Hyndburn Borough Core Strategy and Accrington Area Action Plan DPDs

Comments on Matters and Issues for Examination made on behalf of Mr H Grimshaw

Further Comments in relation to Rural Areas (Policy RA1) and Supporting Text Respondent ID No: CS033

The Inspector has identified specific matters and issues for examination in relation to the topic of rural areas which is to be dealt with on day 6 of the Examination (Wednesday 28 September 2011). I therefore comment below utilising the headings of the specific matters etc which the Inspector via the Programme Officer has set out in a specific schedule that was issued, inter alia, to accompany the notes of the PHM.

Whilst we have been invited to attend the session relating to Rural Areas it seems that a little confusion may have arisen because the principal representation that was made at the initial stage was indeed directed at paragraph 5.74 of the publication version of the Core Strategy that is the final paragraph of the supporting text to Policy RA1, which does relate to the amount and distribution of housing in rural areas. In fact, as a result of our representation the Authority has agreed with our argument and proposed as a change in the revised publication edition that the penultimate sentence in the paragraph should be removed because it caused the paragraph as a whole to be confusing and appear contradictory. That is to say it both indicated that a review of the Green Belt and Urban Boundary specifically in relation to Areas of Special Restraint both had already taken place and was to be undertaken as part of the Site Allocations and Development Management DPDs. In summary the latter is the case and we have supported this because that is logically the stage to review whether or not the Areas of Special Restraint now need to be specifically allocated for development.

I repeat that the layout of the document in this respect seems to have caused a little confusion in the sense that, I suppose, correctly the Areas of Special Restraint and in particular the one with which we are involved on the southern edge of Oswaldtwistle, substantial part of which is owned and controlled by our client are at present part of the Rural Area as it lies outside of the Urban Boundary. However moving forward my understanding of the position is that if this or indeed any of the other Areas of Special Restraint which directly adjoin the wider urban area of Accrington and its associated townships are to be developed, then such development will count against the allocation in Policy HA1 for Accrington as the main urban area rather than Policy RA1 which sets out the appropriate Amount and Distribution of Housing in Rural Areas and quite appropriately adopts a restrictive policy of limiting this to that needed to meet specific local needs which satisfy the requirements of Green Belt and other rural policies.

This being the case, I wondered whether or not the additional representations which I make below are more properly related to the session relating to 'Area Based Policies' and more particularly to Section A dealing with 'Accrington and Townships' but have left this to the discretion of the Inspector as to when and where in the timetable it is most appropriate to deal with these. However as clearly these comments do relate more particularly to the utilisation of the Area of Special Restraint which is largely controlled by my client in order to achieve the development aspirations for Accrington and its
Townships I address and support the Council’s position on the particular matter that the Inspector has raised in this respect, rather than Matter Ea of the Amount and Distribution of Housing in Rural Areas to be provided for under Policy RA1.

**Accrington and Townships**

a) This matter is concerned with the Amount and Distribution of Housing in Accrington under Policy A1 and in particular the Inspector wishes to discuss whether the amount and proportion of new housing development to be developed within Accrington and its townships is appropriate, soundly based, deliverable and justified with evidence.

In brief I do consider that the intention to direct 75% of the whole of the new housing proposed for the Borough to be the main urban area of Accrington and its townships is appropriate. This is qualified by the caveat that in this context I consider the indication of the ‘main urban area’ of Accrington and its townships to embrace not only the area defined by the current Urban Boundary but also the wider physical confines of the broad conurbation to include particularly the Areas of Special Restraint. These were in effect in the 1996 Local Plan identified to provide a reserve area of land excluded from the Green Belt, logically associated with and indeed attached to the present wider urban area to meet medium and longer term development needs without the need for incursions into the Green Belt surrounding the wider settlement for these purposes.

In broad terms Accrington and its townships is the logical focus for the majority of new housing and other development within the Borough. It is presently the main town and will continue in that role which can indeed be built on as well capitalising on its high level of accessibility. Indeed given the accessible location this is capable of acting as a catalyst for regeneration to benefit the Borough as a whole.

It would appear that work undertaken on the availability of housing land in the Borough has indicated that there is sufficient land to meet the housing needs of the Borough over the Plan period without the need for strategic changes to the Green Belt. However clearly the opportunity to follow this course of action has to a large extent been facilitated by the foresight displayed at the time of the preparation of the 1996 Local Plan in identifying several Areas of Special Restraint on the fringes of the wider urban area but directly adjoining it as a reserve to meet what were at that time medium to longer term development needs that would obviate the need for later incursions into the Green Belt. These areas, particularly the one in which we are involved are logically excluded from the Green Belt because they form physically self contained parcels of land that would not fulfil or contribute to Green Belt purposes and objectives but do relate to the existing urban area such that they are highly accessible to it and the wide range of services and facilities which it provides. Moreover, in this case the site is physically and visually associated with the edge of the settlement as it runs downhill towards it and the Green Belt boundary is currently very properly defined on the ridge which separates it from the open countryside beyond.
Furthermore, these and this one in particular have been assessed as part of the SHLAA exercise and it is concluded to demonstrate potential for development as although it is greenfield it is on the edge of the settlement and consequently a logical site to be in the first round of consideration.

Finally and most significantly, the Green Belt Topic Paper prepared in April this year as well as discussing positive exclusions from the present Green Belt boundary which are proposed has also in paragraph 4.3 set out sites which are being considered to be added back into the Green Belt. Although two of the Areas of Special Restraint identified in the Local Plan in Oswaldtwistle have in whole or in part been identified as possible areas for inclusion in the Green Belt, significantly this one has not and therefore whilst it is acknowledged that its future role and possible allocation for development will quite correctly be appropriately considered in detail at the subsequent stage of the preparation of the Site Allocations and Development Management DPDs, this initial work is an early indication of its suitability for development.

Moving more directly to the Oswaldtwistle township, it is an attractive part of the wider urban area to locate new development because it is not only situated on the countryside edge, with good accessibility to the primary road network but also it is enhanced by its remaining development that forms part of its history and the manner in which it originally developed as a settlement. Indeed the Oswaldtwistle Mills complex now converted to a shopping village is a part of the settlement with a strong historic character and association with the historic parts of the town. Accordingly and most sensibly therefore a Specific Policy (A6) has been included to foster the role of Oswaldtwistle Mills by supporting additional development on the site provided that it does not adversely affect the economic viability of Oswaldtwistle and Accrington town centres.

This will add further to the economic viability and diversity of the Oswaldtwistle township and increase the logic of developing family housing within this part of Accrington in order to assist and support that role. Again therefore this points towards the logical release of the Area of Special Restraint at the southern edge of Oswaldtwistle for this purpose.

For these reasons it is considered that the amount and proportion of new housing development assigned to Accrington and its townships, forming the clear majority share of development within the Borough is wholly appropriate, soundly based and deliverable because the opportunity exists to provide a variety of sites which will be attractive to the house building industry to provide on them the type of larger detached and semi detached family housing which is presently within short supply in the area.

ian barley associates

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