211 new homes proposed at Grimston Bar, the A1079 is unlikely to cope with the additional number of cars on the proposed site, with traffic at peak times being most affected.

Huntington (ST8, ST11)

- 3.7.1 As already discussed in Para 3.4.5, if these proposals goes ahead there will be a considerable effect on the local road network, particularly in light of the concerns expressed by the Highways agency.

- 3.7.2 As with Para 3.5.4 on the effects of overdevelopment on nearby retail centres, the 2000 homes proposed to the north and south of Monks Cross could have a detrimental impact on the ability of the retail park to thrive and generate economic growth for the City.

Haxby (ST9, SF4, H37)

- 3.8.1 In recent years Haxby and Wigginton have suffered with flooding and surface water issues relating to the drainage and sewerage system, which is barely adequate to cope with the existing pressures placed upon it. The increases in cumulative surface water run off from minor developments is likely to have had a further impact on this. The addition of 747 homes to the north of Haxby and the 34 homes to the south will likely cripple the existing sewerage infrastructure. Considerable investment in this infrastructure is already needed and as there are no guarantees that such investment will be forthcoming, these developments should not be pursued.
- 3.8.2 Mr H J Watson's submission as part of the consultation includes environmental reports from 2006 which show that the land designated for H37 is at risk of extreme flooding.
- 3.8.3 Residents in Haxby and Wigginton are aware of a number of previous planning applications on the land to the north of Haxby, which have for various reasons been refused. The Council should investigate all previous applications on this land and justify why previous grounds for refusal are not relevant.
- 3.8.4 Local residents are deeply concerned about the existing provision of school places and the effects the development will have on the Ralph Butterfield Primary School. With the Oaken Grove School closed, it is difficult to imagine how the community will cope with the addition of nearly 800 new families.

Woodthorpe (S10)

- 3.9.1 In 1988 the City of York Council refused Persimmon Homes permission to develop this land. These were on the grounds that the land was established greenbelt and productive agricultural land of grade II quality. The Council were concerned about the potentially adverse effect the development could have on Askham Bog as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Also of concern was the local sewerage system, which at the time was 'not adequate to cater for the additional flows that would be generated by the proposed development.' All of these reasons for refusal are as relevant today as they were in 1988 and should be considered carefully when reviewing the site.

Copmanthorpe (ST12, ST13, H40, H29, SF5)

- 3.10.1 Residents in Copmanthorpe are deeply concerned about the impact that 600 new homes will have on the existing infrastructure and amenities in the village. There are also grave concerns over the impact of potentially over a thousand more cars joining the A64 from Copmanthorpe everyday.

Strensall (SF1)

- 3.11.1 The area identified as 'Safeguarded' in Strensall is of considerable importance to the character of the village. It is often described by residents as a 'green lung' for the village, which connects it to the nearby important Nature Conservation areas.

Rufforth (H38)

- 3.12.1 The properties on Middlewood Close, adjacent to H38, are deeply concerned about existing sewerage problems on their road and the effect that the building of a further 22 homes in the immediate vicinity would have on these existing problems. Full and proper consultation with Yorkshire Water should occur before this site is progressed any further.

Part IV – Renewable Energy Policies

The 40+ proposed ‘potential Areas of Search for Renewable Electricity Generation’ (CC1) around York are absolutely unnecessary. If wind farms are to be pursued on the vast majority of these sites, as proposed in the draft Local Plan, they will do much to destroy the character and setting of the City. The key arguments against these sites are the inaccurate calculation of need for them, their inappropriateness and the negative effects they could have on our economy. All of these sites should be removed from the Plan immediately.

Calculation of ‘Need’

4.1.1 The NPPF is clear on the need for Planning and Plan-making to take an active role in meeting the challenge of climate change, stating that ‘Local Plans should take account of climate change over the longer term’. However, nowhere in the NPPF is there any requirement for local authorities to pursue wind power.

4.1.2 The suggestion is that local authorities should support moves to a low carbon future and mitigate the impact of new development on climate change, by supporting renewable energy. Ultimately it rests with the local authority to decide which type of renewable energy they wish to pursue. However, para 97 of the NPPF makes the key point that ‘suitable areas’ should be identified. As will shortly be discussed, the Vale of York is not a suitable area for onshore wind farms, due to the distinct lack of wind.

4.1.3 The draft Local Plan does not make any convincing arguments for pursuing wind and hydro power over other sources of renewable electricity generation. Further investigation into other sources of renewable energy should be undertaken.

4.1.4 Other neighbouring local planning authorities have chosen not to make any provision for onshore wind farms in their areas of jurisdiction and justifiable arguments why the City of York Council have proposed so many wind farms have not been forthcoming.

Suitability

4.2.1 In the recent government policy revisions, dated 6th June 2013, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC) said that “new guidance will clearly state that:

- a. The need for renewable energy does not by definition override environmental protections and the planning concerns of local communities.
- b. Decisions should take into account the cumulative impact of wind turbines and properly reflect the impact on (a) the landscape and (b) local amenity.
- c. Local topography should be a factor in assessing whether wind turbines have a damaging impact on the landscape. For example, it should be recognised that the impact on predominantly flat landscapes can be as great or greater than on hilly or mountainous ones.

- d. Great care should be taken to ensure heritage assets are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, including the impact on proposals on views important to their setting.

4.2.2 It will be argued in the following paragraphs that the proposed sites fail to meet the above criteria and are therefore inappropriate for York and the surrounding communities.

4.2.3 DCLG and DECC also said they were “looking to local councils through their Local Plans to implement policies which ensure that adverse impacts from wind farm developments, including cumulative landscape and visual impact, are addressed satisfactorily. Councils should not feel they have to give permission for applications outside those areas where they judge the impact to be acceptable.” This strengthening of planning policy against inappropriate pursuance of onshore wind power should be reflected in York’s Local Plan via the removal of all of the proposed sites and a reconsideration of other means of generating renewable energy.

4.2.4 However, the original planning policy guidance was already very clear on the need to ensure wind farms were placed in appropriate and suitable locations. The National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (NPSREI), July 2011, said that the key considerations for site selection should be: predicted wind speed, proximity of site to dwellings, biodiversity and geological conservation, historic environment impacts, landscape and visual impact, noise and vibration, shadow flicker and traffic and transport issues. All of the 40+ proposed sites should be removed from the Plan for failing to be suitable in meeting the above criteria.

4.2.5 As previously noted, York is situated in a Vale and it is highly unlikely that any of the proposed sites would meet the predicted wind speed requirements to be viable. Guidelines on the use of wind power suggest wind speeds of at least 5m/s are required before a site is considered viable. Most developers suggest they would require at least 6m/s to make the site practicable. It is not clear what research has been done to support the proposed wind farm sites within York’s draft Local Plan.

4.2.6 NPSREI states that “appropriate distances should be maintained between wind turbines and sensitive receptors to protect amenity. The two main impact issues that determine the acceptable separation distances are visual amenity and noise.” Later NPSREI says that “Modern onshore wind turbines that are used in commercial wind farms are large structures and there will always be significant landscape and visual effects from their construction and operation for a number of kilometres around a site.” Proximity rules should be introduced in York and require that no wind turbine can be built within 2km of a home.

4.2.7 All of the proposed sites are on greenbelt land and often in open rural spaces. Many of these rural spaces are home to high populations of wildlife. There are particular concerns over the impact wind turbines will have on these populations, which are intrinsic to the beauty of York’s countryside surroundings.

4.2.8 NPSREI is clear that wind turbines should not “infringe on the setting of heritage assets”. York’s most important heritage asset is the Minster and its setting would

undoubtedly be damaged by the 40+ wind farms proposed around the City in the draft Local Plan. With the right visual aids, the Minster can be seen from various places, not just around York, but across Yorkshire – even as far as the northern suburbs of Sheffield. By proposing so many wind farms around the City, the prestige of the Minster within Yorkshire and the Country would diminish. This could also have a negative impact on York's tourism industry.

- 4.2.9 The basic incompatibility of the 40+ proposed sites with the local aviation environment renders the Council's renewable energy ambitions completely unworkable. It is probable that any wind farm proposals for the York area will be subject to long, drawn-out and financially draining planning battles with aviation stakeholders. It is unlikely that any of the sites would gain planning approval due to the safety concerns of these aviation stakeholders. The York area is not a suitable location for wind farms on the basis of these aviation safety issues alone. The Council should seek to communicate with local aviation stakeholders to discuss their concerns.

Part V – The Consultation

Considering the scale and the potential impact of what has been proposed on the lives of all York residents, the Council's efforts to publicise and consult the general public were woefully inadequate. Indeed the Council's efforts could at best be described as the bare minimum required in order to defend the consultation process as fair and legitimate. By no means has the process been as thorough and inclusive as it should have been. It would be reasonable to suggest that the Council have been relying on apathy in order to argue that the Plan encountered very little resistance from the local population. This is entirely inaccurate and the vast majority of York Outer residents are strongly opposed to much of the draft Local Plan. The following points should be made clear to the Planning Inspectors:

- 5.1.1 The A3 'Have Your Say on York's Local Plan' leaflet, which was supposedly sent to all residents to inform them of the proposals within the Plan and their democratic rights as citizens in making their views known as part of the consultation, was not received by many residents. Whole streets of residents in communities including Strensall, Earswick, Woodthorpe, Haxby, Skelton and others reported not having received any leaflet at all.
- 5.1.2 Those who did receive the leaflet were largely disappointed with the lack of information or detail on the proposals. The map in the centrefold was grossly inadequate in conveying the breadth of the proposals within the Plan. For example none of the proposed 'Areas of Search for renewable electricity generation' were visible on the map. The Gypsy, Traveller and Showpeople sites on the map were mere coloured dots and did not indicate exactly where the pitches were or how many pitches had been proposed. While all the Strategic Housing sites were included on the Map, none of the village extensions were. Many residents were misled by the lack of information on what Safeguarded land is, with many believing it was safeguarded from rather than for future development.
- 5.1.3 More detailed and localised variations of the leaflet should have been manufactured and distributed to the different areas around York to ensure that residents were aware of the exact location of certain sites and the numbers of new homes or traveller pitches proposed for example. The cost of producing and distributing the leaflet was very low, at a total of £6,845. Given the importance of the Local Plan on the future of the City, any attempts to keep costs down in the interests of the tax payer should not be used as reasoning to justify failing to provide local residents with adequate information.
- 5.1.4 The Council's devoted Local Plan webpage was extremely difficult to navigate and many residents have complained about this. A number of the downloadable files, including the main 'Preferred Options' document itself, were too large for some residents to download, particularly those with slow internet speeds in rural areas.
- 5.1.5 There has also been a distinct age bias in the reliance on the internet to gain more information on the Local Plan. The use of social media sites, including Facebook and Twitter as means of getting involved in the consultation encouraged submissions from younger generations but not older people.

- 5.1.6 For the less 'computer literate' older generations and particularly those who are vulnerable and rurally isolated, it was difficult to engage with the draft Local Plan as it would often require visiting a library.
- 5.1.7 The Local Plan Preferred Options draft is an extensive document and with the numerous supporting papers, meant that the draft Local Plan was not accessible and difficult to engage with, not only for the elderly but also our working populations. It is accepted that there are limits on how accessible the draft Plan can be made but the 'Have Your Say' leaflet fell short in equipping local residents with the knowledge they needed to take part. Ultimately, more effort should have been made to engage the local population in the plan making process and ensure that they were well informed of the proposals and their opportunity to have their say. Sadly, the Council appeared happy to rely on the apathy of much of the local population.
- 5.1.8 The Council organised 'Drop In Exhibitions' did provide local residents with the opportunity to view larger maps, read the relevant documents and discuss the proposals with Council officers. However, sadly these exhibitions were not always organised in the appropriate locations. For example, while two sessions were organised in Clifton Moor, where 4020 new homes have been proposed, it was not until Heslington residents complained that a meeting was hosted there to discuss the 5,580 new homes proposed. Disappointingly, no meeting was arranged in Huntington, where nearly 2000 new homes and a 20 pitch Travellers site have been proposed, until residents lobbied the Council via their local MP.
- 5.1.9 The use of the local media in order to raise awareness of the proposals was also inadequate. Coverage in the local newspapers failed to stress the enormity of what has been proposed and the potential impacts it will have on our communities and on the future of the City as a whole. Local radio was also weak in its coverage of the Plan. The Council should have done more to ensure the Local Plan was well covered by the local media. The Council relied too much on opposing political parties to raise awareness of the proposals through leaflets, mail outs and the internet.
- 5.1.10 The way in which the Council portrayed the sense of urgency needed in having a Local Plan adopted did much to discourage participation in the consultation. The persistent circulation of misinformation by leading Council officials over the apparently uncertain future of York's greenbelt if not defined in a Local Plan by 2015, was a direct attempt to ensure the Plan faced the least possible resistance, by forcing residents to decide between the Council's version of the greenbelt or no greenbelt at all. As previously discussed, this was not at all an accurate summation of the full extent of choices available to local residents. The Council should be held to account for this.
- 5.1.11 The breach of Statutory Instrument 2089 and the withholding of important information relating to the Local Plan should also be carefully considered by the Planning Inspectors when investigating the Plan-making process.

Conclusion

While the efforts that have gone into creating a development plan for York are welcome, sadly I cannot support the Council's draft Local Plan in its current form for the reasons detailed in the previous sections. Of particular concern has been the way in which the Council have calculated the 'need' for the scale of development proposed, particularly with regard to the housing, traveller and renewable energy policies. All of these should be reviewed before the Local Plan is progressed any further. The key question here, which remains unanswered, is whether York needs the scale of development proposed or whether this is what the Council's leadership wants? The Council's policies within the Local Plan should be based on watertight needs assessments. Instead it appears that needs assessments have been fashioned to justify the leadership's policies.

Due to scale of the development that has been proposed, to me, it fails to meet the core criteria within national planning policy guidance and is ultimately unsustainable. York's infrastructure, whether this is the road networks, education facilities, healthcare services or drainage and sewerage systems, is already under considerable strain. Pursuing unsustainable development in York could have hugely detrimental impacts, not just in terms of the quality of life of existing residents, but also on York's economy and future prosperity.

The biggest challenge facing York's businesses is transportation in and around the City and if existing problems were to deteriorate, I have little doubt that some businesses would choose to leave York while others would decide against coming here. The pursuance of unsustainable development in and around the City could also discourage people from living and working here. Any economic advantages from pursuing such large scale development would be short term and largely superficial. In the long term, York's economy would likely become stagnant and perhaps even contract.

The Council have not been able to provide guarantees or even strong explanations for how they plan to improve York's infrastructure. Much further work would need to be done in finding and guaranteeing the necessary investment in our infrastructure before any of the development should be allowed to go ahead. If the Council is unable to guarantee such investment, the Local Plan must be reviewed, with the development being reduced to much more sustainable levels.

York is a unique and prestigious City within the UK but its reputation also spans many international borders. Central to York's identity is the beautiful historic architecture, which can be found across the City, but is most notable in the Minster. However, equally important in making York such an attractive place to live, work and visit is the beautiful open countryside which surrounds the City and provides it with much of its character and setting. The draft Local Plan fails to account for the importance of York's rural greenbelt setting and instead proposes to litter the landscape with thousands upon thousands of new homes, Traveller sites and wind farms. All of this appears to have been proposed under the pretence that it is the Council's right to redefine the greenbelt. In doing so, the Council has disappointingly forgotten its duty to protect York's character and rural setting. Worse still they have relinquished their duty to act in the interests of all the rural communities which surround the City.

Julian Sturdy MP, 31st July 2013.