



Newcastle-under-Lyme Local Plan Examination in Public Hearing Statement

Matter 6: Housing Allocations

On behalf of Persimmon Homes (North West) Ltd.

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Asteer Planning LLP has been instructed by Persimmon Homes (North West) Ltd (“Persimmon”) to prepare this Hearing Statement in relation to the Newcastle-under-Lyme (“NUL”) Local Plan 2020-2040 Submission Draft (“Submission Plan”) and the Matters, Issues and Questions (“MIQs”) posed by the Inspector.
- 1.2 Persimmon controls land to the East and West of Quarry Bank Road in Keele (“the site”) (Site Reference KL21¹) which has been promoted through the entirety of the Local Plan process. The site is wholly deliverable (being suitable, available and achievable) for residential development and could deliver significant public benefits, as demonstrated robustly by the evidence presented in duly made representations in August 2023 (at Regulation 18 Stage) and in October 2024 (at Regulation 19 Stage), which have been supported by a detailed Development Statement and Masterplan.
- 1.3 This Statement responds directly to the Inspectors MIQs at Matter 6 in relation to Site SP11 (Lyme Park) and should be read in parallel with our detailed Regulation 19 representations. Separate statements have been prepared in respect of the following matters and should be read in conjunction with this Hearing Statement:
- Matter 1b – Overarching Matters
 - Matter 2 – Spatial Strategy and Site Selection
 - Matter 3 – Green Belt
 - Matter 4 – Housing Requirement
 - Matter 5 – Housing Supply
- 1.4 It is our view that, in relation to the MIQs posed by the Inspector at Matter 6, that the allocation of Site SP11 (Lyme Park) is unsound and unjustified – and lacking in transparency or rigour. In summary:
- There is no clear rationale for the selection of Site SP11, and no justification to support its selection in the evidence base.

¹ Site Reference in the Evidence Base, including Site Selection Report and Assessments (Document ED029), SHLAA (Document ED006a) and Sustainability Appraisal (Document CD04)

- The site has significant technical and environmental constraints that have not been fully considered by the Council and which have not informed the site selection.
- The Council's Green Belt Assessment is fundamentally flawed, not up to date and does not consider the impact on the Green Belt of allocating SP11 (which is considered in more detail in our Matter 3 Hearing Statement).

- 1.5 Persimmon recommend that, should the allocation and selection of Site SP11 be considered unsound for the reasons set out in this and accompanying Hearing Statements, or a higher housing requirement, then Site KL21 should be considered for allocation based on the evidence presented and Persimmon's Regulation 19 Representations.
- 1.6 Site KL21 represents a logical and appropriate extension to Keele Village at the heart of Keele Village (and University Hub) settlement and the University growth corridor; and is highly sustainable with access to a range of existing services and facilities. The site provides an opportunity to deliver (if fully developed) up to 435 high quality family and affordable homes to meet the critical housing needs of the Borough.
- 1.7 Site KL21 has the scope to support the expansion of St John's CE (VC) Primary School in Keele, to release capacity and underpin the wider growth of the University growth corridor; or to deliver other community or active travel infrastructure to support Keele and the growth of the University corridor. The site can deliver development that meets the highest standards of sustainable design, delivers new local amenity for the existing Keele community and supports enhancement in biodiversity and accessible community open space.

2 HOUSING ALLOCATIONS

Q3.3: Are the sites allocated for housing sound, and in particular for each of the sites listed below:

a) Have the site constraints been appropriately taken into account in the allocation of the site?

2.1 This Hearing Statement should be read alongside our Hearing Statements for Matter 2 (Spatial Strategy and Site Selection) and Matter 3 (Green Belt), which set out flaws in the Submission Plan and evidence base in its overall approach to site selection in relation to Site's SP11 and (omission site) KL21. The issues set out in these statements is not repeated in full here, but in summary concludes that:

- The site selection process in relation to Site SP11 is not sound, and the Council's assessment of the site and lacks transparency or rigour, with a lack of justification to support its selection in the evidence base.
- The Council's Green Belt Assessment is fundamentally flawed and unsound in its assessment of Site SP11, which does not fully consider its impacts on the purposes of the Green Belt.

2.2 This statement provides further detail on why the site specific constraints, that have informed the selection of Site SP11, have not been fully taken into account.

Site SP11

2.3 The proposed allocation at Lyme Park (Site SP11 – including parcels SP11[1], SP11[2], SP11[3] and SP11[4]) has potential to generate significant impacts on the Green Belt, biodiversity, and Keele Village (and University Hub). Site SP11 is identified:

- Within the NUL Strategic Centre (Silverdale);
- As a site that is disaggregated into 4 land parcels, with a capacity for 900 dwellings, including:
 - SP11 (1) – Keele Square – a development of 255 homes, a local centre, including a health centre, to meet local needs and a 1 form entry Primary School, including an attractive public realm accessed from a new spur from A525 Keele Road / University Avenue roundabout.

- SP11 (2) – Keele Woods – a development of 310 homes accessed from A525 Keele Road.
- SP11 (3) – Ashbourne Drive – a development of 235 homes accessed from Ashbourne Drive.
- SP11 (4) – Park Road – a development of 100 homes accessed from a new road from the junction of Race Course and Park Road to the north east of the site. For SP11(4) no dwellings will be occupied before the cessation of the disposal of non-hazardous waste at the Whalley's Quarry Landfill Site, currently anticipated December 2026.

Assessment of SP11 Site Constraints

- 2.4 Persimmon consider that the Council has not fully taken into account, nor given sufficient weight to the significant site constraints that are inherent on Site SP11. The following provides a review of the key constraints that have not fully been addressed in the Submission Plan and evidence base:

Highways

- 2.5 Persimmon has undertaken a traffic impact analysis undertaken for Site KL21 in Keele (for 435 Units), which has indicated that there is sufficient capacity on the surrounding highway network, albeit with the mitigation at the A525 Keele Road/A525 Newcastle Road/A531 Crewe Road junction. The provision of 900 units on SP11 would generate considerably higher levels of traffic on the local highway network and therefore require mitigation at junctions.
- 2.6 There is limited scope for mitigation at the junctions in the vicinity of the site without requiring third party land, therefore, detailed assessment/analysis is required to demonstrate that the provision of circa 900 units can be accommodated on the network either with or without off-site highway works.

Ecology and Trees

Ecology

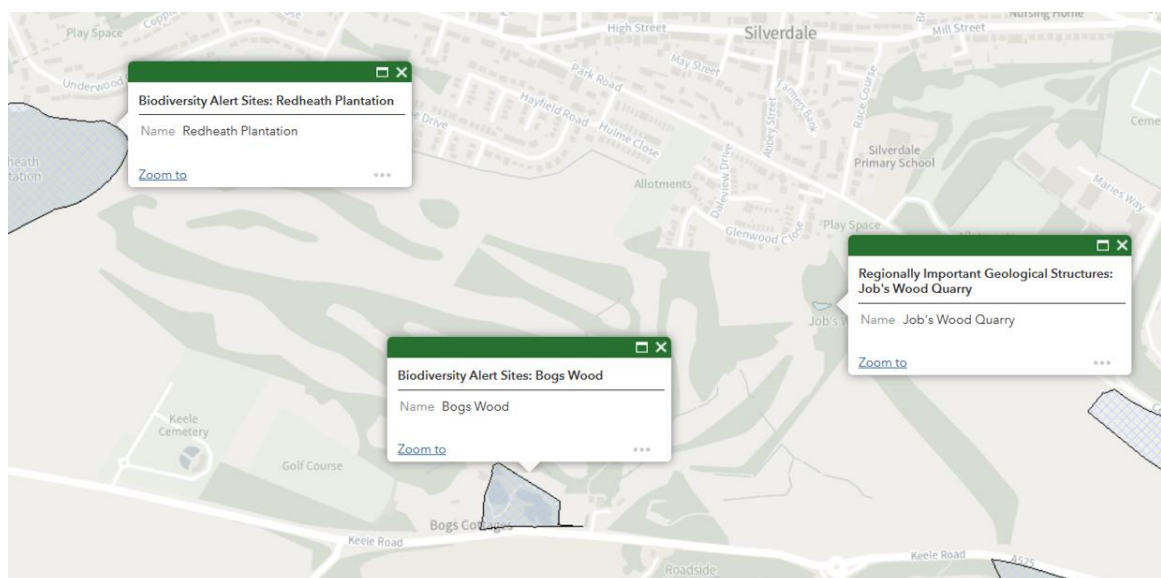
- 2.7 A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal was undertaken at Keele Golf Course by Ostara Ecology, which comprised of an online desk study, Phase 1 Habitat Survey, and an

ecological scoping survey which assessed the potential of the site to support species which could present a constraint to development.

- 2.8 The site has been unmanaged since 2014, and has been subsequently re-vegetated. This re-vegetation of the land has facilitated the growth of extensive areas of significant ecological value within the site. This includes 23.44ha of UK BAP priority habitat deciduous woodland with Ancient Woodland indicators, spread throughout the site. The site therefore serves as the ideal habitat to support an abundance of flora and fauna, and if further botanical surveys classify these areas of the site as ancient woodland, it would designate this as an irreplaceable habitat.

Ecological Designations

- 2.9 The streams and wider sites could be sensitive to hydraulic changes. A detailed statutory designated sites assessment up to 10km should be undertaken to ascertain the National Context of the site.
- 2.10 Within the site is 'Bogs Wood', a Biodiversity Alert Site and 'Job's Wood Quarry' which is identified as A Regionally Important Geological Structure. Adjoining the western boundary of the site is another Biodiversity Alert Site 'Redheath Plantation'. These clearly identified areas of ecological sensitivity are not fully considered in the 2024 GBA and have not been transparently assessed by the Council based on published evidence.



- 2.11 The baseline field survey confirmed the presence and potential presence of a number of species which all pose a high risk to development, and require further assessment/mitigation prior to the commencement of works. These are as follows:

Assessed Category	Key Constraints
<i>Biological Important Hedgerow</i>	There are native intact hedgerows to the north and east of the site.
<i>S41 (only) Habitats</i>	The deciduous woodland habitat is a priority BAP (biodiversity action plan) habitat. These habitats have priority status as they support ecological networks and species which are becoming increasingly rare in the UK.
<i>Protected Plants</i>	There are bluebells present in the woodland. These are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981).
<i>Great Crested Newts</i>	There are 10 ponds within 500m of the site; 6 present on site with a suitable aquatic and terrestrial habitat to support the species. The Great Crested Newt is a protected species.
<i>Bats</i>	The site is considered to offer high potential for foraging and commuting bats. Under Section 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), it is an offence for anyone without a licence to kill, injure, disturb, catch, handle, possess or exchange a bat intentionally. It is also illegal for anyone without a licence to intentionally damage or obstruct access to any place that a bat uses for shelter or protection.
<i>Badgers</i>	There is a potential presence of badgers. Badgers are protected under the Protection of Badgers 1992.
<i>Reptiles</i>	There is a potential presence of reptiles given the suitable habitat present.
<i>Nesting Birds</i>	The presence of a nesting buzzard was confirmed on site alongside a wide diversity of bird species and communities which were recorded during the phase 1 survey.

Invertebrates	The site is considered likely to support assemblages of invertebrates due to the micro-habitats available on site.
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2.12 The above table shows that development of the site could result in significant damage to a wide array of protected habitats, plants, and animals. Development of the scale and nature proposed cannot be viewed as sustainable, and would likely result in irreparable damage to the species and habitats affected.

2.13 The cumulative impact from the assessment, mitigation and known and unknown constraints resulting from the presence of these protected categories is a significant constraint on the deliverability of the site. We consider that the site has significant ecology value and does not represent a suitable or sustainable site for allocation.

Trees

2.14 There are several groups of trees across the site including heavily wooded areas within the site, with TPOs located along the southern boundary of the site (Keele Road) and also along the north eastern boundary (Park Road).

Landscape & Visual

2.15 The site is within the Keele Ancient Redland Farmlands Landscape Character Area. The site is also identified under 3 typologies in the Open Space Strategy (2022) including Amenity Greenspace (approximately 3.1ha), Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace (approximately 3.1ha) and Provision for Children and Teenagers (0.4ha).

2.16 The LCA describes the site as *"land comprising woodland vegetation... the site slopes steeply down from approximately 195m AOD in the south of the site to approximately 140m AOD in the north of the site along the existing settlement edge. The woodland and open grass areas provide the backdrop to the existing settlement and separate it from the Keele University campus to the south". This provides further evidence that development would result in both encroachment on the countryside, and the merging of two settlements. Development would also directly conflict the LCA Landscape Strategy which gives specific landscape guidelines for this character area type, stating to, "Conserve and enhance woodland on steep slopes".* There are several Open Spaces adjoining the site, which are Open Space Sites: 380 Redheath Plantation; 453 Keele Cemetery; 144 Job's Wood; and, 140 Park Road Allotments around the edges of the site. The Open Space and Green

Infrastructure Strategy designated the Open Space sites as either 'High Quality/High Value' or 'Low Quality/High Value'. The proposed actions for sites of these ratings are for the sites to be 'protected and enhanced'. Development of such a significant size as the one proposed at SP11 will likely result in damage to these areas of Open Space given the volume of inflows of people and the resultant increase in foot traffic.

2.17 Part 3 of the Landscape Character Assessment Study² performed a site-specific assessment to judge the overall impact of developing the site. This assessment identified a number of 'potential significant adverse effects' including potential for:

- built form to intrude on undeveloped, wooded hillsides that are characteristic of this area and provide the backdrop to existing settlement;
- development to be viewed as a conspicuous, large scale urban extension across the steep sides of the wooded hillside that provides the backdrop to Silverdale;
- development to contribute to coalescence of the separate settlements of Silverdale and Keele University campus;
- loss of public footpaths and land with recreation value that would alter local recreational opportunities and links between the urban and rural areas;
- loss of woodland and trees that would alter the settlement backdrop, local sense of enclosure and remove vegetation links through the local landscape.

2.18 The Overall Appraisal then judged that, *"larger residential development on this site would have a major adverse effect on the SA objective to strengthen the quality of the landscape and urban townscape and deliver well designed development which respects the local character and distinctiveness."*

2.19 Ultimately, allocating the site will result in a significantly weakened Green Belt; remove a significant area of land with existing recreation value, limiting local recreational opportunities and links between the urban and rural areas; threaten a number of identified high-quality open spaces; and, cause 'major adverse impacts' to the landscape and local character.

² Document ED017

Ground Conditions

- 2.20 The Green Belt Assessment considers ground stability and mining activity, and states the following for site SP11: *"Historic mining activities. Consultation with Coal Authority likely"*. There is limited further information with regard to this and it is unclear to what extent mining activity could have been prevalent below ground, without specific investigation. This should have been further investigated by the Council prior to the allocation of the site.

Summary of Site SP11

- 2.21 Persimmon's assessment of the site demonstrates that the selection of Site SP11 is not sound, and the Council's assessment of the site lacks transparency or rigour. Our assessment highlights that:
- There is no clear rationale for the selection of Site SP11, and no justification to support its selection in the evidence base.
 - The site has significant technical and environmental constraints that have not been fully considered by the Council and which have not informed the site selection.
 - The Council's Green Belt Assessment is fundamentally flawed, not up to date and does not consider the impact of allocating SP11 on the proposed settlement of Keele & Keele University or the wider countryside (as considered in more detail in our Matter 3 Hearing Statement).
- 2.22 Overall, Persimmon consider this site to be unsuitable for development and recommend that the Council consider it against the merits of Site KL21 – where a detailed comparative assessment with Site SP11 has been undertaken in Persimmon's Regulation 19 Representations.