

High Offley Neighbourhood Development Plan (Submission Plan)
Stafford Borough Council response to Examiner's questions (February 2020)

The Borough Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to questions 1 and 2 raised by the examiner for the High Offley Neighbourhood Development Plan through a letter received on 23 January 2020 (please refer to that letter for further details). The Borough Council provides the following responses:

1) European Obligations

Taking all of the above into account [see examiner's letter for details] please can Stafford Borough Council confirm that it has considered all relevant information and that it is satisfied (or is not satisfied) that the Neighbourhood Plan is compatible with European obligations?

The Borough Council considers that the Neighbourhood Plan is compatible with European obligations, having assessed all of the relevant information associated with the Screening Assessment of the High Offley Neighbourhood Plan, together with the Habitat Regulations Assessment for the adopted Plan for Stafford Borough.

2) Comments on Basic Conditions (matter for response from Stafford Borough Council)

Does Stafford Borough Council agree with the housing requirement calculations set out on page 9 of the Neighbourhood Plan?

The adopted Plan for Stafford Borough sets out the strategic approach for housing provision across the Borough area for the period 2011 to 2031 through Spatial Principle 2 (SP2), Spatial Principle 3 (SP3) and Spatial Principle 4 (SP4). 12% of the Borough's housing provision is identified to Key Service Villages, of which Woodseaves is one, and 8% is identified to the rest of the Borough area. Based on the requirement within the plan period for 10,000 new homes as a minimum, this equates to 1,200 new homes at the Key Service Villages and 800 new homes for the rest of the Borough area. The adopted Plan for Stafford Borough did not identify a specific housing requirement for Woodseaves or other Key Service Villages, or for the High Offley Parish area outside of Woodseaves, which would fall within the 'rest of the Borough' area.

The Borough Council understands and considers reasonable the approach used in the High Offley Neighbourhood Plan to establish the housing requirement for Woodseaves, as a 'small' Key Service Village of less than 500 dwellings requiring 48 new dwellings. However the rationale for calculating a requirement for the rest of the Parish area is less clear, and paragraphs 7.11 and 7.13 are not consistent with each other.

Paragraph 7.11 implies a provision of 24 dwellings in the rural area, but mentions 8 dwellings are planned or completed and a further 5 new dwellings are proposed. (Total 13). Paragraph 7.13 states that 5 additional dwellings have been identified in the rural area. The paragraph also states that 11 additional new dwellings including barn conversions will be supported in the rural area. It is not clear whether that is in addition to the 5, and to the 8 planned or completed (Total 24). The reference to 11 additional new dwellings including barn conversions may include the 5 additional dwellings or could be in addition to those. It is not clear. Furthermore, it is important to understand where these 11 additional new dwellings are located.

Has Stafford Borough Council been involved in the land allocation assessment process?

In terms of the land allocation assessment process as part of the High Offley Neighbourhood Plan Stafford Borough Council provided the Parish Council with advice and support through the early stages of the Neighbourhood Plan process, including suggesting the Parish Council carry out a call for sites exercise as well as community engagement to identify key issues leading to the Draft Neighbourhood Plan. However the Borough Council was not involved in the land allocation process of assessing and selecting sites.

Is Stafford Borough Council satisfied that each of the housing allocations are in general conformity with the strategic policies of the adopted development plan, have regard to paragraph 79 of the Framework and contribute to the achievement of sustainable development?

In terms of the housing allocations identified in and around Woodseaves (sites 06, 07, 10, 11, 15, 16) the Borough Council are satisfied that these are in general conformity with strategic policies of Plan for Stafford Borough. In particular these allocations are considered to be in general conformity with Spatial Principle (SP2), Spatial Principle 3 (SP3), Spatial Principle 4 (SP4) and Spatial Principle 7 (SP7).

Additionally, the allocations identified at Woodseaves are not considered to raise any issues in terms of paragraph 79 of the Framework. Similarly, the Borough Council is satisfied by the general sustainability of these proposed allocations.

With regard to the housing allocations proposed in the rural parts of High Offley Parish (sites 03, 05, 14 and 20) the Borough Council's response is as follows. These sites are not consistent with Plan for Stafford Borough policies SP7, C5 and E2. Therefore currently any planning application for new build development on these sites (except for essential agricultural worker accommodation) would be contrary to the Local Plan and would be very unlikely to be granted planning permission.

However, the basic condition only requires that the Neighbourhood Plan as a whole is in general conformity with strategic policies of the development plan. Taking that into account, and in view of the small number of dwellings proposed in rural parts of the parish, it is considered by the Borough Council that these housing allocations could be regarded as being in general conformity with strategic policies of the plan.

Turning to consider paragraph 79 of the Framework, the Borough Council is of the view that the isolated rural nature of these sites means they do not accord with this paragraph of national policy. In light of that, it will be for the independent examiner to determine whether not these sites meet the relevant basic condition.

Finally, it is the Borough Council's opinion that these isolated rural housing sites would not contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.

Is Stafford Borough Council satisfied that the campsite and canal mooring sites are in general conformity with the strategic policies of the development plan?

The campsite proposals (sites 18 and 19) are capable of falling within paragraph vii. of Policy E2 and according with Policy E6. In principle these proposals could meet the detailed criteria set out in Policy E2, but it will be the independent examiner to make that assessment.

With regard to the mooring proposals (CMB1 and 2), these are in principle capable of meeting the requirements of Policy E7. However, a detailed assessment against the criteria of that policy would be needed. The Borough Council would, however, query the appropriateness of the scale of the mooring proposals to their locality, and this issue will require consideration by the independent examiner under Policy E7.d.

In summary, the campsite and canal proposals are in principle capable of according with the strategic policies of the local plan, subject to more detailed analysis of the sites.