

## SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING STATEMENT

**PROPOSAL** : Erection of thirteen dwellings  
**ADDRESS** : Ivy Cottage, Tythe Barn, Alton, ST10 4AZ  
**APPLICANT** : Vital Construction UK Limited  
**DATE** : July 2015 **JOB No.** : 2014-1983

### Introduction

Planning application SMD/2015/0151 proposes the erection of 13 houses on land at Ivy Cottage. The site is located part inside and part outside the Alton settlement boundary but it and neighbouring land either side has been proposed by the Council for consideration as a future housing site. The application site is within an area of suburb on the east edge of Alton. It is not in the village Conservation Area and has a suburban character comprising a mix of house age, design and size.

### The Proposal

Application SMD/2015/0151 has been objected to by the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust on the grounds that it involves the removal of an old orchard. This supplementary statement sets out the reasons for this view not being given over-riding weight in the balance of planning policies and objectives raised by the planning application.

### Evaluation

Application SMD/2015/0151 was preceded by a pre-application consultation. The relevant results of this are set out below together with an explanation of how these comments have impacted on the proposal.

#### **"Planning Policy"**

*NPPF (Framework):*

*Para 14 - Presumption in favour of sustainable development. For decision taking this means approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay and where the plan is absent, silent or policies out of date granting permission unless:*

- *Any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework, or*
- *Specific policies in the Framework indicate development should be restricted.*

*Core Strategy:*

*Policy SS6 - Rural Areas identifies a requirement for around 1680 new dwellings between 2006 and 2026 in accordance with the Area Strategies set out in policies SS6a - SS6c. The Site Allocations DPD will define the urban areas of larger villages by a Development Boundary and will allocate sites for development sufficient to ensure that the requirements set above can be met.*

*Alton has a good range of services and facilities and is identified as a larger village in Policy SS6a. This policy seeks to increase the range of available and affordable house types and to allocate a range of deliverable housing sites primarily within the built up area in locations across the village with good accessibility to services and facilities. Where development is required to be met on land outside the built-up area this will be only of a small scale and on sites which relate well to the built-up area, can be assimilated into the landscape and have good access.*

*Policy H1 - New Housing Development sets out criteria regarding mix, density, lifetime homes standards, amenity and design.*

*Policy H2 requires that residential developments of 5 dwellings (0.16ha) or more shall provide a target of 33% affordable housing.*

*Policies DC1 (Design Considerations) and T1 (Development and Sustainable Transport) are also relevant.*

- Although part of the site is within the development boundary, the majority of the site lies outside in the open countryside where new build housing is generally restricted to that which is essential to local needs.*
- The application site is included in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) ref (AL024). The SHLAA identifies over 2,000 potential housing sites which have all been assessed and classified in terms of availability, suitability and achievability. It is currently classified as a B, i.e. a site that could be developable for housing and is well related to the existing settlement.*
- Ivy house is not listed and there are no TPOs on the site (although trees present) but there may be some historic interest.*
- The Council is still at an early stage in its preparation of its site allocations DPD and has not yet undertaken public consultation on site options.*
- The Council is required to demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites. The Council calculates its 5 year land supply on a district basis. At 1 March 2014 it was 2.17 years which includes a 20% buffer. This means that according to paragraphs 14 and 49 of the Framework, Core Strategy housing policies cannot be considered up-to-date and there should be a general presumption in favour of sustainable development unless 'any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the framework taken as a whole' or specific policies in the Framework indicate that development should be restricted.*
- There is a need for new housing, including affordable housing in Alton which is identified in Policy SS6a. Core Strategy Policy H2 sets out the requirements for affordable housing and how this should be secured. The Councils Strategic Housing market Assessment (HMA) provides the background evidence for this. The housing officer will be able to offer advice regarding tenure.*
- Contributions may be required towards education provision.*

*Although the site is located outside the development boundary, it is not located in Green Belt and in terms of the Framework there are no policies that indicate*

*that development should be restricted. As stated in paragraph 14, adverse impacts will have to significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework for permission to be refused.”*

The policy conclusions therefore are that the site is supported for housing, and that permission should be granted unless the Council is able to show that adverse impacts will arise that would **“significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits”**.

It is understood that the planning application is supported by the application consultees other than the consultation response from Staffordshire Wildlife Trust. This recognises that the existing orchard and the ground around it is important for ecological reasons. Ironically, it is not the visual attraction of the trees that is of merit, it is the very fact that the trees are in a poor state of health (and in some cases having poor stability) that allows them to be populated by insects and the birds that feed on these that cause Staffordshire Wildlife to object to the proposal.

The central planning issue therefore is whether the loss of an old orchard is of such significance that it outweighs the benefits identified in the SMDC Policy Section consultation for the release of the land for housing.

The Council accepts that there is a pressing need for housing in the Staffordshire Moorlands. Its Core Strategy recognises this and seeks to allocate land in Alton for future housing. The pre-application consultation with the Council acknowledged that the lack of a 5 year supply of housing meant that support should be given to the development of land at Ivy Cottage. Before the submission of the planning application the land had not been formally identified as an ecological asset nor as a site worthy of a Tree Preservation Order. Because Ivy Cottage is wide and is located close to the road, and also because the orchard trees are not tall, to a large degree the general public have been unaware of the existence of the orchard. The Council issued an emergency Tree Preservation Order for the site during the processing of the application.

The application does not propose the wholesale removal of the orchard trees. The layout seeks to make provision for the retention of the best of the old orchard trees and the planting of new orchard trees where appropriate. Inevitably many of these are on the site boundary where there is an existing hedgerow. In this position they will have less impact on the proposed houses and will, from an ecology point of view, form a valuable thread of wildlife habitats and feeding opportunities around the site. Hedgerows provide vital habitat for a number of fauna species (including; birds, mammals and invertebrates) for breeding, foraging and commuting purposes, so they are deemed to be important features. The existing hedgerows are poor in places and will require new planting. The species that are considered acceptable to comprise the body of the hedgerows are hazel (*Coryllus avellana*), blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) and hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*).

The recommended species compositions for new tree planting on the site are Crab Apple (*Malus sylvestris*), Damson (*Prunus damascenum*), Cobnut – Hazel (*Corylus*

*avellana*), English Pear (*Pyrus sp.*) and Plum (*Prunus domestica*). In appropriate locations species of quince, cherries and walnut are also proposed.

A condition status of the existing orchard has been carried out by Evolution Ecology Limited. The results are set out in the table below:-

### Condition Assessment of Current Orchard

A condition assessment is undertaken upon any orchard to classify what state they are in. Please refer to table 3 below for the categories/matrix used under the 'Orchard Network' guidelines.

**Table 3:** Showing the classifications for the condition assessment.

**KEY:** DETERMINING FACTOR    **O**  
PRESENT OR ABSENT        **X**

Criteria	Excellent	Good/Fair	Poor	Destroyed
Established Orchard, mostly stocked/new trees planted where gaps	O	X	X	
Newly planted or young orchard		O	X	
Established/mature orchard mostly gaps/no new trees planted			O	
Grazed	O	X	X	
Mown or Cut	X	O	X	
Scrubbed over			O	
Livestock damage to trees			O	
Orchard no longer present				O
Standing deadwood trees and limbs	O	X	X	

Fallen deadwood trees and limbs	O	X	X	
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The intention of the proposal is to retain as much of the original orchard as possible to add new orchard trees and supplement this asset with new and improved hedgerows. The intention therefore is to improve the standing of the orchard from poor to fair/good.

### **Conclusion**

This report is not attempting to undermine the ecology objection raised by the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust. Safeguarding ecological features are an important part of planning. The point this statement is making is that this should not be an overriding consideration. The Planning Policy consultation response makes the point very well- there is a presumption in favour of the application site being developed for housing unless “adverse impacts” arise that “significantly and demonstrably outweigh” the benefits of, in effect, supporting the Council to meet its housing targets. In this particular case it is considered that the loss of an ecological feature that was not recognised prior to the submission of the planning application, is not in the public realm and who’s standing is POOR within the “Orchard Network” guidelines. The proposals will enhance the ecological status of the site.

Notwithstanding the above, the application is acknowledging the ecological value of the site by retaining and enhancing as far as it can those features within the development. Existing orchard trees are retained and additional ones planted. Existing hedgerows are retained and gaps filled and new hedgerows are introduced as plot boundaries. Albeit in a different fashion, the ecological value of the site is secured for the future by this proposal.

For these reasons it is considered that the application should not be refused on ecology grounds.