

CASE TO THE INQUIRY

July 2013

Inquiry into the appeal by Crest Nicholson (South West Ltd) following the non-determination of their application for planning permission for a residential development of up to a maximum of 99 units, access and associated works at Manor Road, Saltford BS31 3AB

Planning Inspectorate Reference APP/F0114/A/13/2195351

Bath & North East Somerset Council Ref: 12/0531/OUT

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1. Introduction & Summary

1.1 This case is presented jointly by Salford Environment Group (over 260 members), and the Salford Green Belt Campaign. It is based on local knowledge including hundreds of discussions with individual residents of our community during the petition and with SEG's membership.

1.2 This case is made as a representation of the views and opinions expressed by nearly 1,000 local residents who signed the campaign's petition that was specifically against this development and against building on Green Belt land in Salford, and the 156 residents who voted against the development at the public meeting held on 5th January 2013. It is also a representation in support of the 93% of households that responded to the Salford Parish Plan questionnaire in 2009 who specifically said that they want Salford's Green Belt protected, not built upon. It is relevant that they gave that view before they were aware of this planning application that has arrived some 3 years later.

1.3 We are strongly opposed to this proposed development for numerous reasons that have been submitted to B&NES in over 400 objections from 500 individuals and organisations. It is outside Salford's housing development boundary so cannot be classed as infilling and therefore falls outside the permitted exceptions for Green Belt development in NPPF paragraph 89. There are two key reasons why we are against this proposed development on our Green Belt.

1.4 **Firstly**, it is not sustainable development. The Sustainability Appraisal commissioned by Salford Environment Group that we have submitted as key evidence to the Inquiry is unequivocal in supporting this assessment. Furthermore, the Sustainability Appraisal includes recent Ministerial correspondence that shows that the Government does not intend for Green Belt and agricultural land such as this to be developed.

1.5 **Secondly**, there is a strong feeling locally that Salford will be treated unjustly if this appeal is won and the planning application is permitted to proceed. B&NES, rather than a housing developer, is democratically elected by the local community to plan and determine where new housing developments should be located through its Core Strategy and place-making consultation process. We feel strongly that if allowed to proceed, this development would not only extend the existing housing development boundary against the wishes of local residents, but set a dangerous precedent for other developments on our Green Belt.

1.6 This is inappropriate development in the Green Belt that will affect its openness and permanence at this location, degrade the rural village setting of Salford, and would be contrary to the Green Belt purpose of safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.

2. The Case from Salford Environment Group (SEG) & the Salford Green Belt Campaign

2.1 Localism & decisions affecting the Green Belt

2.1.1 In his statement on “Housing and Growth” to the House of Commons on 6th September 2012, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Eric Pickles)¹ said:-

“The green belt is an important protection against urban sprawl, providing a “green lung” around towns and cities. The coalition agreement commits the Government to safeguarding green belt and other environmental designations, which they have been in the new national planning policy framework. The Localism Act allows for the abolition of Labour’s regional spatial strategies which sought to bulldoze the green belt around 30 towns and cities across the country, subject to the strategic environmental assessment process, as outlined in my statement of 3 September 2012, *Official Report*, column 5WS.”

“As has always been the case, councils can review local designations to promote growth. We encourage councils to use the flexibilities set out in the national planning policy framework to tailor the extent of green-belt land in their areas to reflect local circumstances. Where green belt is considered in reviewing or drawing up local plans, we will support councils to move quickly through the process by prioritising their local plan examinations. **There is considerable previously developed land in many green belt areas, which could be put to more productive use. We encourage councils to make best use of this land, whilst protecting the openness of the green belt in line with the requirements in the national planning policy framework.**”

(Note: Text underlined and highlighted to identify appropriate policy for this development.)

¹ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmhansrd/cm120906/wmstext/120906m0001.htm>

2.1.2 That statement of Government policy on the green belt in the context of housing and (economic) growth makes it clear that the Government only expects previously developed land in Green Belt areas to be put to more productive use. The Government does not seek or expect to see the development of undeveloped land within the Green Belt.

2.1.3 Furthermore, due to the nature of the application, if this development were permitted it would show that developers can determine planning policy in our area and not B&NES Council who have been democratically elected to take responsibility on our behalf for that role.

2.1.4 If this development was allowed to proceed it would contravene the B&NES Local Plan 2007 and also the forthcoming Core Strategy that will replace the Local Plan within the coming months.

2.1.5 Statements by Government Ministers and Departments on how localism is intended to affect planning policy are well known. The Ministerial Foreword to the 2012 'National Planning Policy Framework' by Planning Minister Greg Clark states how important our natural environment is to our well-being and that until recently, i.e. before the change of Government in 2010, "*planning has tended to exclude rather than include people and communities*".

2.1.6 Likewise, on the central Government website (gov.uk) the Department for Communities and Local Government describes the Government's policy for giving communities more power in planning local development. It states that under the Localism Act 2011 "*new powers are in addition to existing opportunities for community involvement, which are already part of the planning system*", and, "*We want people to be able to influence decisions about new and modified buildings and facilities in their area.*"

2.1.7 Local people in this community have overwhelmingly shown that they wish this Inquiry to reject this planning application. That would be an opportunity to implement the Government's localism policy and prove that localism is a genuine objective that can be met.

2.1.8 For localism to be meaningful when it comes to land-use planning for house building, Government targets should be implemented through consultation by the Local Planning Authority. That in turn would lead to an agreed local strategy, the Core Strategy. Therefore, the location of new housing developments would not be determined by developers wishing to build on potentially vulnerable parcels of undeveloped land.

2.1.9 There is a strong feeling in Saltford that its residents will be treated unjustly if this planning application is permitted to proceed regardless of the wishes of the local community and the democratic processes put in place to enable developments to be planned and implemented through proper consultation and planning, i.e. the Core Strategy.

2.1.10 The fact that B&NES's Core Strategy has been behind schedule is not a reason to force through a development on our Green Belt. Subjective opinions on the deliverability of the B&NES draft Core Strategy for bringing forward sufficient new houses to meet targets set by central Government do not provide a valid reason to build on other areas of undeveloped land including on the Green Belt.

2.1.11 If there are any outstanding problems or doubts over the deliverability of a 5 year land supply, those should be addressed in other ways. This would preferably be through bringing

forward the building of houses on brownfield sites already identified in the draft Core Strategy and independently appraised to be suitable on sustainable development grounds; but not by the removal of our Green Belt outside the housing development boundary at the request of a housing developer.

2.1.12 The recently revised draft Core Strategy published in March after much research and deliberation by B&NES does not include Saltford's Green Belt. The process that led to the draft Core Strategy was informed by an independent Green Belt review by the consultants Arup. The report from Arup, dated April 2013, said that this area of Green Belt "*helps to preserve the identity and setting of the village of Saltford*".

2.1.13 According to the Planning Department at B&NES Council in its advice to B&NES Councillors dated 29th April 2013, "*the current version of the housing delivery trajectory for the Core Strategy period, incorporating the latest changes and proposed Green Belt sites, identifies a potential supply of 4,423 between 2013 and 2018. This is a surplus (over the 20% buffer) of 436 i.e. a 33% buffer.*"

2.1.14 Many residents feel strongly that to allow this development to proceed would be to disrupt and penalise the residents of Saltford for something that is completely outside of our control.

2.1.15 The local community knows better than anyone else the dynamics, the problems and the culture of village life in Saltford. In other words this is a local view of people who actually live here; the real long-term stakeholders in our Green Belt land.

2.1.16 The developer refers to a consultation exercise with the local community in its "Grounds of Appeal" and that feedback was invited. It is of interest to us that no detailed analysis report of the feedback has been provided. Was the local community favourable towards the proposed development? From our evidence we would suggest they were not.

2.2 Sustainability Appraisal

2.2.1 We acknowledge the importance that the Government attaches to house building as a driver of national economic recovery. However, there is no exceptional reason or any special circumstances why this development on Saltford's Green Belt should be permitted. This is not a housing development that meets sustainable development criteria – the core underpinning planning principle that the Planning Inspectorate is required by Government to observe.

2.2.2 Crest Nicholson describe “Saltford as one of the most sustainable villages in the B&NES area” as one of its grounds for appeal. That can be taken as saying “Saltford is so sustainable that it doesn’t matter if we make it less so by destroying some of its Green Belt, adding traffic volumes (as most working-age residents drive elsewhere to work and for major shopping trips), reducing air quality and increasing hazards to busy local roads, and all the other issues that would make Saltford less sustainable through this development”.

2.2.3 Saltford residents do not claim that Saltford is one of the most sustainable villages despite sharing great pride in our village. We believe the development, if permitted, would make Saltford less sustainable, not more so.

2.2.4 The Sustainability Appraisal report commissioned by Saltford Environment Group and submitted as evidence to the Inquiry addresses the claims made by Pegasus in its Sustainability Statement and also on the seven “very special circumstances” listed by Crest Nicholson in their grounds for appeal.

2.2.5 The Sustainability Appraisal report has tested the proposed housing development against six key objectives that are based on the universally applied definition of sustainable development, “*Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*”. The report shows that the proposed development fails to meet 5 of the 6 key objectives and that the remaining objective is met only partially. The report also demonstrates with statements from Ministers that the current Government policies for permitting development on Green Belt and agricultural land do not include the type of undeveloped land at this location.

2.2.6 We therefore conclude that the development proposed by this planning application on Green Belt agricultural land (class 1, 2 and 3a, i.e. 'Best and Most Versatile' land) does not contribute to sustainable development. It would therefore make Saltford a less, not more, sustainable village.

2.3 Green infrastructure & landscape value

2.3.1 Our residents have shown overwhelmingly that the Green Belt in this location is part of what makes Saltford, Saltford. For people who live in towns and cities, their parks and green spaces are important to them for their quality of life. Likewise it is pockets of green fields, open spaces, trees, hedgerows and other areas such as rivers and lakes where nature can flourish within rural villages that provide those villages with a rural character. Green infrastructure within or bordering rural villages should be highly valued; it contributes to the health and quality of life for residents and visitors alike.

2.3.2 To suggest there is no landscape value for those fields, is a subjective view that does not reflect how the community itself feels about this open green space. Viewed from a distance, such as due south of the site (i.e. beyond the Golf course) or from the Cotswold AONB on the north and east side of the village, the contribution to the landscape by these fields may indeed be deemed as minimal as they are lost amongst surrounding trees and, from the Cotswold AONB, the Saltford housing settlement. However, in calculating the real value of a landscape it surely must be important to take account of how that landscape is perceived by the local community that lives on its doorstep and who experience and view the landscape on a regular basis as part of the local environment.

2.3.3 Those fields and their margins are seen not just from the adjacent houses facing or backing onto the fields but, more importantly, by walkers, dog walkers, runners, cyclists (Manor Road is part of the Strategic Cycling Network) and drivers passing along Manor Road - the main route for getting around the southern side of Saltford. They do, therefore, have a landscape value to the community and visitors to the village. They contribute to the feel of Saltford for residents living on the southern side of the village; the very people who see them the most. The fields are valued highly by the community and are an intrinsic part of that side of the village, as a green open space, and part of its green infrastructure.

2.4 Summary of the objections from residents

2.4.1 The need to protect Saltford's Green Belt, concerns over the potential traffic impacts on Saltford from this development – especially at peak times including the hazard for children associated with the Manor Road entrance to Saltford School opposite the site entrance, the effect on services including the school and school places, and the unsuitability of the development itself were the main reasons behind the many objections raised by Saltford's residents.

2.4.2 Attached as an Appendix to this paper is summary of the detailed analysis carried out by the Saltford Green Belt Campaign of the objections submitted to Bath & North East Somerset Council by residents.

3. Conclusion

3.1 A Green Belt designation is given and thus belongs to a local community to protect its surrounding land and setting. More than anyone else, it is local communities who live with and understand the real value of their Green Belt agricultural land and its landscape value.

3.2 Saltford Environment Group and the Green Belt Campaign are asking that the Inquiry Inspector prevents this part of our community's natural environment from being confiscated and permanently destroyed. If permission is given for this development to proceed, that would put the rest of our Green Belt at risk from developers.

3.3 We are asking for the outcome of this Inquiry to show that it is for local people and their local planning authority to determine where new housing should be located. That role is not for developers in trying to force through a development for their own short-term advantage. It is the local community that faces the real short, medium and long term disadvantages when developments like this are allowed to proceed.

3.4 For future planning applications of this nature we recommend that before the planning process is allowed to proceed to an advanced stage a Sustainability Appraisal should be produced as early as possible to: (a) inform the decision making process; (b) reduce the risk of giving consent to unsustainable development; and (c) reduce the anxiety and concern placed onto a community.

3.5 The Sustainability Appraisal report commissioned by SEG has shown that the proposed development is not sustainable development and that there are not any "very special circumstances" for permitting the loss of Green Belt agricultural land outside the housing development boundary at this location. The proposed development is therefore contrary to national planning policy for protecting both the Green Belt and agricultural land of higher quality as backed by written statements obtained from the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Planning and the Minister of State for Agriculture and Food (Appendix 5 to the Sustainability Appraisal).

3.6 We request on behalf of the vast majority of Saltford's community and the large volume of objections that have been submitted, that this Inquiry supports the principle of sustainable development, protects our Green Belt in accordance with the Government's Planning Policies and rejects the appeal and the associated planning application.

**Saltford Environment Group & Saltford Green Belt Campaign
July 2013**

Enquiries to Phil Harding by email to: phil@philharding.net

Analysis of the 412 objections submitted to Bath and North East Somerset Council against the planning application by Crest Nicholson for a residential development of up to a maximum of 99 units, access and associated works at Manor Road, Saltford BS31 3AB (BaNES Ref: 12/0531/OUT)

Findings

The main areas of concern raised by objectors (i.e. mentioned by at least 50%) were as follows:-

85% of objections included concern at the loss of **Green Belt** land. Many comments went into detail in respect of the relevant national and local policies to protect the Green Belt. 38% of the objection comments included specific reference to the NPPF protection of Green Belt. A significant number were concerned at the precedent that building on this Green Belt parcel of land would set.

84% were concerned about the additional **traffic volumes** that would be generated, especially at peak times on the main A4 and in Manor Road with 45% making reference to school drop-off and collection times. Almost 48% of objectors were concerned about the impact on **road safety** of the development, particularly in Manor Road itself and the Manor Road access point to Saltford Primary School and the adjacent Nursery school.

Over 55% of objectors commented about the effect on **services** in Saltford. 49% were concerned with the ability of the School to accommodate the extra children and 29% were concerned with the additional pressure that the development would place on the Doctors' surgery.

Over 50% of objections mentioned their concern at the **unsuitability** of the development; specific reference in their comments concerned housing density and scale, out of keeping with the character of the village and the wish to keep Saltford a village.

Methodology

During June 2013 a group of volunteers from the Saltford Green Belt Campaign each read through an allocation of all 412 individual objections submitted by 500 individuals and organisations to BaNES Council that are recorded and published on the BaNES website.

Each and every objection letter or electronic submission was individually read to identify the reasons stated by objectors as to why they were making an objection to this planning application. This data was then collated centrally. Where possible duplicate objections identified in this process were counted as one. Furthermore, where subsequent objections were re-submitted, for example in response to the announcement of a revised outline plan for 72 homes, these subsequent objections were, in each case, counted with the original objection as a single objection from one source.