

Winchester District Local Plan (2020-2040)

Hearing Statement Relating to Matter 1 On Behalf of Bellway Strategic Land

April 2025

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Client

Bellway Strategic Land

Date of Issue

4th April 2025

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This Hearing Statement has been prepared on behalf of our client Bellway Strategic Land ('Bellway') and the landowners' agent Ian Judd and Partners in response to the publication of the Winchester District Local Plan 2020-2040 (the 'Plan').

1.2 Representations have previously been submitted to the Council's Regulation 18 and Regulation 19 consultation stages of the Winchester District Local Plan on behalf of Bellway and the landowners' agent; this included documentation which set out the significant planning benefits of the site, which adjoins the settlement boundary of Bishop's Waltham.

Bellway Homes' Interest

1.3 Bellway Homes have a specific interest in land within the Plan area adjacent to Crown Hill House, to the east of Botley Road, Bishop's Waltham, Winchester, SO32 1DQ. Botley Road, the B3035, is a main road into Bishop's Waltham from Botley to the south. The site comprises a single field paddock that is framed by a mature hedgerow interspersed with trees on its northern, eastern and southern boundaries and a modest hedgerow on its western boundary.

1.4 The site measures approximately 2.62 hectares and is currently an undeveloped parcel of land that adjoins the settlement boundary of Bishop's Waltham to the south-east. The site is situated between existing dwellings and the character of the site is influenced by the presence of these dwellings and the urban edge of the settlement to the north.

1.5 The site is sustainably located within walking distance of the town centre and is connected by pavements. The measured walking distance between the centre of the site and the clock tower in the centre of St George's Square is just 395 metres, this being a comfortable, convenient and very sustainable five-minute walk.

1.6 There are bus stops located at St George's Square within 400m of the site providing good connections to Winchester, Fareham and Portsmouth and numerous small settlements between, including Wickham and Swanmore. The site is a sustainable location for development in our view and this site represents a valuable opportunity for a development which would relate very well to the existing settlement.

1.7 The site is shown outlined in red on the aerial photograph below and full details of our vision for the site are contained within the 'Botley Road, Bishop's Waltham Vision Document' that was submitted alongside Regulation 19 stage representations.

- 1.8 The site has not been allocated for development; it is therefore an 'omission site' and we continue to promote it for development because of our concerns that the Plan will not deliver enough homes that the evidence confirms are required.
- 1.9 The site is shown edged in red below, and this helps to show the site's relationship with the town, the high street, the town square and local schools. The aerial photograph shows the recent developments to the north-west of the site that were considered to be developments in sustainable locations despite their location further away from the town centre.



Aerial Photograph Showing the Site Outlined in Red, by Courtesy of Google Maps © All Rights Reserved

This Statement

- 1.10 This brief Hearing Statement has been prepared in accordance with the prevailing planning policy and guidance, in particular the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), September 2023 and the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG).
- 1.11 We do not seek to unnecessarily repeat points raised in the representations submitted by Bellway, but we have answered the questions posed by the Planning Inspector in the Matters, Issues and Questions (ED13) where we feel it would be helpful to do so.
- 1.12 Gillings Planning, on behalf of Bellway and the landowners' agent wish to take a full and active part in the relevant Hearing sessions relating to their interests in the site.

2.0 Our Responses to the Matters, Issues and Questions

Matter 1 – Procedural and Legal Requirements

Issue: Whether all Statutory and Regulatory requirements have been met?

Duty to Cooperate

Q1. Is there clear evidence that the Council has engaged constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis with neighbouring authorities and prescribed bodies in accordance with section 33A of the 2004 Act, in respect of strategic matters with cross-boundary impacts considered through the preparation of the Plan?

Q2 In particular in relation to the unmet housing need in Partnership of South Hampshire area (PfSH) and *individual* adjoining Councils, especially Portsmouth and Havant and Basingstoke in relation to the establishment of a new community at the Popham Airfield and Micheldever Station?

- 2.1 We provide a brief response to these two questions below in a single response because the issues are so intertwined in our view.
- 2.2 As set out in Section 2 our Regulation 19 representations, and not repeated here, we have expressed concerns that there has been a failure of the Duty to Cooperate with regards to repeated requests from Portsmouth City Council and Havant Borough Council that Winchester City Council only sought to try and address very late in the Plan production stages. I remain concerned that both Portsmouth and Havant Councils have toned down their most recent responses to the Council; but it remains that there are substantial unmet needs that have not been addressed; and so it is difficult to see how anyone could state that the Council has engaged “constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis”.
- 2.3 We are also concerned that the Partnership for South Hampshire has met only once since the revised Standard Method was published on 12th December 2024 and has not yet considered the implications of the Standard Method, not even discussed it at all.
- 2.4 The PfSH Joint Committee met on 5th March 2025 and the published Agenda contained the 11 items listed below.
1. Apologies for absence and changes in joint committee membership
 2. Minutes

3. Chair's Announcements
4. Declarations of Interest
5. References from the PfSH Overview and Scrutiny Committee
6. Deputations
7. PfSH Coordinator's Report
8. PfSH Support for the Cultural and Creative Industries
9. Budget Monitoring and Proposed Budget for 2025-26
10. Nutrient Mitigation Supply and Demand
11. Deployment of the Local Nutrient Mitigation Fund

- 2.5 We have reviewed the PfSH Coordinator's report and we can find no reference to the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) or Standard Method and its implications on spatial planning and strategic planning in the region.
- 2.6 We are also concerned that since preparing our Regulation 19 Representations a decision was taken by officers at East Hampshire District Council (EHDC) to remove the Council from the PfSH.
- 2.7 On 11th December 2024, just before the revised NPPF and Standard Method was published, the Leader of EHDC wrote to PfSH to remove EHDC from the partnership citing concerns with national planning policy and future proposals in regard to strategic planning in England.
- 2.8 The PfSH has still not published any further housing papers whatsoever regarding the strategic scale housing development required in the region and has not published any updates on the Broad Areas of Search for Growth it identified in December 2023.
- 2.9 PfSH has fallen worryingly silent on housing growth matters and this leads us to conclude that any reliance on the PfSH to assist with the Duty to Cooperate is questionable.

Sustainability Appraisal

Q3. The SA tested five spatial strategy options: a development strategy based on the adopted Local Plan, focusing development on Winchester and the larger more sustainable settlements; a strategy based on a new strategic allocation/new settlement; a strategy based on dispersing development around the District largely in proportion to the size of existing settlements; and, a variation of option 1, known as option 1A, which provides for a higher total number of dwellings. It takes account of existing commitments, windfall allowance and has the effect of reducing development in the South Hampshire

Urban Area and increasing it in Winchester and the Market Towns and Rural Areas. Given national policy that strategic policies should, as a minimum, provide for objectively assessed needs for housing and other uses, as well as any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas should an option with a higher growth target have been considered?

2.10 The simple answer to this question is yes, of course. In our view, the Council should have considered higher growth targets when preparing the Plan. The failure to do so will not help the Council with its current housing problems.

2.11 Appeal Decision reference APP/L1765/W/24/3350662 dated 31st March 2025 relating to Land south of School Lane, Denmead contains an up to date picture of the housing crisis in Winchester and confirms that the Council does not have a five-year supply of land for new homes. Under a sub-heading entitled “The Framework – Housing Land Supply” paragraphs 32 to 35 state:

32. The Framework, published in December 2024, sets out that its new five year supply provisions should take immediate effect and include a revised standard methodology for calculating housing needs, along with the need for an appropriate buffer. As set out in Appendix 3 of the Addendum Statement of Common Ground, the Council acknowledge that the annual requirement under the Framework is for 1,157 dwellings per annum. As an illustration of the vast difference, the housing figure under the current development plan, which is over five years old, is for 676 dwellings per annum. The Council have also sought to justify a 5% rather than 20% buffer and I find no reason to disagree with this approach. Furthermore, the parties are in agreement on the 3,888 dwellings that make up the supply and thus, there was no need to look further into evidence on the individual sites, permissions and allocations.

33. The Council emphasise that the examination into the eLP is due to commence in April 2025 and will be seeking to establish a lower housing requirement than that required by the Framework under the transitional arrangements. The figure promoted in the eLP is 773 dwellings per annum. The Council’s calculation of its five year supply for this appeal is therefore based on a combination of the Framework requirement for year one and the need for years 2 – 5 being set by the eLP, assuming its adoption in late 2025.

34. Whilst the Council suggests that it can demonstrate a 5.4 year supply of housing based on its hybrid approach to calculating need and making a healthy deduction based on past over supply, I am not content that the adoption of the eLP can be considered so

certain or so imminent to accept this as a robust position. It is clear that the Council are progressing its eLP, but it was indicated at the hearing that it was only capable of attracting very limited weight. Therefore, whilst I do not seek to replicate the role of the examination, I am not persuaded by the evidence of the Council as part of this particular appeal that it can demonstrate a 5 year supply of housing land with appropriate 5% buffer.

35. Absent of any more robust evidence of the Council to the contrary as part of this appeal, I adopt the appellant's position which indicates that the presumption in favour of sustainable development set out in paragraph 11 d) of the Framework is engaged for decision making purposes.

Underlining is our emphasis.

Q4. In terms of assessing site selection, data relating to services and facilities was only available at the District level (i.e. for areas within the boundaries of Winchester District only) and this is noted as a limitation. In this regard, are the scoring and conclusions reached in the SA reasonable, sufficiently accurate and robust to inform the Plan?

2.12 As stated in our Regulation 19 representations we are concerned that the Council's assessment of the services and facilities of a place are not as robust as they could be. For example, Bishop's Waltham does not have a secondary school or college of its own, and children make the short journey (often by bus) to the secondary school in Swanmore and to Winchester, Eastleigh or Havant (for examples) for college education. The Settlement Hierarchy scores do not truly reflect the provision of services for each place.

Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)

Q1 In relation to the HRA, Natural England has raised concern regarding air quality impacts and nutrient impacts. The Council has produced a revised Nutrient Neutrality Topic Paper and Air Quality Assessment aimed to address Natural England concerns. It intends to update the HRA through an Addendum and produce a revised Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) with Natural England. When will the Addendum and SoCG be available?

2.13 We are concerned that such a vital piece of evidence has been retrofitted to the Plan evidence base after the submission of the Plan for examination. It is more evidence that the Plan has been rushed through to align with the transitional arrangements prescribed in the National Planning Policy Framework.

Local Development Scheme

Q1. Is the Plan compliant with the Council's Local Development Scheme (LDS) in terms of its form, scope and timing?

- 2.14 The Council's LDS does seek to deliver a Plan with the prescribed minimum of 15 years plan period from adoption; but it remains our view that the Plan is unsound and it will require substantial modifications if it can be made sound; and as such, these modifications will take time to be prepared. Whilst modifications are factored into the Council's latest LDS, they are not realistic in our view. We cannot see a scenario where the Plan is adopted in 2025.