

Hearing Statement – March Policy CS9

Question 1

1. A clear statement of our proposed amendments to the Core Strategy Policy CS9 we set out in our objection dated 30th July 2013 in response to the amendment to the Document proposed. A copy is attached as Appendix A for ease of reference and it is not proposed to repeat these points within the statement
2. The Sustainability Appraisal has been utilised by the Council in an attempt to justify a decision taken for political reasons. As set out in the objection, the various rationales for the amendment when examined do not support objectively the decision that the original allocation of North East March was incorrect. It was stated to be sound in the original submission version, and it is submitted it remains so in principle
3. It is not clear how the sustainability appraisal has influenced the plan when viewed objectively and the revision is considered unsound in the light of this on the basis that it is not positively prepared, justified or effective.
4. The deletion ignores the location of North East March as best placed for proximity to the rail station and employment areas of all considered allocations, and as a result scoring well on sustainability grounds. In the original consideration its case was sufficiently strong it was proposed as the primary tier strategic allocation rather than as a growth area.
5. It is the case that the original proposal was flawed in including the Playing Field within the area of proposed development, without safeguarding the facility. However, as we have suggested, minor wording to the policy clarifying the requirement for it to remain as a public facility was a sufficient change rather than deletion of the allocation.
6. The proposed replacement in numbers between an increased size proposal at South West March – acknowledged in Amended version of Core Strategy Amendment 4 as pushing back delivery (by 7 years suggested) and windfall in an unspecified location is not considered the most reasonable.
7. In theory a scheme of 249 could still occur at North East March as a windfall, but it is submitted that, as per the attached objection, a reduced area excluding the playing field, and a reduced strategic allocation of 300, based upon the objective sustainability appraisal and assessments within the original policy, before being influenced by politics, would be a more appropriate and reasonable location. The increase in numbers at South West March would be reduced to 350. This would leave the windfall allowance at 450 for March, (similar to Wisbech) part of which could be utilised at South West March or as additions to any of the proposed Allocations or Broad Locations dependent upon progress with delivery in the latter part of the plan period, if sufficient windfall is not forthcoming elsewhere.
8. In its current form the plan is considered unsound as not positively prepared on the basis of the background evidence, not justified by the rationales utilised in the proposed amendment and not effective in terms of delivery. The position of the Council in initially certifying in their studies that this proposed allocation was sound, and subsequently seeking to argue that it was not, is untenable.
9. It is noted that other representations on behalf of St Johns College and Cambridgeshire CC suggest that the appropriate scale of development can be accommodated on a smaller area of land, excluding that owned by the Wilkinson family for whom we act. We would counter

this argument by pointing out that the alternative schemes still reduce the size of land identified for playing field use, and proposed densities of 35 units per hectare, which are significantly above the level envisaged in the Core Strategy or generally in larger applications within Fenland, seek to over develop the sites in their ownership, rather than utilise the area initially allocated, minus the playing field in its entirety, to achieve a higher quality of development and environment for the area.

10. Including land to the east and north east of Berryfield, owned by our clients, as proposed, envisaged as an area for family homes of a similar nature to those in Berryfield, rather than high density unit, alongside those on Land owned by St John's College (but at a lower density) would create a housing environment with an appropriate range of accommodation for the area, of manageable scale and likely to achieve early delivery in a sustainable location. The allocation could also contribute via S106 agreements to enhancement of the community facilities of the existing sports ground, without crowding the sports ground, rather than removing or reducing the sports facilities. Access options mean that traffic routes could introduce manageable scale to each of the three potential access points serving the allocation as a whole, and enable initial phases at an early stage of the plan period.
11. The majority of the land in my clients ownership is Flood Zone 1 excepting the eastern extremity with would give opportunity for open space / landscaping to form a landscaped buffer at the edge of the town. Other representations suggesting all is at higher flood risk are inaccurate.
12. We thus submit that the amendments proposed in our objection should be adopted and the Core Strategy is unsound in its current form, being not positively prepared, justified or effective.