

Our Ref: SV/MCR/1731/Atkinson 100815

Your Ref

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**BY EMAIL AND POST**

10<sup>th</sup> August 2015

Dear Sir/Madam

**PLAN Selby: Summer 2015**

Thank you for your letters with regard the release of the above Evidence Base information on to the Selby website. I note that this is a non-statutory consultation and that the formal 'Preferred Options' document is due for publication in early 2016.

In the first instance we are deeply concerned that the method and timing of consultation used in this instance was inappropriate and was unlikely to yield either representative or properly considered responses.

Firstly, the Council chose to release a large volume of technical and interrelated studies and information via their website upon the opening of the consultation. This information, whilst technically available to members of the public and stakeholders, is neither capable of reading nor full comprehension prior to the closing of the consultation period. I would draw officers attention to the normal practice of preparing and considering evidence in advance of the policy and proposals decisions made in a development plan, and highlight the fact that stakeholders had approximately 3 days between the release of this information (29<sup>th</sup> June 2015), and then being asked for comments at the first PLAN Selby focussed engagement consultation event (3<sup>rd</sup> July 2015).

Whilst I acknowledge that this was the first of two events, of which the second was held on 15<sup>th</sup> July, the issue remains that there is insufficient time to have absorbed and analysed the information before the Council organised event intended to secure a reliable and representative response.

I would also like to note that the consultation period coincides with a period of time during the year when many people with an interest in these matters take their annual holiday, and are largely unavailable.

For these reasons, we have grave concerns with regard the methodology and timing adopted in the release of information in relation to this latest consultation by the District Council. The volume of information released by the Council is such that it is impossible to provide a meaningful response on the wide and interrelated issues which are sought to be addressed in the timescale provided. In our opinion it would have been more productive for the Council to have released the evidence base in advance of the consultation period, in order that it could be reviewed and assessed in a full and proper manner. This would have allowed the meetings with stakeholders, organised as part of the 'focussed engagement' to have been properly informed, rather than having to rely upon notes and summaries provided by officers and their consultants.

On this basis we will undertake to respond to the Council on the various detailed issues and aspects of the information during the course of the Further Consultation being carried out during 2015/16.

However, without prejudice to points and issues that we may wish to highlight and comment upon later in the process, the following comments are relevant to the ongoing work that the Council Officers are undertaking.

### ***Retail and Leisure***

The GVA Grimly Retail and Leisure Study (May 2015) appears to contradict the conclusions of the Drivers Jonas Report on Retail, Commercial and Leisure (Oct 2009), which point to there being no capacity either in the convenience goods market of the settlement for an extension to the town centre boundary, or any need to identify a specific site for additional provision. The previous study goes on to identify that there are opportunities within the existing town centre boundary to improve the offer and provision of the centre, and that this should be the focus of planning policies. There is no explanation for the apparent change in the evidence base in relation firstly to the convenience retail need and secondly the changed approach in addressing the perceived deficiencies on the town centre offer.

The technical detail of the GVA Grimly Retail and Leisure Study (May 2015) is still being considered and we will provide further comments in this regard during the course of the ongoing consultation period.

I note the reference on a number of occasions to the need for and lack of a 'formal park' in the settlement of Tadcaster, however have not seen any formal assessment or analysis of this apparent requirement. You will be aware that there are a number of formal and informal park areas in the settlement, many of which are identified in the Selby Local Plan. On this basis, whilst some stakeholders and individuals may consider the creation of formal parks etc. desirable, there is no evidence to show that the settlement is lacking or in need of such facilities.

I also note the reference to the need for more equipped children's play spaces in the settlement, and again note that there appears to be little or no evidence in the evidence base provided during the consultation for this apparent desire. There are play equipment and facilities which have been removed

by the Town Council due to under use, and it is unclear what part these location have played in reaching the conclusion that there should be more of these facilities.

### *Employment*

We note that in the face of evidence that there has been no take up of employment allocations in the last plan period, and that the Employment Land Study by GVA Grimly (2015) recommends deallocation of the previously allocated London Road site. It should be noted that the evidence and rationale behind the original allocation of this site, and indeed its detailed consideration during the Selby Core Strategy EIP was that it represented an aspirational location for further employment development, and is not supported by an identified need for a site of this size or location. The grounds for the latest evidence base document, citing the non-development of this 'aspirational' site as a reason for identifying an alternative site in the area are therefore irrational. The 'need' to develop a site for which there was never any 'need' identified, is not an argument that could be reasonably sustained.

The technical detail of the GVA Grimly Employment Land Study (June 2015) is still being considered and we will provide further comments in this regard during the course of the Councils ongoing consultation.

### *Site Specific*

We note the use of the Selby District Renaissance Strategic Development Framework (2006) as evidence in relation to Site Specific issues. It should be noted that the purpose of this document was intended to be considered as a series of options, and not a list of projects to be completed within a timescale. Indeed many of the projects were formed in the face of evidence from various external statutory parties that they were unlikely to support them. For example, the junction improvements to the bypass were directly in conflict with the Highways Agency's policy of prevent ne access points onto the A64. It is therefore of little surprise that this has not been delivered.

### *Flood Risk*

We await the updated Strategic Flood Risk Assessment that is currently being prepared by AECOM, before we can comment upon this issue further.

### *Green Belt*

In relation to all areas of Green Belt in the District relating to both Leeds and York, we are firmly of the opinion that these areas fulfil critically important roles and that boundaries should be preserved in their current form. We are particularly cognisant of the Councils apparent approach to Green Belt boundaries around Tadcaster in resolving the question of where to accommodate housing development. In this regard the government's Planning Practice Guidance clearly sets out that unmet housing need in a particular area is unlikely to meet the "very special circumstances" test to justify green belt

development, and that encroachment into the Green Belt is not one of the examples cited as potentially being an 'exceptional circumstance' capable of justifying an amendment to the Green Belt.

Whilst we await the completed Green Belt Study and supporting documents, the emerging information does not appear to justify an encroachment into the Green Belt in this area.

### *Strategic Countryside Gaps*

We support the identified location of a Strategic Countryside Gap to the south of Tadcaster, along the eastern bank of the Wharfe. Indeed we consider that the area of land to the north of the settlement on the western banks of the Wharfe should similarly be protected as this also performs well when assessed against the roles outlined in the Study. It is unclear why this area has been excluded from consideration in the ARUP study.

### *Summary*

The Council will obviously have received the detailed representations that my client has submitted to the initial consultation during 2014. These representations remain valid and an important feature of my clients position in relation to the wide range of issues facing Tadcaster.

I would reiterate that my client is keen to see the delivery of a number of sites throughout the settlement for a variety of uses and would welcome the opportunity to discuss the options available for a wide variety of sites in the area.

I trust that the above is clear however please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any further information or have any queries.

Yours sincerely

Stuart Vendy

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