

**BABERGH & MID  
SUFFOLK JOINT LOCAL  
PLAN EXAMINATION**

**MATTER 4: SETTLEMENT  
HIERARCHY, SPATIAL  
DISTRIBUTION OF  
HOUSING AND HOUSING  
SITE SELECTION  
PROCESS**

**REP ID: 21807, 21808,  
21809, 21810, 21811,  
21812**

**HEARING STATEMENT**

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## MATTER 4 – SETTLEMENT HIERARCHY, SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSING AND HOUSING SITE SELECTION PROCESS

### Introduction

- 1.1 This Hearing Statement for Matter 4 has been prepared by Carter Jonas LLP on behalf of Obsidian Strategic Ltd to respond to the Inspector's questions. Obsidian Strategic Ltd has promoted land east of Church Road in Thurston as an additional allocation for up to 500 dwellings in two phases.
- 1.2 Obsidian Strategic Ltd submitted representations to the pre-submission draft Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan (Draft BMSJLP) that address the issues raised in Matter 4. The relevant Id. numbers for those representations are as follows:
- Policy SP03: Settlement Hierarchy – Rep Id. 21807
  - Policy SP04: Housing Spatial Distribution – Rep Id. 21808
  - Paragraph 9.08: Decision-Making Process for Site Allocations – Rep Id. 21809
  - Paragraph 9.12 & Table 4: Minimum Housing Requirement for Neighbourhood Plan Areas: Rep Id. 21810
  - Appendix 1: Housing Trajectory – Rep Id. 21811
  - Part 3: Maps & Allocations – Thurston Sites – Rep Id. 21812

### Matter 4 – Settlement Hierarchy, Spatial Distribution of Housing and Housing Site Selection Process

*4.1 Has the settlement hierarchy set out in Tables 2 and 3 been derived using a robust and objective process?*

- 1.3 Yes. The Settlement Hierarchy Review Topic Paper November 2020 [Doc Ref. EP01] identifies the services and facilities available in each settlement in a matrix and provides a score based on the number and type of services and facilities provided. The matrix score for Thurston is 30, making it the second highest scoring Core Village. It is appropriate that Thurston is defined as a Core Village. However, the planned growth and the sustainability credentials of Thurston provide support for the Core Village to be upgraded to a Town/Urban Area when the BMSJLP is next reviewed. In this regard, Thurston has a larger population when compared with Eye, which is identified as a Market Town.

*4.2 Is it sufficiently clear how policy SP03(1) would be applied to (a) development on sites allocated in the plan (b) applications for development not on sites allocated in the plan?*

- 1.4 No comment.

*4.3 Is the requirement to demonstrate "exceptional circumstances" for development outside of defined settlement boundaries in isolated locations consistent with NPPF paragraphs 79 and 83?*

- 1.5 No comment.

*4.4 Are the criteria of policy SP03(4a-c) of relevance to the Settlement Hierarchy and do these relate to issues covered by other policies of the plan?*

1.6 No comment.

*4.5 Is there sufficient clarity as to whether policy SP03(4d) concerns the cumulative impact of the various effects of an individual development proposal or the cumulative impact of more than one development proposal?*

1.7 No comment.

*4.6 Is the proposed distribution of development set out in policy SP04, based on robust and objective evidence and is it justified and consistent with national policy? Does the distribution appropriately reflect the Ipswich Strategic Planning Area-wide growth objectives?*

1.8 The distribution of development should be based on the principles of sustainable development, with development directed to locations with no significant environmental constraints and which are accessible by sustainable modes of transport. Core Villages, including Thurston, are a suitable location to accommodate additional development.

1.9 As set out in the Obsidian Strategic Ltd representations to Paragraph 9.12 and Table 4 (see Rep Id. 21810) the figures for sites with planning permission for each category of the settlement hierarchy needs to be updated because some of the sites allocated in Draft BMSJLP have been granted planning permission since the base date of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018. For example, in Thurston: 490 dwellings had outline planning permission at 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018; approx. 800 additional dwellings have subsequently been granted planning permission; and approx. 200 dwellings do not have planning permission (but an application has been submitted) and are allocated (Allocation Ref. LA089). The 'core villages' column within the Mid Suffolk table in Policy SP04 should be updated accordingly.

1.10 It should be noted that most of the approx. 800 dwellings that have been granted planning permission in Thurston since April 2018 were approved at a time when Mid Suffolk District Council could not demonstrate a five year housing land supply and policies related to the supply of housing were identified as out-of-date. While it might appear that a disproportionately high amount of housing in Mid Suffolk is directed to the Core Villages, a significant proportion of that supply already has planning permission and was approved to address a housing land supply shortfall. The decision to grant planning permission for residential development in Thurston does highlight that it is a sustainable settlement with no significant constraints to development.

*4.7 Is it sufficiently clear how the numbers and percentages of new homes, by settlement hierarchy categories, set out in policy SP04 will be applied in the determination of planning applications for housing development?*

1.11 No comment.

*4.8 Are the "Total homes required" figures for Neighbourhood Plan Areas, detailed in Table 4, a sum of the outstanding planning permissions (as of 1/4/18) and the sites allocated for housing in the plan in each Neighbourhood Plan Area? If so:*

*(a) are all outstanding permissions from after 1/4/18 identified as housing allocations in the plan or do they need to be otherwise accounted for?*

*(b) is it sufficiently clear as to how and when the requirement to identify the indicated total number of homes required in each Neighbourhood Plan (NP) Area will operate in practice; in particular:*

*(i) in respect of outstanding permissions in NP areas which expire (both those pre- and post-dating 1/4/18)?*

*(ii) in respect of housing sites allocated in the plan in NP areas for which planning applications do not come forward?*  
*(iii) is not flexibility to reflect existing permissions/housing allocations which do not come forward already accounted for in the approximate 20% buffer of housing provision over the housing need targets?*

- 1.12 Table 4 sets out the housing requirement for designated neighbourhood plan areas. As set out in the Obsidian Strategic representations to Table 4 (see Rep Id. 21810) the figures for sites with planning permission and allocations for Thurston needs to be updated because since the base date of 1st April 2018 some sites in the village have been granted planning permission. As explained in the Obsidian Strategic representations to Appendix 01: Housing Trajectory and Part 3: Maps and Allocations for Thurston, most of the sites that are 'allocated' in Thurston already have planning permission, and thus should be treated as commitments and not allocations. The only large allocation site that does not currently have planning permission (but is the subject of a planning application) is the land east off Ixworth Road (Allocation Ref. LA089) for 200 dwellings.
- 1.13 The Thurston Neighbourhood Plan makes no allocations for housing, but instead identifies those sites with planning permission located on the northern edge of the village – see Figure 13 on page. 76 of the Neighbourhood Plan. It should be noted that all of those sites were granted planning permission at a time when Mid Suffolk District Council could not demonstrate a five year housing land supply. As an adopted document, the made Thurston Neighbourhood Plan is now fixed until it is reviewed, as such no further housing allocations can or will be made through this neighbourhood plan process in the short or medium term.
- 1.14 Therefore, in respect of Thurston, it is requested that Table 4 is amended to reflect the quantum of development that has been granted outline planning permission and should state as follows:
- 1,290 dwellings with outline planning permission;
  - 200 dwellings allocated in Draft BSMJLP; and,
  - 0 dwellings to be delivered from Thurston Neighbourhood Plan.

*4.9 The Councils have stated that “the settlement hierarchy and the distribution of development between settlement categories have not been of particular significance in the selection of housing sites, to the extent that they might be overriding of other factors” (paragraph 4.01 of Doc G01). In view of this is it justified and effective to require existing permissions/housing allocation sites which are not implemented to be offset by other sites within the same Neighbourhood Plan Area?*

- 1.15 No comment. This question does not apply to Thurston, since most of the 'allocations' in the village have already been granted planning permission outside of the plan-making processes for Draft BMSJLP and the made Thurston Neighbourhood Plan. Thurston is a sustainable location for additional development, and sites with planning permission in this village have been and are being implemented.

*4.10 Have the housing sites allocated in the plan been selected against possible alternatives using a robust and objective process? [Note: the soundness of specific housing allocation sites and their relevant policy criteria will be considered as part of Matter 9 and this question focusses on the overall approach by which the sites were appraised and selected.]*

- 1.16 No. The site selection process, and the assessment of some sites in the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) in particular, is not robust or objective. The SHELAA is one of the key

evidence base documents that has informed decisions about which sites should be allocated in Draft BMSJLP. Obsidian Strategic Ltd is promoting land east of Church Road in Thurston, and this response refers to that site as an example where the site assessment process is not robust or objective. Obsidian Strategic Ltd submitted representations to Paragraph 9.08 and Part 3: Maps & Allocations – Thurston Sites, which are relevant to the site selection process - see Rep Id. 21809 and 21812. A Vision Document was prepared for the promoted development and submitted with Rep Id. 21812, which explained how the design and layout of development could address the characteristics of the site and surrounding area.

- 1.17 The land east of Church Road in Thurston was promoted through the SHELAA process by the landowner (Site Ref. SS0911). The conclusions of the site assessment were as follows: *“Site has poor connectivity to the existing settlement and lies within an area of high heritage sensitivity”*. As a consequence, the site was discounted and not assessed further. These conclusions are not correct for the following reasons.
- 1.18 There are a number of housing commitments on the northern edge of Thurston, most of which have planning permission, including land west of Church Road. Therefore, in the near future, the site promoted by Obsidian Strategic Ltdsite will be immediately adjacent to residential areas. In addition, the promoted site is immediately adjacent to the settlement boundary for the village. In these circumstances the promoted site is, and will be, well connected to the existing settlement boundary.
- 1.19 As set out in Section 3.3 of the Vision Document, the promoted site is within walking distance of the services and facilities within Thurston. There is an existing and well-used public footpath network that connects the promoted site and the surrounding countryside to the village. A traffic free walking route connects Church Road with School Lane, allowing a direct route from the site to the village. The promoted development would upgrade the existing pedestrian facilities, including new sections of footway, lighting, and new and improved crossings. These improvements would actively encourage walking and cycling to and from the site. Therefore, the site is well connected to the existing settlement, and the promoted development would seek to enhance that connectivity with improvements to pedestrian facilities.
- 1.20 Section 3.6 of the Vision Document sets out the heritage matters for the site and promoted development. The site falls within the setting of the listed church of St Peters (Grade II), Thurston War Memorial (Grade II), Manor Farm (Grade II\*) and farm buildings (Grade II), and Green Farm (Grade II). The potential impact on heritage assets is not substantial and can be reduced through careful design and layout including by avoiding built development within the setting corridor of listed buildings. The Concept Masterplan for the promoted site includes a green corridor between the heritage assets to the east and west of the site in order to mitigate the impact on heritage. Therefore, the sensitivity of the heritage at the site can be address by design, and this is not a constraint to development in this location. It is noted that heritage was not identified as a constraint to any of the other committed developments located on the northern edge of Thurston, including land west of Church Road, despite these sites falling within the setting of the same heritage assets as land to the East of Church Road. A consistent approach should be applied to the assessment of sites.

- 1.21 The justified soundness test contained in Paragraph 35 of the NPPF requires plan-making decisions to be based on robust evidence. As demonstrated above, the assessment of the land east of Church Road in Thurston within the SHELAA is not robust in terms of the findings for connectivity/accessibility and design and layout should have been taken into account for the heritage assessment.
- 1.22 The findings of the SHELAA for land east of Church Road in Thurston ((Site Ref. SS0911) should be amended to reflect the above. Contrary to the findings of the SHELAA the site is adjacent to existing commitments in the village, is evidently accessible by walking and cycling, and heritage impacts can be mitigated by careful design. If the assessment of this site had been undertaken in accordance with the Government's guidance then it would not have been discounted in the SHELAA, and should have been allocated in Draft BMSJLP.

