

Note on Buckingham VALP Allocations

Submission VALP allocated three sites at Buckingham including site BUC051 - 300 houses on the western edge of the town south of the A422 Brackley Road.

The site BUC051 first came to the Council's attention as a Call for Site promoted in May 2014 for consideration in the VALP. However the allocation of BUC051 for around 300 homes derives from the Buckingham Neighbourhood Development Plan (BNDP) (Made Version October 2015) – identified as Site M in the BNDP. Policy HP1 of the BNDP allocates a total of five sites (Sites G – K) for 617 dwellings. Site M is confirmed in HP1 as a Reserve site of 300 dwellings that will only be required if one or more of the allocated sites (in the BNDP), with a total of 80 outstanding units is not brought forward before 2025. Notably only two sites G (400) and I (100) have more than 80 units in total, and the council is confident that both of these sites will be brought forward before 2025. It is therefore considered that it is highly unlikely that this reserved site will need to be brought forward and it is no longer considered appropriate to allocate this site in the Local Plan.

Debate at the Examination (17 July 2018 Day 5 Agenda Session 25) considered the dependency in full or part of the BUC051 site coming forward before the delivery of a Western Relief Road between the A421 Buckingham Bypass & the A422 Brackley Road to relieve traffic impact on Buckingham Town Centre which was an issue that had been raised by the county council immediately prior to the hearing session and they attended the hearing session to explain this.

The Inspector in his interim findings acknowledged this in para 49 of his Interim Findings where he states “during a hearing session it became apparent that BUC051 is dependent on a road proposal contained within the Buckingham Transport Strategy but nowhere mentioned in VALP”. However it was suggested by the Councils at the examination that part of the site might be able to proceed before the provision of the Western Relief Road, but this would depend on a more detailed assessment of traffic impacts on Buckingham town centre.

Accordingly, the Councils (AVDC & BCC) commissioned further detailed modelling work to fully understand the traffic impacts on Buckingham town centre and agree how much of Site BUC051 could come forward before mitigation in the form of a new link road between the A421 & A422 (Western Relief Road) was required.

That work is complete and the Highway Authority BCC has considered the outputs of the Buckingham Town Centre Modelling Report (May 2019) and concludes that:

“In relation to Buckingham, our view is that the detailed town centre modelling shows that BUC051 would have an unacceptable impact on the town centre, even if the development was phased. The only mitigation to congestion in the town centre that we have been able to identify is the Western Relief Road, as set out in the Buckingham Transport Strategy. However, it has been acknowledged that the scale of the proposed BUC051 allocation would be insufficient to provide funding for this mitigation measure. One option would be to increase the size of the allocation in order that the development was able to deliver the relief road. However, this would lead to a much larger allocation at Buckingham resulting in further modelling work being required to assess the potential impact on the A421. This suggestion does not take into account any site constraints such as flood risk.

The second option would be to delete the BUC051 site from the draft VALP”.

Moreover, the Inspector in his interim findings paragraph 36 noted that

“Whilst accepting that the Buckingham and Winslow Neighbourhood Plans seek to make those towns much more self contained communities and recognising that all settlements must be allowed to grow to retain their vitality and viability, the contrast between the north of the

district where the dominant settlement is not allowed to dominate the development strategy and the south of the district where the dominant settlement is encouraged to dominate the development strategy is startling. It is hard to escape the conclusion expressed by several representations that the spatial strategy in the north of the district would lead to increased lengths of commuting flows to and from Milton Keynes”.

The Inspector concludes in paragraph 37 that:-

“This would be contrary to national policy expressed in paragraph 34 of the NPPF which advises that plans should ensure that developments which generate significant movement are located where the need to travel will be minimised. It is therefore unsound. A modification to the plan is required to redress the balance, by increasing allocations in close proximity to Milton Keynes. For reasons summarised earlier, I reach the conclusion that insufficient land has been identified for housing and that additional allocations need to be made. This inevitably means revisiting the decision which led to the spatial development strategy known as option 3 in the Sustainability Appraisal being selected for VALP and so gives rise to an opportunity to redress the balance of the chosen spatial development strategy in the north of the district”.

Conclusions

BUC051 is allocated within the Neighbourhood Plan as a reserve site –but there is no reason to believe that the need for the Reserve site will be triggered given the level of development that will occur through other sites allocated in the Neighbourhood Plan.

BUC051 is not critical to the spatial strategy of VALP or to the needs of Buckingham. Even without the 300 homes of BUC051, Buckingham would still deliver 2,009 homes, 1,509 of which are commitments and completions as at March 2017. This level of development still generally reflects the character of Buckingham and is a sustainable level of development to support its role and function, consistent with the VALP strategy for settlement hierarchy and cohesive development at para 3.19.

Further detailed modelling work undertaken by the Council has identified unacceptable traffic impacts from this allocation on Buckingham Town Centre without significant mitigation in place – the Western Relief Road. The view of the Highway Authority is that the allocation should be deleted from VALP.

The Inspector identifies the need to redress the imbalance of the spatial strategy by increasing allocations in close proximity to Milton Keynes to minimise the need for travel in line with the NPPF. It is considered that the shortfall of 300 units can be made good as part of a larger allocation at Milton Keynes.

Proposed Modification

That BUC051 be deleted as an allocation at Buckingham because of unacceptable traffic impacts on Buckingham Town Centre and that the 300 dwellings be included in the increased allocations in close proximity to Milton Keynes.