

CAPITA

Leekbrook Junction Planning Statement
February 2014

CAPITA

Leekbrook, Staffordshire
Planning Statement
February 2014



We | Listen Create Deliver

Quality Management

Job No	UV/004521-02		
Project	Leekbrook Junction Planning Application		
Location	Leekbrook, Leek, Staffordshire		
Title	Planning Statement		
Date	12th February 2014		
Prepared by 1	Natalie Blackston	Signature (for file)	NB
Prepared by 2	Janette Findley	Signature (for file)	JF
Checked by	Janette Findley	Signature (for file)	JF
Authorised by	Martin Hodgson	Signature (for file)	MH

Contents

Executive Summary

- 1. Introduction**
 - 1.1 Purpose**
 - 1.2 Document Structure**
 - 1.3 The Proposed Development**

- 2. Background and Context**
 - 2.1 Site and Surroundings**
 - 2.2 Context**
 - 2.3 Strategic Policy Support**
 - 2.4 Pre-application discussion**

- 3.0 Planning History of the Site**

- 4.0 Public Consultation**

- Planning Policy appraisal**
 - 5.1 Context – Legislative Requirements**
 - 5.2 Spatial Strategy**
 - 5.3 Housing**
 - 5.4 Retail**
 - 5.5 Transport and Highway Safety**
 - 5.6 Recreation and Tourism**
 - 5.7 Design Principles**
 - 5.8 Ecology and Biodiversity**
 - 5.9 Landscape and Trees**
 - 5.10 Drainage and Flood Risk**
 - 5.11 Noise and Air Quality**
 - 5.12 Ground Conditions**
 - 5.13 Planning Obligations**

Executive Summary

This is an outline planning application seeking permission for residential development and a small station facility with integral convenience retail store on land at Leekbrook Junction, Leekbrook, Leek, Staffordshire. All detailed matters are reserved.

The sale of the site for housing development will facilitate the eventual re-instatement of the existing disused railway line that forms the western boundary of the application site and extends northwards to Leek and connects to the Churnet Valley Heritage Railway line to the south.

The proposed development will fulfil a crucial enabling role in providing funding to help realise a key strategic policy objective of both Staffordshire County Council and Staffordshire Moorlands District Council - the ability to re-instate and bring back into operation a part of the former railway network in the County as part of a phased process.

The proposed development will unleash the opportunity to fund the reinstatement of the former railway into Leek and in so doing, will provide a major boost to the town's role as the main service and employment centre for the district and to its visitor economy.

The railway reinstatement will greatly assist in boosting the economic contribution from sustainable tourism that the Council's strategy for the Churnet Valley seeks to achieve; this will bring significant commercial benefits in terms of the expansion of CVR as a major tourism enterprise and the propensity to boost jobs and net expenditure in Leek and the surrounding area.

The proposal has been subject to significant public consultation and the feedback obtained has formed a key element of the evolving design process for the development.

The proposed development is aligned with national guidance, the relevant saved policies set out within the Staffordshire Moorlands Plan and the policies within the Revised Submission Core Strategy.

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose

This Planning Statement has been prepared in support of an outline planning application submitted to Staffordshire Moorland District Council on behalf of Moorland and City Railways (MCR) for residential development and a small station facility with integral convenience retail store on land at Leekbrook Junction, Leekbrook, Leek, Staffordshire. The sale of the site for housing development will facilitate the eventual re-instatement of the existing disused railway line that forms the western boundary of the application site and extends northwards to Leek and connects to the Churnet Valley Heritage Railway line to the south.

The planning application comprises of the following:

Drawings

- M1021-P1-Topographic Survey
- M1021-P2-Exisitng Site Layout Plan
- M1021-P3-Location Plan
- M1021-P4-MasterPlan
- M1021-P5-Proposed Site Layout Plan
- M1021-P6-Bridge Entrance
- M1021P7-Railway Station
- M1021-P8-Site Sections A&B
- M1021-P9-Site Sections C&D

Documents

- Planning Statement (this document);
- Design and Access Statement;
- Transport Assessment;
- Extended Phase One Habitat Report Ecology Report;
- Bat Survey Report;
- Otter Survey Report;
- Invertebrate Survey Report;
- Reptile Survey Report;
- Arboricultural Report;
- Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Report;
- Public Consultation Statement;

- Marketing and Tourism Report ;
- Topographical Survey;
- Ground Investigation Report
- Environment Report (including Noise Survey and Air Quality)
- Funding and Delivery Proposals Statement
- Leekbrook to Leek Track Estimate
- Heritage Information

1.2 Document Structure

This Planning Statement provides an explanation of, and justification for, the proposals. It is structured into the following sections:

- **Section Two** provides background and context to this application. It provides a detailed description of the proposed development and outlines the current uses of the site and surrounding area. It then explains the key drivers behind the project and details of pre-application advice from Staffordshire Moorlands Council officers.
- **Section Three** sets out the planning history of the proposed development site.
- **Section Four** refers to public consultation that has taken place regarding the proposed development and the outcomes of this process.
- **Section Five** sets out, in detail, the national and local planning policy framework affecting the site and includes an appraisal of the development proposals within this context, based around specific issues to which the site gives rise. This section cross refers to, and is underpinned by, a series of individual technical reports that collectively form part of the overall application package
- **Section Six** sets out the conclusions on the proposed development and the benefits it will bring.

1.3 The Proposed Development

The planning application is submitted in outline with all matters reserved for future approval and seeks permission for:

- a) A high density residential development scheme of 89 units comprising the following dwelling types:
 - 27 apartments
 - 49 town houses (850 sq.ft)
 - 10 villas (1200 sq.ft)
 - 3 detached houses (2200 sq.ft)

- b) A small station facility for use by residents of the existing and proposed housing development at Leekbrook. Ultimately, it is intended that this will provide access to rail connections to Leek, Stoke and along the Churnet Valley and Caudon lines.
- c) A small retail facility of approximately 49.3 sqm that will be integral to the station facility.

Please note that the total gross external floor area of the new railway station, including the retail facility, is 131.5sqm (excluding external canopy).

The proposed development will also incorporate the reinstatement of the original railway lines within the site comprising part of the through Churnet valley route and the former north curve. In so far as this is located within land in the ownership of Moorland and City Railways, this railway infrastructure will be reinstated using the original statutory powers conferred by the North Staffordshire Railway (Churnet Valley) Act 1846.

An indicative layout for the proposed development is shown on the accompanying Masterplan for the site. Whilst presented in indicative form only, the Masterplan demonstrates how the site could be developed and shows that the site is capable of delivering a range of house types and sizes of up to three storeys in height.

Whilst the presented layout represents the most likely form of development, this does not preclude an alternative form of development being delivered. The final scheme will be determined by the developer of the site.

A more detailed description of the indicative layout and its evolution is provided within the Design and Access Statement that forms a part of this application.

Access to the site from the A520 is proposed via a new link road between Leekbrook Way industrial estate and the existing access track (known as Leekbrook Junction). The access track will then be upgraded to a single two-lane carriageway between the new link and the railway bridge at the western end of Leekbrook Junction which gives access into the site. Details regarding access arrangements are explained in the Transport Assessment that accompanies this application.

The proposed development will fulfil a crucial enabling role in providing funding to help realise a key strategic policy objective of both Staffordshire County Council and Staffordshire Moorlands District Council - the ability to re-instate and bring back into operation a part of the former railway network in the County as part of a phased process. Further details regarding the underlying drivers for these proposals are provided in the following sections of this Planning Statement.

2. Background and Context

2.1 Site and Surroundings

The application site is approximately 3.86 hectares in size and forms a western extension to the built up form of Leekbrook, an amorphous settlement which lies approximately 1 mile south of Leek. The site is currently accessed via Leekbrook Junction, an existing single-track road which provides access to a number of existing properties and small industrial units. Leekbrook Junction itself is accessed from Cheadle Road (A520) which links Leek to Stoke-on-Trent and Stone.

The site occupies a triangular area of former railway land that was previously occupied by an engine shed and other associated plant for locomotives. These structures were demolished in 1946 and all rail activity ceased on site in 1990, since when the site has undergone natural succession.

The site is bordered to the west and to the north east by the routes of dismantled former railway lines and to the south east/south by the Cauldon branch line, which was re-opened in 2010 following refurbishment to heritage standard. The line is currently operational to Ipstones to the east and connects with the existing Churnet Valley Railway to the south; this has enabled CVR's existing heritage railway services linking Cheddleton, Consall and Froghall to be extended by a further 5 miles, enabling a round trip of 20 miles.

2.2 Context

The proposed development forms a crucial initial first stage of a larger project - 'Reconnecting Leek' that seeks to extend the Moorland and City Railways (MCR) and Churnet Valley Railway (CVR) line from Leekbrook to Leek, as shown on the accompanying Leek Railway Masterplan (drawing ref. M1021-P4). This project, in turn, forms a key element of broader aspirations for the reinstatement of the remaining MCR network to enable commercial services to operate between Leek, Stoke-on-Trent and Alton Towers, as part of a phased approach.

Phases 1 and 2:

This current application constitutes **Phase 1** of the 'Reconnecting Leek' Project and has a critical enabling role in securing the delivery of subsequent phases. It is intended that the revenue from the sale of land for residential development will be used, in **Phase 2**, to fund the single-track infrastructure required to reinstate the railway line into Leek and connect it into the existing Churnet Valley heritage railway line at Leekbrook Junction. Without this, the railway cannot be extended to Leek.

This planning application is accompanied by a report, prepared by the applicant, which sets out proposals for the funding and delivery mechanisms for the new railway.

The funding mechanism is based upon the Council setting up a new dedicated bank account into which MCR will deposit monies equivalent to the cost of the works involved in re-laying the railway from Leekbrook into Leek. Payments made from this account for line construction works will be as directed by MCR and must be certificated by Capita to confirm that the amount is correct, fairly related to the project specification and the works carried out are of appropriate quality.

The suggested delivery mechanism outlined in the report is intended as a basis for discussion with the Council and anticipates a new unquoted PLC being set up to carry out the new railway development and manage the line into Leek. The majority of shares would go to MCR and CVR but a stake would be available for the District Council in return for making the trackbed into Leek available for the project. Public shareholdings would be available by subscription and would be an important way of involving the public in the project.

For further details please refer to the report entitled '*Funding and Delivery Proposals for the new railway into Leek enabled by the Application Development*'. (*Proposed Development*)

MCR has carried out an estimate of the costs of the works involved in re-instating a single track railway from Leekbrook to Leek. The calculations are based upon the line being suitable for heritage trains operated by CVR and subsequently for commercial DMU operation as well as heritage services. The total cost is assessed to be £567,400. MCR undertakes to fund the new company to this level prior to the commencement of any housing development at Leekbrook.

For further details please refer to the report entitled '*Moorland and City Railways – Leekbrook to Leek Track Estimate Commentary*'.

Subsequent Phases:

The reinstatement of the railway to Leek and introduction of services is dependent upon the development of a new station facility in Leek itself. The revenue from the Leekbrook site will not fund a new station at Leek which will need to be of sufficient substance to reflect its status in the District's major town. Separate proposals will be introduced in the near future to deal with this.

It is recognised that there are at least two potential locations for the new Leek Station

- At Cornhill, where land is allocated for mixed use development;

- On land in close proximity to Morrisons supermarket, Leek.

However, a full examination of options is needed and has yet to be undertaken.

Once the new track and railway infrastructure is complete, CVR heritage steam and diesel services to Leek along the Churnet valley and Cauldon lines will start immediately. CVR heritage services will not, as a rule, use Leekbrook station to pick up or drop off passengers. Leekbrook and Leek stations will be developed together and heritage services will use Leek, as the main northern hub for visitors, as this station will be larger, have access to multiple facilities and better parking facilities. However, once the new Leek and Leekbrook stations are open, local commercial services will operate between Leek and Froghall, stopping at Leekbrook as well as the current operational CVR stations of Cheddleton, Consall and Froghall. On later completion of the rest of the MCR network, commercial services will be extended to Stoke on Trent and Alton Towers.

2.3 Strategic Policy Support

The aspiration to secure the reinstatement of the former railway network line to Leek and beyond has had strategic policy support for some considerable time.

- Policy T6 of the 1998 Adopted Staffordshire Moorlands District Local Plan seeks to encourage the re-use of the railway network between Leekbrook, Stoke, Cauldon Lowe and Oakamoor;
- Policy T2 of the Revised Submission Core Strategy seeks to continue to safeguard all existing disused railway lines within the District and support the reuse of these for public or commercial/tourism use.
- Paragraph 8.4 (Development and Management Principles) of the Draft Churnet Valley Masterplan states that:

'There shall be continued support for the use of the Churnet Valley rail line as a heritage and tourist attraction and support for the re-opening of the rail line into Stoke-on-Trent and into Leek and the line to Caldun Lowe for both light passenger and freight use. There is also support for the phased extension of the Churnet Valley rail line east of Froghall, initially to Moneystone Quarry and Oakamoor'.

The Churnet Valley Masterplan Transport Study (July 2013), which forms a key part of the underlying evidence base for the Masterplan itself, notes that the proposals for the development of the Moorland and City Railway network will play a key role in improving connectivity between Stoke and the Churnet Valley, by providing an important link to the national main-line railway network and allowing for more sustainable travel into the area. It is

anticipated that the railway will also become a catalyst for tourism to other sites in the Churnet Valley – particularly with the opening of subsequent stages.

These policy documents endorse the MCR's own objectives. A more detailed assessment of the proposals in relation to relevant planning policy is set out in Section 6 of this Planning Statement.

2.4 Benefits of railway re-instatement

The proposed housing development and station halt at Leekbrook Junction will play a significant role in the realisation of strategic policy aspirations. Without enabling development, the recognised benefits to be derived from railway re-instatement will not come to fruition.

The benefits of restoring the town's rail connections are considerable, with particular regard to:

- its potential role as a catalyst to stimulate regeneration in the area, especially in respect of mixed use development at Cornhill;
- the broader economic and tourism benefits that could accrue;
- the ability to provide a sustainable transport link between Leek and other settlements and tourism hot spots in the Churnet Valley and beyond;
- the scope to access a number of major opportunity sites, including the Thomas Bolton site and Moneystone Quarry;

A report commissioned by Moorland and City Railways, entitled Heritage Railway Extension into Leek- Summary Report (September 2013), forms one of the supporting documents that accompany this application. It highlights the broader economic benefits that the railway could bring, showing that the re-connection to Leek will have a very positive impact on the town and will assist in developing and reinforcing the important role of the Churnet Valley Railway as a tourist attraction.

The report indicates that by enabling the CVR heritage steam services to be brought into Leek, the railway for the first time would have a recognisable end destination in an accessible location. This should help the CVR become a more significant 'attractor', potentially widening its catchment area. This in turn, will add to the visitor economy, creating jobs and spend. The Summary Report estimates that a Leek base for the CVR could:

- Lead to an increase in visitor numbers to the railway of approximately 30,000 per annum, bringing the total to between 95 – 100,000 per annum;
- Support additional employment at the railway and its supply chain in the order of 13 (FTE) jobs;

- Create additional gross tourist spend, predominantly focused in Leek, of £950,000 per annum;
- Inject £577,600 net additional expenditure into the local economy.

Please refer to the Summary Report for further information.

A Tourism Study commissioned by Staffordshire Moorlands District Council in 2011 similarly supports the reinstatement of the line and states that enhancement of the Churnet Valley Railway can be seen as a key project for Staffordshire Moorlands' visitor economy.

2.5 Pre-application discussion

A request for pre-application advice and a meeting with Council officers was submitted in September 2013. Initial advice was provided by e-mail from Wayne Johnson on 7th October 2013. Issues relating to ecology, landscape, amenity considerations, access and sustainability were raised. These issues have subsequently been addressed in technical reports that are submitted in support of this application.

An initial pre-application meeting with planning officers was held on 14th November. Discussion was constructive and it was agreed that ecology and arboricultural reports (then in preparation) would be forwarded to officers for comment as soon as possible. The reports were submitted on 4th December 2013 and an e-mail response was received on 22nd January 2014. It is anticipated that dialogue will continue during the determination of this application.

Separately, extensive discussions have been held with David Plant at Staffordshire Highways, initially with regard to options for accessing the site and more recently, in respect of MCR's preferred means of access via Leekbrook Way, which currently serves businesses within Leekbrook Industrial Estate. A draft Transport Assessment was forwarded for comment during pre-application consultation and dialogue is ongoing in respect of the issues raised. The Transport Assessment (TA) that accompanies this application provides details as to how identified issues can be resolved satisfactorily. Copies of correspondence with Staffordshire Highways are set out in Appendix A of the TA.

It should be noted that informal discussions have previously taken place in 2012 with Dai Larnier, Head of Regeneration at SMDC and with Gavin Clark (Planning Policy) in respect of earlier proposals that envisaged linking the Leekbrook Junction site with the Wainhomes development to the south, incorporating land between the two sites. These proposal were not taken forward.

Further informal discussions have taken place since then with Dai Larnier and also with senior officers within the County Council, regarding MCR's overall objectives and aspirations in

bringing back into use the disused lines linking Stoke-on- Trent, Leekbrook Junction, Leek, Cauldon Lowe and Alton Towers.

3.0 Planning History of the Site

There are no previous planning applications for this site. However there are a number of planning applications on surrounding sites. The most relevant have been set out below:

- **SMD/2011/0951-** Leekbrook Junction Signal Box. Installation of staircase, landings and entrance porch to enable access to the top floor of the Signal Box, and erection of replacement signage-Approved with conditions.
- **SMD/2013/0085-** Vehicle Repair Workshop Unit 2, Leekbrook Industrial Estate Leekbrook Way Leek ST13 7AP. Change of use from kitchen workshop to auction room and storage-Approved with conditions.
- **SMD/2004/0209-** Land At Cheadle Road Land At Cheadle Road (Former Joshua Wardle Site) Staffordshire Moorlands Leekbrook ST13 7AZ.Reserved Matters application for residential development. Approved with conditions.
- **SMD/2003/0957-** Joshua Wardle Joshua Wardle Leek Road Staffordshire Moorlands Leekbrook ST13 7AZ. Outline application for residential development and industrial development. Approved with conditions.
- **SMD/2000/1043-** Joshua Wardle Ltd Joshua Wardle Ltd Leekbrook Staffordshire Leek ST13 7AZ. Outline application for residential development. Application withdrawn.

4.0 Public Consultation

Active engagement with key stakeholders and the local community has been a key element of the evolving development design process for the development prior to this planning application being submitted.

Facilitating direct participation enables the project team to explain the vision and aspirations that underpin the development proposals so that the scheme is better understood by those most likely to be affected by it. It is however also recognised that consultation provides an important opportunity for the design team to be made aware of issues that prospective users of the facility have identified so that potential problems can be identified and resolved before the proposals are finalised. In addition, the process of direct engagement is crucial in demonstrating to interested parties that the assimilation of feedback into subsequent design stages has been a critical part of design development, that their views are appreciated and that they have a critical role in the overall process. In recognition of this, active engagement with key stakeholders and the local community has formed a key element of the evolving design process for the development.

A pre-application public consultation event was held at the Foxlowe Gallery, Leek. The event took place on the 14th, 15th and 16th of November 2013. The event ran throughout the day from 10am until 4pm to allow as many members of the public to attend as possible.

The exhibition, titled "Reconnect Leek", provided details by way of visual display panels about the proposed development at Leekbrook Junction, its enabling role in facilitating the re-instatement of the railway connection to Leek, and the benefits expected to materialise as a consequence. This, together with the indicative Masterplan, proposed site layout and elevational drawings formed a basis for seeking public comment.

The feedback received is shown within the report on Public Consultation submitted as part of the application package and has been taken into account as part of the design process. The responses received covered a broad range of issues including:

- Vehicle access to the site;
- Creation of footpaths;
- Creation of links from new Leek station to the town centre;
- Benefits to Leek in terms of improved travel links, tourism, regeneration and economic growth;
- Railway safety; and
- Need for high quality design.

For further information on the outcome of the public consultation events, please refer to the report on Public Consultation.

The Design Response

In light of feedback from the above consultation event, a number of changes have been incorporated into the design proposals to reflect some of the key points that were made. The Design and Access Statement provides a more comprehensive explanation of the principles underlying the design proposals and the ways in which feedback from community and stakeholder engagement has influenced the design development process. For further information, please refer to the Design and Access Statement.

5.0 Planning Policy Appraisal

5.1 Context – Legislative Requirements

Development proposals are required to have close regard to relevant national and local planning policies.

National Planning Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published on the 27th of March 2012 and forms the overriding policy framework against which proposed developments should be assessed. Following the publication of NPPF, it is necessary to review the weight which can be afforded to the policies of the Council's draft Core Strategy Local Plan and the 'saved' policies of the adopted Local Plan (1998).

Paragraphs 214-216 of Annex 1 of the NPPF give guidance on the weight that can be given to saved Local Plan policies and to draft policies in Core Strategies and other Development Plan Documents that have still to be adopted:

214 "For 12 months from the day of publication, decision-takers may continue to give full weight to relevant policies adopted since 2004 even if there is a limited degree of conflict with this Framework."

215 "In other cases and following this 12-month period, due weight should be given to relevant policies in existing plans according to their degree of consistency with this framework (the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the Framework, the greater the weight that may be given)."

Local Planning Policy

At the time of writing, the development plan comprises the "saved" policies of the Staffordshire Moorlands District Local Plan (adopted 1998). Staffordshire Moorlands District Council is currently preparing a Core Strategy Local Plan for the area, which is at an advanced stage of production. However, the saved policies of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan will remain part of the development plan until such time that the Core Strategy is adopted.

The Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy Local Plan (CS) has been the subject of a protracted preparation process. Following Examination in February 2013, the Inspector issued his interim conclusions shortly after, in which he indicated that modifications were required in order for the Core Strategy to be considered 'sound'. The Council subsequently consulted on

Main Modifications between June and August 2013 and has had regard to further comments and suggested amendments made by the Inspector. Following receipt of the final report from the Inspector on 2nd January 2014, it is anticipated that the Core Strategy Local Plan, as modified, will be considered by the Council for adoption in February 2014. Therefore, in accordance with paragraph 216 of the NPPF, due weight can be given to relevant policies within the emergent Core Strategy Local Plan, the adoption of which is imminent.

In addition, there are a number of **Supplementary Planning Documents** and **Planning Guidance Documents** that the Council have prepared to supplement the Local Plan Policies and provide further detail regarding their implementation. These provide non-statutory guidance regarding the application of adopted planning policy and constitute important material considerations in the determination of planning applications.

The following sub-sections provide an assessment of the development proposals against relevant national and local planning policies. This is structured around the specific issues to which the proposals give rise and makes reference to, and is underpinned by a series of technical reports that collectively form part of the overall application package

5.2 Spatial Strategy

The Revised Submission Core Strategy, as modified, indicates at paragraph 7.2 that:

“The driving force behind the proposed spatial strategy is the need to make the District an exceptional place in which to live and work and to visit”.

To achieve this, a suite of policies (**SA1 – SA4**) seeks to focus on four strategic aims: delivering sustainable and self-supporting settlements; meeting the needs of local communities; encouraging a strong, prosperous and diverse economy; and maintaining a quality environment and special places. Strengthening the role of tourism within Staffordshire Moorlands is recognised as a key underlying element. **Paragraph 7.2** continues:

‘This will mean ensuring that new development and regeneration is targeted to locations and sites which support the overall strategy and that the necessary infrastructure is in place and that initiatives and actions are delivered in a complementary and integrated way’.

Policies SA1 –SA4 are further underpinned by a series of policies that establish a hierarchy of settlements reflecting the roles, function and capacity of individual settlements.

The following sections identify those aspects of the above policies that have particular relevance in relation to the proposed development at Leekbrook.

Policies SA1 and SS5 direct the bulk of development for employment and housing towards the three market towns of Leek, Cheadle and Biddulph.

At **paragraph 7.5**, the reasoned justification to Policy SA1 indicates that Leek, as the largest town in the District and its administrative centre, will be promoted as the principal service centre and market town. As part of this offer, it is acknowledged that Leek has good transport links with the rest of the District and has a major role to play in the development of the tourist offer and as a service and employment base to support the rural economy of the sub-region.

The town is recognised as a highly sustainable settlement that has the capacity to take further housing and employment growth of an appropriate scale and nature and in locations which do not undermine its distinctive character. Its role will also be reinforced by strengthening its function as a principal service and retailing centre for the District and by promoting and investing in Leek's special character and heritage and strengthening its role as a visitor destination.

Paragraph 7.7 notes that land at Cornhill is a key opportunity site for mixed-use regeneration that will be a major driver for urban renaissance and change. However, its development will depend upon the provision of critical transport infrastructure works and other public transport improvements.

Beyond the market towns, the strategy for the rural areas is based on ensuring that villages continue to be vibrant and sustainable communities, providing opportunities for people of all ages. The Core Strategy Local Plan recognises that the rural areas will maintain an important role within the District in terms of providing homes and jobs to meet local needs with better links with services and facilities in the larger villages and towns in order to address the decline in the rural economy and tackle social exclusion.

Whilst the priority will be on using brownfield and underused sites within the built-up areas of the District, the spatial strategy recognises the need to allow for development of some greenfield sites and also peripheral expansion in order to enable the housing and employment requirements to be met. **Paragraph 7.17** notes that peripheral expansion will only be expected to come forward where it will bring infrastructure benefits, can be properly assimilated into the landscape and well related to existing urban areas.

Paragraph 7.29 states that managing the housing supply will be crucial to the successful delivery of the strategy. Inter alia, it will be controlled to ensure that it is distributed appropriately across the District and that preference is given to urban, brownfield sites or sites delivering essential infrastructure needs. **Paragraph 7.30** goes on to state that an allowance will be made for windfall sites, on top of identified requirements. These are sites that have not previously been identified that come forward for development. The Council propose that any

such development will be managed to ensure that development rates are not excessively exceeded.

Infrastructure

The implementation of social, physical and green infrastructure improvements to support future development requirements is recognised as a major factor in achieving the strategy both within existing urban areas as well as in new areas of development (**paragraph 7.31**). This is seen to be dependent on the successful delivery of physical development and regeneration schemes through developer funding and the plans and programmes of other service providers. Developers promoting development and regeneration schemes will be expected to contribute towards strategic and local infrastructure requirements, through both on-site facilities and financial contributions for off-site works and facilities.

Employment and Tourism

Policy SA3 seeks to encourage a strong, prosperous and diverse economy and to meet local employment needs in the towns and villages by distributing employment growth and change across the District.

In **Leek** the priority will be to intensify employment development to the south of the town where the potential for expansion and good road communications and accessibility are greatest. However, as well as requiring the provision of a new road link between the A53 and A520 to serve existing and future employment areas, measures are also needed to secure better public transport access, if the strategy is to succeed.

The Spatial Strategy places a strong emphasis on sustainable tourism, as a key driver for diversifying the local economy and strengthening the District's role in the sub-region. **Paragraph 7.44** states that this will be achieved by providing opportunities to increase the length of visitor stays, promoting more sustainable forms of tourism which are compatible with the character of the area, establishing links between existing tourist facilities and enhancing and managing tourism in a way which balances the needs of visitors, residents and the environment. It further notes that delivery will require a partnership approach with key organisations and neighbouring authorities as well as engaging the private sector in identifying opportunities.

The town centres within market towns are expected to play a key role in achieving growth in tourism by offering a range of experiences and attractions for day and long-stay visitors. The strategy envisages that this will be achieved by measures and initiatives to help develop and promote the towns and their rural hinterland as visitor destinations focusing on their unique qualities and heritage.

Beyond the market towns, the Churnet Valley will be promoted as an area for sustainable tourism to support rural regeneration (**Policy SS7 as modified**). Key aims will be to focus opportunities for further appropriate visitor accommodation and tourist facilities along the corridor and to improve and develop links between existing facilities and activities so that they are benefiting from each other. Measures to improve access are fundamental and the expansion of the Churnet Valley Railway and the continued sensitive growth of Alton Towers phased with measures to improve access will be a key element of this corridor.

Policy SA4 indicates that a key underlying theme of the strategy is to maintain a quality environment and create special places and that local distinctiveness and protection of landscape and settlement character will be a major consideration in all new development.

Settlement Hierarchy

The Core Strategy proposes to establish a hierarchy of settlements reflecting the roles, function and capacity of individual settlements. Separate policies are provided for each of the market towns, for larger and smaller villages, and for other rural areas.

Policy SS5a sets out the Leek Area Strategy that provides more detail about the policy approach towards the role of Leek and its hinterland. It is anticipated that in due course, the geographical extent of the Leek Area and the specific locations for development will be defined within a single comprehensive Local Plan for the period 2016-2031 (as per Main Modification MM1). This document has yet to be prepared. It is clear that Policy SS5a clearly envisages that Leek Area extends as far as Leekbrook, insofar as it defines the Leekbrook Industrial Estate as a location for new employment development. The Leekbrook application site lies in close proximity to the industrial estate and will be accessed via Leekbrook Way that serves the estate.

Paragraph 8.1.37 of the reasoned justification to Policy SS5a acknowledges that a range of opportunities in a variety of locations, including greenfield sites, will need to be provided to enable the market to respond to housing targets and to address key infrastructure and regeneration needs. **Paragraph 8.1.40** further indicates that there should be an allowance to enable small urban extensions to come forward to supplement provision within the urban area. This would provide flexibility to ensure that the requirements for Leek are met and provide a more sustainable mix of housing sites.

Notwithstanding the apparent extent of the Leek Area under Policy SS5a, **Policy SS6b** categorises Leekbrook as a smaller village, based upon an assessment of services available within the settlement. Within these settlements, appropriate development is that which enhances community vitality or meets a local social or economic need of the settlement and its hinterland. The policy (modified by **Main Modification MM37**) indicates that this will be achieved, inter alia, by protecting and enabling services and facilities which are essential to

sustain rural living; improving connections by public transport and other transport measures to neighbouring larger villages and market towns and enabling new housing development which meets a local needs. Under **Main Modification MM38**: *'housing will be required to meet a local need in terms of size, type and tenure. This may include both open market and affordable housing'*.

Commentary

The Council have indicated in their e-mail response to our pre-application request for planning advice that the application site lies in the open countryside and Special Landscape Area as defined in the adopted Local Plan (1998). However, the application site is, in fact, a natural extension to the built up form of Leekbrook.

The site was formerly developed for railway uses and therefore, is technically a brownfield site which has been partially re-colonised by vegetation over time. Photographs showing the extent of former development activity on the site and the surrounding area can be found in the Heritage Information document that accompanied this application. Leekbrook itself is an amorphous settlement with a substantial employment base (including industrial estates on either side of the A520) and a very recent planning history of significant housing development at Wardle Gardens by Wain Homes. A residual land parcel with planning permission for employment development lies in close proximity to the south east boundary of our application site.

Leekbrook is not remote. It lies less than a mile south of Leek to which it is virtually connected by development extending alongside the A520. The proposed development site would form a western extension to the built form of the settlement. It is considerably closer to Leek within surroundings that are much less rural in character than, for example, the housing development to the west of the A520 at Cheddleton Heath which occupies a rural 'island' location and is virtually surrounded by green field land. More significantly, the proposed development will facilitate the ability to establish a sustainable direct transport link to Leek, to other settlements in the Churnet Valley and ultimately to Stoke. The benefits of re-instating the railway are significant, as outlined earlier in Section 2.3, and amplified below.

The location of the proposed development at Leekbrook will not undermine the spatial strategy for the district; on the contrary, it will lend support by facilitating the realisation of key strategic policy aspirations embodied in the Spatial Strategy of the Core Strategy and the Churnet Valley Masterplan. Specifically:

- The development will assist in injecting vibrancy into Leekbrook by providing homes that will assist in re-vitalising its character and will help to support and enable the provision of better and a wider range of services;
- It will unleash the opportunity to fund the reinstatement of the former railway into Leek and in so doing, will provide a major boost to the town's role as the main service and employment centre for the district and to its visitor economy (please cross refer to Section 2.4 of this statement for further information regarding the projected income the railway could inject into the local economy);
- The reinstatement of the railway network provides the opportunity to create sustainable public transport links between Leek, Leekbrook and other settlements within the Churnet Valley to the south and, ultimately, Stoke on Trent; this will greatly assist in improving the permeability of the local area and the connectivity between places within and beyond it;
- As a particular example, the table below shows the potential value that the completed network, based on Leek, could have in connecting schools and settlements and conveying school children around the district, thereby reducing the reliance upon car journeys that exists at present. In addition, when the link to Stoke is complete, the railway would confer significant benefit in making Staffordshire University accessible from the whole of the Moorlands District, as all the main buildings are in close proximity to Stoke railway station.

Location of Station	School	Distance from Station (miles)	Pupil Numbers
LEEK	All Saints First School	0.4	201
	Woodcroft First School	0.75	208
	St Mary's Primary	0.5	160
	Westwood First School	0.8	302
	St Edwards Middle	0.8	765
	Leek College of Further Education	1.0	
	Leek First School	1.25	185
	Leek High School	1.5	460
	Westwood High	1.25	756
CHEDDLETON	All Saints First School	1.0	201
KINGSLEY & FROGHALL	St Werburgh's Primary	0.6	130
	St Mildred's Primary	0.6	30
OAKAMoor	Valley Primary School	0.2	38
ALTON	St John's Primary	0.2	62

	School		
	St Peters First School	0.2	47
ENDON	Endon Hall Primary	0.2	227
	St Lukes Primary	0.2	211
	Endon High School	0.3	706
STOCKTON BROOK	Greenways Primary	0.1	177

- The enabling benefits of the Leekbrook development in funding the reinstatement of the railway has fundamental ramifications in assisting in the delivery of significant public transport improvements, required to facilitate mixed use development at Cornhill and secure the major regeneration benefits that this site is expected to bring;
- The delivery of essential infrastructure benefits are recognised as being a major factor in achieving the spatial strategy through developer funding required in order to deliver major sustainable regeneration;
- The railway reinstatement will greatly assist in boosting the economic contribution from sustainable tourism that the Council's strategy for the Churnet Valley seeks to achieve; this will bring significant commercial benefits in terms of the expansion of CVR as a major tourism enterprise and the propensity to boost jobs and net expenditure in Leek and the surrounding area.
- Extension of the CVR to Leek will provide the heritage railway with a terminus that, to date, it has never had. This will add to its attraction in providing scope for multiple purpose visits; it will also increase the potential to encourage greater access into the Churnet Valley by public transport and provide enhanced opportunities for people to experience the assets of the valley in a sustainable manner.
- As a former brownfield site, now re-colonised with vegetation, the application site will enable peripheral expansion of the built form of Leekbrook in a manner that can be properly assimilated into the landscape.
- The retention of peripheral trees and vegetation around the application site will enable the assimilation of the proposed development within the landscape without prejudicing its overall character or that of the settlement; the site will not be visible from properties or premises located beyond the site boundary;
- The development of the site will not compromise overall environmental quality.
- The proposed development will assist in meeting five year housing requirements
- The proposed development comprises of an indicative mix of housing in terms of size and type, consistent with local needs. The proposals do not distinguish between open market and affordable housing; Policy SS6b, as modified, does not specify affordable housing as an essential prerequisite.

For these reasons, it is considered that the proposed development is supportive of the Spatial Strategy policy framework for the district and aligns with the Settlement Hierarchy as defined above.

5.3 Housing

Requirements and Supply

One of the core planning principles of the **NPPF** is that planning should:

"proactively drive and support sustainable economic development to deliver the homes ... that the country needs. Every effort should be made objectively to identify and then meet the housing, business and other development needs of an area ... (paragraph 17)"

Section 6 of the NPPF sets out the policy on housing which is designed *"to boost significantly the supply of housing"*. Paragraph 49 of the NPPF states that housing applications should be considered in the context of the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

The NPPF requires LPAs to identify and update annually a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide five years worth of housing against housing requirements. An additional buffer of 5% is required to ensure choice and competition in the land market but where there has been persistent under-delivery the buffer should be increased to 20%.

At district level, the Inspector's Report of 2nd January 2014 on the Core Strategy Local Plan notes that whilst significant under performance would suggest that a 20% buffer should be applied, local circumstances lead him to conclude that a phased approach to the provision of housing development would be a pragmatic approach coupled to an early review of the Core Strategy linked to the Site Allocations DPD. Main Modifications put this into effect.

Revised Submission Core Strategy Policy SS2 deals with the future provision of housing development. Under **Main Modifications (MM8)**, provision will be made for 6000 additional dwellings (net of demolitions) to be completed in Staffordshire Moorlands (excluding the Peak District National Park) during the period 2006 to 2026. The provision is phased. In relation to the five year period 2011-2016, the policy, as modified, acknowledges that the impact of past underperformance in dwelling completions means that *'the Council will ensure a supply of deliverable land for 1320 dwellings to provide a 20% buffer supply, added to the 5 year requirement to 2016'*.

Main Modification (MM12) further states that ‘the Council will ensure there is a 5 year supply of deliverable housing land at all time with an additional 5% or 20% buffer as appropriate. They will seek to achieve this through a plan monitor manage approach to the phased release of allocated sites, the granting of permissions on unidentified (windfall) sites and identification of sites through the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment.

Under **Main Modification MM16, MM 18 and MM23**, additional requirements have been apportioned to the sub areas within the district, as per paragraph 22 of the Inspector’s report of January 2014. The requirement for the Leek area has increased by 150 to 1800 dwellings (2006-2026). Meanwhile, within villages and other rural areas, Policy SS6 (as modified by **MM34**) provides for around 1680 new dwellings between 2006 and 2026, an increase of 140.

Paragraph 8.1.37 of the reasoned justification to **Policy SS5a (Leek Area Strategy)** acknowledges that a range of opportunities in a variety of locations, including greenfield sites, will need to be provided to enable the market to respond to housing targets and to address key infrastructure and regeneration needs. **Paragraph 8.1.40** further indicates that there should be an allowance of 300 to enable small urban extensions to come forward to supplement provision within the urban area. This would provide flexibility to ensure that the requirements for Leek are met and provide a more sustainable mix of housing sites.

Whilst Main Modification to the Core Strategy Local Plan seek to put in place a policy framework to manage the supply of housing over time to ensure there is a deliverable five year land supply plus an appropriate buffer available at all times, this must be matched by performance. The last published figures that we are aware of show that on 31st March 2013 the District had just over 3 years of deliverable housing supply shortfall but this fell well below 3 years supply with the application of a 5% and 20% buffer.

Nature of Supply

Paragraph 50 of the NPPF recognises the need to deliver a wider choice of high quality homes and to create “*sustainable, inclusive and mixed communities*”. This requires planning for a mix of housing for the needs of all different groups in the community.

At the district level, the NPPF requirement is encapsulated in **Revised Submission Core Strategy Policy H1** which indicates that all new housing developments should provide for a mix of housing sizes, types and tenure including a proportion of affordable housing. The policy indicates that development will be assessed according to the extent to which it provides for high quality, sustainable housing and to which it meets identified local housing market needs and the strategy for the area, having regard to the location of the development, the characteristics of the site and the economics of provision.

Policy H1 goes onto state that:

*'residential development and redevelopment on unidentified (windfall) sites will be permitted up to an indicative maximum scheme size of 5 dwellings within the Infill Development Boundaries of the smaller villages. **Exceptionally, larger windfall schemes may be permitted where it would provide over-riding affordable housing, regeneration, conservation or infrastructure benefits and it would not undermine delivery of the spatial strategy*** (our emphasis).

Revised Submission Core Strategy Policy H2- Affordable and Local Needs Housing, as modified by **Main Modification M69**, sets a target of 33% affordable housing on-site, unless there are exceptional circumstances which dictate otherwise. The original proposed requirement for all housing in the rest of the rural areas, including small villages, to be either affordable or meet a local need which cannot be met elsewhere, has been removed from the policy. Under **Main Modifications MM37 and MM38**, Policy SS6b: Smaller Villages and Area Strategy now indicates that the Council will seek to meet local community, social or economic need by *'enabling new housing development which is essential to local needs, including affordable housing (in accordance with policy H2)'*

Commentary

Although in outline, the development proposals demonstrate the capability to deliver a well-designed, sustainable, high quality housing development, providing a range of accommodation in terms of type and size that will meet the requirements of all sections of the local housing market.

The application site will form an extension to the built form of Leekbrook. The settlement is semi-urban but is categorised as a small village under Policy SS6, albeit it is located within the Leek Area, as is apparent from Policy SS5a. The proposed development will contribute to the Leek Area's supply of housing land in an appropriate and acceptable manner, as a small urban extension that can be assimilated within the landscape without undue harm.

At a strategic level the Core Strategy places significant emphasis on delivering an appropriate supply of housing to meet the District's requirements. It is apparent from the Inspector's January 2014 report and from the Main Modifications to the Core Strategy that there is an underlying record of underperformance in terms of housing activity. The most recent published housing land supply figures (March 2013) show a sizeable shortfall and since then the five year requirement figure (plus 20% buffer) has been increased by Main Modification MM8. In consequence, the Council's ability to achieve the five year target up to 2016 is at best uncertain and at worst remains well short of the requirement. This confirms the pressing

need for the Council to grant planning permission for additional residential development within the District, in accordance with the NPPF and the Council's own Core Strategy.

The site has been previously developed for railway related uses and technically therefore is not a greenfield site, albeit it has been re-colonised by vegetation. The proposed development provides a means to regenerate this site through the delivery of high quality homes that will make an important contribution to meeting the housing requirements of the local area and the needs of different groups within the community, including starter homes.

The site is unallocated but presents a significant windfall opportunity that will provide a range of high quality housing to meet the needs of the local housing market. Furthermore, it will bring major regeneration, economic and infrastructure benefits to the local area by providing the funding to secure the reinstatement of the railway to Leek, as the first stage towards achieving a key strategic policy commitment to the re-use of the former railway network within the wider district area. The broad range of socio-economic benefits that the railway can bring is considerable, as outlined in earlier sections of this Planning Statement. As such, the development will greatly assist in the delivery of the spatial strategy for the district. Moreover, it will enable the introduction of a sustainable mode of transport that will significantly improve connectivity within the area.

The ability to make provision for affordable housing will be a matter for discussion with the Council but should be evaluated in the context of the applicant's intentions to make available a sum of £567,400 to fund the reinstatement of the railway between Leekbrook and Leek, as outlined in Section 2 of this Planning Statement and in detail in the Funding and Delivery Proposals Statement. MCR seeks to meet the actual costs of re-instatement in full, as calculated in the Leekbrook to Leek Track Estimate Report. The company considers that this intention and the economics of provision present the exceptional circumstances that would justify a policy target of 33% affordable housing being rescinded or significantly reduced on this site.

In view of these considerations, it is considered that the proposed development aligns with emergent policies in the Core Strategy and Churnet Valley Masterplan as outlined above and with the emphasis that NPPF places upon boosting significantly the supply of housing. Paragraph 49 of the NPPF states that housing applications should be considered in the context of the presumption in favour of sustainable development and the applicant considers that the development proposals are fully in keeping with this.

5.4 Retail

The **NPPF** promotes the retention and development of local services and community facilities in villages, such as local shops.

Revised Submission Core Strategy Policy TCR2 allows for small scale convenience retail development for local need including village shops. The policy states that *'new or convenience retail units up to 500m² gross floor space to serve everyday local shopping needs and improve access to retail facilities at a local level will be promoted and supported, provided that they compliment but do not adversely impact upon the vitality and viability of the three town centres and are in sustainable locations'*.

Policy SS6b categorises Leekbrook as a smaller village, based upon an assessment of services available within the settlement. Within these settlements, appropriate development is that which enhances community vitality or meets a local social or economic need of the settlement and its hinterland. The policy (modified by **Main Modification MM37**) indicates that this will be achieved, inter alia, by protecting and enabling services and facilities which are essential to sustain rural living.

The **Draft Churnet Valley Masterplan** supports the creation of new community facilities which will help sustain local villages and businesses through the promotion of local services, goods and attractions, according to local need.

Commentary

The retail component of the proposals involves the creation of a small retail unit of approximately 49.3 m² which is integral to the proposed station facility. The proposed retail unit will provide a local amenity for surrounding residents and provide local employment opportunities. Given the small scale of the unit, it is considered that the retail element of the proposal is incidental and ancillary to the main use of the site for residential development.

The proposed development is therefore in accordance with the **NPPF**, policies **TCR2** and **SS6b** of the Revised Submission Core Strategy.

5.5 Transport and Highway Safety

The **NPPF** recognises that transport policies have an important role to play in contributing to wider sustainability and health objectives. The **NPPF** supports development proposals that secure opportunities for sustainable patterns of movement and ensure that sufficient capacity exists in the local highway network to meet the arising traffic generation.

Local Plan Policy T6 deals with Railways and seeks to encourage the future re-use of the following railway lines:

- Stoke to Leekbrook
- Leekbrook to Cauldon Lowe
- Leekbrook to Oakamoor
- Cheadle Branch Line

The District Council will support the retention of the lines by encouraging their maintenance and continuity.

Revised Submission Core Strategy Policy T1- Development and Sustainable Transport identifies specific development measures which reduce reliance on the car and reduce the need to travel.

Revised Submission Core Strategy Policy T2- Other Sustainable Transport Measures seeks to continue to safeguard all existing disused railway lines within the District and support the reuse of these for public or commercial/tourism use.

The Draft Churnet Valley Masterplan (September 2013) states that all proposals should aim to support more sustainable means of transport within and into the Churnet Valley and seek to change visitor perceptions of how they can travel around the Churnet Valley by increasing transport choices for those wishing to visit attractions and facilities.

Commentary

A Transport Assessment has been prepared by Capita in support of this application to identify and analyse the transport and highway implications of the development proposals and set out any measures to mitigate the impact of the proposals.

The Transport Assessment has assessed the likely impact of the proposed development on the local highway network and the Leekbrook Way/ A520 Cheadle Road junction has been examined carefully. It has been demonstrated that following the implementation of the scheme proposals, this junction will continue to operate well within capacity and there will be an imperceptible delay on the approaches to the junction. The Transport Assessment therefore concludes that the overall impact of the development on the local transport network is likely to be minimal and it is anticipated that improvements to this junction would not be needed.

The Transport Assessment also shows that sustainable modes of travel can form viable alternatives to car travel to and from the proposed development. The proposed pedestrian infrastructure adjacent to the highway network and crossing facilities over the railway lines will be of a good quality and would encourage journeys on foot throughout the catchment area. Off highway footpaths/cycle paths will have good surfaces, will be well lit and would also encourage walking and cycling to the proposed development. The inclusion of a new railway station and the associated services will significantly improve the potential for rail to form part of a wider journey if required.

In line with Staffordshire County Councils 'Guidelines for Transport Assessments and Travel Plans', all new home owners will be given an information pack containing information on existing public transport and emerging information on rail services where appropriate. Information and maps will also be provided relating to existing walking and cycling routes and the new routes to be created into Leek from the development site.

In conclusion, the Transport Assessment demonstrates that the development proposals will result in a low number of trips to and from the site and would generate a minimal amount of additional trips per minute in the AM and PM peak periods. It suggests scope for mitigation of the additional traffic movements on Leekbrook should that be considered necessary.

The development proposals will bring great benefits to the local community through the provision of much needed housing and the significant enabling role that it will fulfil in providing the funding for the reinstatement of the railway to Leek and promoting the means to deliver a highly sustainable form of transport use. Please refer to the accompanying Transport Statement for further information.

5.6 Recreation and Tourism

Local Plan Policy R2 states that where there is a proven deficiency, qualifying new residential development will be expected to make provision for public open space which is necessary and reasonably related in form and scale.

Local Plan Policy R15 seeks to encourage the development of the Churnet Valley Railway and associated facilities which enhance the tourism potential of the district.

Revised Submission Core Strategy Policy SS7 identifies the Churnet Valley as a major sustainable tourism corridor. Within this corridor a number of forms of development and measures will be supported including the extension of the Churnet Valley Railway.

Revised Submission Core Strategy Policy E3 deals with tourism and cultural development and supports the important role that tourism and culture plays in the economy of the Staffordshire Moorlands and the contribution it makes to increasing physical activity and improving health and well-being.

The Draft Churnet Valley Masterplan (September 2013) provides a comprehensive framework for future development in this area. It identifies opportunities and measures to help regenerate and manage this important rural area based around sustainable tourism in a manner which is sensitive to and enhances its important heritage, landscape and ecology.

Commentary

The Churnet Valley will be promoted as an area for sustainable tourism to support rural regeneration as set out within Policy SS7 (as modified by MM44). Key aims will be to focus opportunities for further appropriate visitor accommodation and tourist facilities along the corridor and to improve and develop links between existing facilities and activities so that they are benefiting from each other. Measures to improve access are fundamental and the expansion of the Churnet Valley Railway and the continued sensitive growth of Alton Towers phased with measures to improve access will be a key element of this corridor.

A report commissioned by Moorland and City Railways, entitled Heritage Railway Extension into Leek- Summary Report (September 2013), forms one of the supporting documents that accompany this application. It highlights the broader economic benefits that the railway could bring, showing that the re-connection to Leek will have a very positive impact on the town and will assist in developing and reinforcing the important role of the Churnet Valley Railway as a tourist attraction.

Furthermore, the report indicates that by enabling the CVR heritage steam services to be brought into Leek, the railway for the first time would have a recognisable end destination in an accessible location. This should help the CVR become a more significant 'attractor', potentially widening its catchment area. This in turn, will add to the visitor economy, creating jobs and spend.

5.7 Design Principles

The **NPPF** acknowledges the importance of achieving high quality and inclusive design for all development. **Paragraph 56** advises that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, is indivisible from good planning, and should contribute positively to making places better for people. **Paragraph 58** emphasises that developments should function well and add to the overall quality of the area; they should also establish a strong sense of place using buildings to create attractive and comfortable places to live, work and visit.

Local Plan Policy B13 outlines the design standards required for new development. Policy B13 states that development proposals will be expected to demonstrate a good quality of design which takes into account the scale, character, siting, alignment, mass, design, colour and materials of their surroundings.

Revised Submission Core Strategy DC1 deals with design considerations and seeks to ensure a high standard of design which is locally distinctive and reinforces the unique character of its individual settlements.

Revised Submission Core Strategy DC3 deals with Landscape and Settlement Setting and provides protection for local landscape character which includes features, qualities and views that can make a valuable contribution to the landscape quality.

Design Principles SPG has been prepared to illustrate the basic design principles applicable to development primarily within the rural areas of Staffordshire Moorlands. The Document states that all new development should always have regard to its surroundings so that it is appropriate and blends with the scale, proportions, materials and character of the buildings of the area.

Commentary

Good design, appropriate to its local context has been at the heart of the proposals in this application. Whilst not fixed at this stage, the Design and Access Statement sets out how the scheme may be brought forward in a manner which embraces the objective of achieving good design and which positively responds to the opportunities and constraints presented by the site context. This includes establishment of associated development principles which will provide a guide to inform future reserved matters applications to ensure this is achieved. The full Design and Access Statement is one of the series of documents that has been submitted as part of the overall planning application package.

5.8 Ecology

When determining planning applications, the **NPPF** advises that local planning authorities should aim to conserve and enhance biodiversity by, inter alia, refusing applications that would result in significant harm that cannot be avoided, adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for.

The site is also identified as a Nature Conservation Site. **Local Plan Policy N15** relates to Nature Conservation Sites and states that where development is to be approved which could adversely affect any site of significant nature conservation value, appropriate measures shall

be required to conserve the site's biological or geological interest and to provide for replacement habitats or features where damage is unavoidable.

Revised Submission Core Strategy Policy NE1- Biodiversity and Geological Resources

seeks to ensure that the biodiversity and geological resources of the District and neighbouring areas will be protected and enhanced by positive management and strict control of development.

Commentary

In 1982 the site was surveyed as part of the County Phase 1 Ecological Survey and was designated a Site of Biological Importance (SBI). In 1998 a resurvey of the whole of Staffordshire Moorlands took place, but this site was not revisited at that time. Nevertheless, the site was allocated as a Nature Conservation Site within the 1998 Adopted Local Plan notwithstanding that the survey information underpinning the original basis for the SBI designation was historical and had not been updated. (Confirmation of this historical record can be provided if necessary).

Whilst the site is allocated in the adopted Local Plan, the Revised Submission Core Strategy Local Plan does not carry this allocation forward and the Core Strategy Key Diagram does not show the site as a significant site for nature conservation.

Nevertheless, in order to comply with the above policies, an extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey of the site was undertaken in August 2013. This represents the first survey to have been undertaken since 1982. The Survey consisted of a thorough walkover of the site to map the habitats present and to identify plant species indicative of the habitats present and the potential of the site to support protected species.

Habitats of Principal Importance were present on site and immediately adjacent. These included dry heath scrub, semi natural broadleaved woodland and running water. Scattered trees, semi natural broadleaved woodland and bare earth were also present on site.

No evidence of protected species or the presence of protected species was found during the survey but due to the suitability of the habitats on site and species records in close proximity the following surveys have been completed:

- Reptile
- Otter
- Bats
- Invertebrate

Each of the surveys is discussed in more detail below:

Bat Survey

The bat survey consisted of a desktop study and on site field studies including an inspection of the structures present (i.e. bridges and trees) for bats, an activity survey, and an emergence survey.

No evidence of bat roosts was observed during the inspection of the structures on site and no bats were recorded emerging from any of the bridges present. However, a number of different bat species were recorded foraging on the proposed development site and commuting through, adjacent to the site boundaries, via the habitat present on site. Although some tree areas will be removed, substantial woodland groups will be retained that will continue to provide foraging corridors linking to trees and other vegetation off site.

Invertebrate Walkover Survey Report

The site includes a range of habitats capable of supporting invertebrate assemblages and a number of invertebrate species were observed on site during the course of the habitat and invertebrate surveys. Based upon data acquired to date, it is believed that the habitats and species recorded do not constitute a constraint to the development of the site. However, a detailed mitigation strategy for the site will be devised to reduce any adverse impacts upon the invertebrate ecology present on the site.

Otter Survey Report

The habitats present both on site and immediately adjacent to the site have the potential to support otter, which is both a UK and a European Protected Species (EPS), as well as a UK Species of Principal Importance and local BAP Priority Species.

The otter survey report confirms that no form of shelter used by otter is present on the site. Therefore no otter habitat used for shelter or protection will be disturbed, damaged or destroyed as a result of construction activity associated with the development. There will also be no obstruction of access to any form of shelter. Therefore, these potential offences would not be a consequence of the development.

However, both otter prints and otter couches were recorded adjacent to the proposed development site during the course of the survey, but there were no holts observed. Therefore, whilst otter utilise the adjacent watercourses and associated riverine habitat, it is believed that they have only a transitory presence.

As a result the report concludes that on site activities associated with construction could have the potential to disturb any otter adjacent to the site. A series of mitigation measures will therefore be put in place to avoid the potential for otters to be harmed on site during works.

Reptile Survey Report

No reptile species were recorded within the study area during the course of the 2013 survey. Whilst it is unlikely that the presence of reptiles will constitute a constraint to the proposed development, there remains a low risk that reptiles are present, albeit in such low numbers that they were not detected by 2013 the survey effort. As such, precautionary working methods will be adopted during any on site clearance activity in order to avoid the intentional killing or injury of reptiles and prevent potential adverse impacts upon any reptiles.

For additional information, please refer to the Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey and accompanying reports submitted as part of the application package.

5.9 Landscape and Trees

Chapter 11 of the NPPF is concerned with conserving and enhancing the natural environment. It requires the planning system to contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment in a number of ways including preventing new development from contributing to unacceptable levels of air and noise pollution.

The site lies within a Special Landscape Area as defined within the Local Plan. **Local Plan Policy N8** states that in the Special Landscape Area, planning permission will not be given for development which would materially detract from the high quality of the landscape because of its siting, scale, design and materials and the associated traffic generation.

Local Plan Policy N9 states that within the special landscape area the Local Planning Authority will promote and require high standards of design for development.

Local Plan Policy B13 states that new development proposals should provide design and landscaping of the spaces between and around buildings throughout the whole site which takes account of and enhances the scale and character of their surroundings. Where soft landscaping is appropriate, it should follow ecological principles and incorporate plant species which are indigenous to the locality.

Revised Submission Core Strategy Policy DC1 states that all development shall be designed to respect the site and its surroundings and promote a positive sense of place and identity through its scale, density, layout, siting, landscaping, character and appearance.

Commentary

The proposed layout will incorporate individual garden spaces as well as shared spaces softened with landscaping enhancing the landscaping within the site. Permeability to the site will also be provided with the introduction of footpaths through and around the site linking the site with existing surrounding landscaping. Please refer to the Design and Access Statement for further information in relation to landscaping.

The application site accommodates a number of trees and shrubs both within and along the boundaries of the site. The trees present on site are not covered by a Tree Preservation Order and the application site is not located within a conservation area.

The tree groups consist of small woodland blocks providing ecological habitats and wildlife corridors along the railway embankments. The groups of woodlands have recently, within the last 20 years, established on disused railway sidings.

The proposal will involve the removal of the main group of trees within the site (G2, G3, G5, G6 and G7 on the Tree Removal Plan). However, it is the intention to retain the woodland groups around the edge of the site as this will allow wildlife to migrate around the development to surrounding woodland blocks and riparian sites along the River Churnet. The introduction of the surface water holding pond will provide significant new feature for wildlife diversification on the site.

The retention of the trees along the borders of the site around the railway lines will make a significant contribution towards mitigating the effects of the development by screening the site from the wider environment and providing wildlife corridors to other woodland areas. As these trees continue to grow, the screening of the site to the wider environment will be complete.

Please refer to the Arboricultural Appraisal and Impact Assessment which forms part of this submission.

5.10 Drainage and Flood Risk

Chapter 10 of the NPPF deals with flood risk and states that inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding should be avoided, directing development away from areas at

highest risk but, where development is necessary, making it safe without increasing flood risk elsewhere.

Revised Submission Core Strategy Policy SD3 deals with pollution and flood risk and states that development proposed within the floodplain will be guided to first make use of areas at no or low risk of flooding before areas at higher risk, where this is viable or possible and compatible with other policies aimed at achieving a sustainable pattern of development.

Development deemed acceptable within areas at risk of flooding due to national or other policies or other material considerations, must be subject to a flood risk assessment. Additionally, approved schemes must be designed and controlled to mitigate the effects of flooding on the site and the potential impact of the development on flooding elsewhere in the floodplain. In all cases, schemes will be determined after having considered both individual and cumulative impacts.

Tamworth, Lichfield, Stafford and Staffordshire Moorlands Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (January 2008) – Leekbrook falls within Flood Zones 2 and 3 therefore all development should seek to reduce existing local flooding and not add to them.

Commentary

The Flood Risk Assessment submitted in support of the application indicates that the site lies within the Environment Agency's Provisional Flood Zone 2 (as defined by the recently completed 2013 River Churnet modelling). Within Table 1 of the Technical Guidance accompanying the NPPF, sites in Flood Zone 2 are classified as having a 'Medium Probability' of flooding. Flood Zone 2 is defined as "*Land assessed as having between a 1 in 100 and 1 in 1000 annual probability of river flooding (1% - 0.1%) in any year.*"

The development is considered to be a 'More Vulnerable' development, because of the residential elements, which are considered appropriate in Flood Zone 2 subject to passing the Sequential Test. The FRA provides information to show that the development should pass the Sequential Test, as it is not located within a high risk area and, whilst located in an area with a flood risk, the development location is intrinsically linked to the reinstatement of the Moorlands and City Railways (MCR) and Churnet Valley Railway (CVR) line, thus providing the means to achieve major strategic policy aspirations for the area. Alternative sites within the area will not meet these aspirations. Measures are also proposed to manage the residual risks of flooding in more extreme events.

The development proposal has considered flood risk throughout the development of the scheme and flood risk constraints have been taken into account within the design such that

the masterplan reflects the flood risk constraints and the need to manage, and where possible reduce, flood risk in compliance with the guidance in the NPPF and the SFRA. Surface water runoff can be managed within the site.

Please refer to the accompanying Flood Risk Assessment for further details.

5.11 Noise and Air Quality

The NPPF indicates that decisions should aim to avoid the prospect of noise giving rise to significant or other adverse impacts on health and quality of life, as a result of new development.

In relation to Air Quality, the NPPF states that planning decisions should ensure that any new development in Air Quality Management Areas is consistent with the local air quality action plan.

Local Plan Policy B13 states that development proposals should mitigate adverse environmental effects including noise as far as possible.

Local Plan Policy N28 deals with contaminated land and states that the Council will encourage and where possible assist proposals which will result in the reclamation and appropriate redevelopment of contaminated land.

Revised Core Strategy Policy SD1 supports and promotes proposals that remediate brownfield sites affected by contamination.

Revised Core Strategy Policy SD3 deals with pollution and states that the Council will ensure that the effects of pollution (air, noise, water, light) are avoided or mitigated by refusing schemes which are deemed to be (individually or cumulatively) environmentally unacceptable and by avoiding unacceptable amenity impacts by refusing schemes which are pollution-sensitive adjacent to polluting developments, or polluting schemes adjacent to pollution sensitive areas, in accordance with national guidance.

Commentary

In accordance with the above policy framework, the following assessments have been submitted in support of the application.

Noise Assessment

The Noise Assessment report demonstrates that existing noise from the use of the steam railway at Leekbrook should not be a constraint to the residential development of the site. Also, opening up and using new railway lines for steam trains will not have a detrimental impact on future residents providing safeguards are put into place, notably maximising the distance between rail track and the nearest dwelling.

Please refer to the Noise Assessment for further information.

Air Quality Assessment

The site is located close to the Leek sewage treatment works, however the risk of odour from the operation of the works impacting future residents of the development has been considered. It is concluded that the risk of odour impacts at the development site is not thought to be significant.

In addition, the scheme would not introduce any new exposure into an area with poor air quality. The proposed scheme would not significantly increase traffic volumes on local roads, and therefore the scheme would not result in any significant changes in pollutant concentrations. The operational impacts of the scheme are therefore insignificant.

As there will be no significant impact on air quality arising from this development and exposure of future residents to pollutants is highly likely to be well below air quality objectives, no mitigation is therefore proposed in respect of this scheme.

Please refer to the Air Quality Assessment for further information.

5.12 Ground Conditions

A Preliminary Sources (desk) Study and Ground Risk Assessment has undertaken in support of this application. This desk study assessment has shown the site is likely to be suitable for the proposed development. Please refer to the full Assessment for further detail on ground contamination.

5.13 Planning Obligations

Local Plan Policy A1 seeks contributions from developers towards the provision of community facilities and environmental and infrastructure improvements when there are directly related to the development or the use of land after development and are reasonably related in scale and kind to the development.

Developer/Landowner Contributions Supplementary Planning Guidance assists those wishing to develop in the District in terms of what contributions are normally required in relation to service infrastructure.

It is not the intention of the SPG to compromise regeneration or sustainability in any parts of the District. Therefore the requirement for transportation, affordable and local needs housing, public open space, nature conservation, recycling, town centre enhancement, public art and community safety may be waived in exceptional circumstances, i.e.

- where the building and/or vicinity is in a poor or derelict condition AND
- the development would result in substantial improvements to the local environment AND
- it can be demonstrated to the Council's satisfaction that the requirement would render the redevelopment financially non-viable. OR
- the proposal involves the redevelopment of a listed building AND
- it can be demonstrated to the Council's satisfaction that the requirement would render the redevelopment financially non-viable.

Commentary

The financial details of the project are outlined in the Funding and Delivery Report which accompanies this application. This shows that Moorland and City Railways will undertake to fund the reinstatement of the railway line from Leekbrook to Leek, the costs of which have been independently assessed at £567,400 as set out in the Leekbrook to Leek Track Estimate.

As outlined above and within the Funding and Delivery Report, the railway will bring with it large scale public benefits for the whole district in terms of environmental improvements, increased connectivity, carbon reduction, economic regeneration and tourism. The dedicated funding for the reinstatement of the railway will take up approximately half of the net capital released by the development to Moorland and City Railways and any additional imposition of contributions would render the project financially non viable. Therefore, in the context of the aims of the project and the benefits that the railway will provide, MCR consider that exceptional circumstances exist to justify no additional planning obligations being imposed for service infrastructure, other than its commitment to providing £567,400 for the reinstatement of the railway.

For further information, please refer to the Funding and Delivery Report and the Leekbrook to Leek Track Estimate, submitted in support of the application.

6.0 Conclusion

This report clearly demonstrates that the proposed development is aligned with national policy and the relevant saved policies set out within the Staffordshire Moorlands District Local Plan Adopted 1998 and the policies within the Revised Submission Core Strategy,

The proposal has been subject to public consultations and discussion with officers of the Council and key stakeholders.

The proposed development will fulfil a crucial enabling role in providing funding to help realise a key strategic policy objective of both Staffordshire County Council and Staffordshire Moorlands District Council - the ability to re-instate and bring back into operation a part of the former railway network in the County as part of a phased process.

Furthermore, the location of the proposed development at Leekbrook will not undermine the spatial strategy for the district; on the contrary, it will lend support by facilitating the realisation of key strategic policy aspirations embodied in the Spatial Strategy of the Core Strategy and the Churnet Valley Masterplan. Specifically:

- The development will assist in injecting vibrancy into Leekbrook by providing homes that will assist in re-vitalising its character and will help to support and enable the provision of better and a wider range of services;
- It will unleash the opportunity to fund the reinstatement of the former railway into Leek and in so doing, will provide a major boost to the town's role as the main service and employment centre for the district and to its visitor economy (please cross refer to Section 2.4 of this statement for further information regarding the projected income the railway could inject into the local economy);
- The reinstatement of the railway network provides the opportunity to create sustainable public transport links between Leek, Leekbrook and other settlements within the Churnet Valley to the south and, ultimately, Stoke on Trent; this will greatly assist in improving the permeability of the local area and the connectivity between places within and beyond it;
- The enabling benefits of the Leekbrook development in funding the reinstatement of the railway has fundamental ramifications in assisting in the delivery of significant public transport improvements, required to facilitate mixed use development at Cornhill and secure the major regeneration benefits that this site is expected to bring;
- The delivery of essential infrastructure benefits are recognised as being a major factor in achieving the spatial strategy through developer funding required in order to deliver major sustainable regeneration;

- The railway reinstatement will greatly assist in boosting the economic contribution from sustainable tourism that the Council's strategy for the Churnet Valley seeks to achieve; this will bring significant commercial benefits in terms of the expansion of CVR as a major tourism enterprise and the propensity to boost jobs and net expenditure in Leek and the surrounding area.
- Extension of the CVR to Leek will provide the heritage railway with a terminus that, to date, it has never had. This will add to its attraction in providing scope for multiple purpose visits; it will also increase the potential to encourage greater access into the Churnet Valley by public transport and provide enhanced opportunities for people to experience the assets of the valley in a sustainable manner.
- As a former brownfield site, now re-colonised, the application site will enable peripheral expansion of the built form of Leekbrook in a manner that can be properly assimilated into the landscape.
- The retention of peripheral trees and vegetation around the application site will enable the assimilation of the proposed development within the landscape without prejudicing its overall character or that of the settlement; the site will not be visible from properties or premises located beyond the site boundary;
- The development of the site will not compromise overall environmental quality.
- The proposed development will assist in meeting five year housing requirements
- The proposed development comprises of an indicative mix of housing in terms of size and type, consistent with local needs.

It is therefore considered that the proposed development should be approved.

