

# PDH01557

## Site 3376 – Land off Weetwood Avenue

### Proposed allocation for housing in the Leeds Site Allocations Plan - Ref HG2-49

*We object in the strongest terms to the proposed allocation of land off Weetwood Avenue for housing in the Leeds Site Allocations Plan. The proposal fails the tests of soundness in terms of consistency with National Planning Policy and justification.*

#### *Grounds of objection*

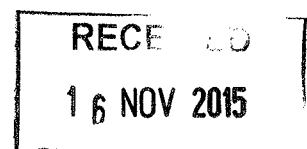
1. The site is designated as statutory Green Belt in the current Development Plan. NPPF confirms that such designation is intended to be permanent and only changed in exceptional circumstances. There has been no systematic and transparent analysis to review Green Belt boundaries in this part of the city to justify the removal of this site from Green Belt. There are no exceptional circumstances to justify a change in the Green Belt status of the site. On this basis, the Plan fails the test of soundness in relation to any justification for this Green Belt alteration and is inconsistent with NPPF which requires Green Belt boundaries to be permanent. The NPPF sets a high bar in terms of justifying alterations to Green Belt boundaries and the case for the re-designation of this site for housing development has not been justified in planning terms.
2. The site performs an important Green Belt function. It is an important open space in this area of the city, restricting urban sprawl and safeguarding an important gap in the built up area as part of the wider Meanwood Valley. The site forms part of a wider network of greenspace in this part of the city which would be harmed by its development for housing, including through impact and encroachment on the adjoining Meanwood Park. It cannot be considered as an infill site given its strong linkage to the wider open space network.
3. The site is also in a Conservation Area, an Urban Green Corridor and has recognised wildlife value. These designations are intended to give the site maximum protection from development and properly reflect the importance of the site in the local area and its relationship to a wider open space network.
4. The site makes an important contribution to character of the Weetwood Conservation Area and its development for housing would have harmful impacts on that character. Indeed, the potential for such harm is acknowledged in the Site Allocations Plan.
5. The site is within the area covered by the Far Headingley, Weetwood and West Park Neighbourhood Design Statement which highlights the importance of open space and the significant constraints on future development.
6. Throughout the Local Plan-making process the Council Planning Officers have consistently assessed the site to be inappropriate for housing development. In all assessments the site has been categorised as 'RED' meaning that it is considered unsuitable for housing development based on its Green Belt status and the potential for harm to the Conservation Area and green space value.
7. These assessments had given local residents confidence that the site would be protected from development and were accepted by the Council until it received a letter on 9<sup>th</sup> January

2015 from the site owners, Leeds Rugby Limited, offering to use the proceeds from the development of the site to contribute to the cost of improvements at Headingley Stadium. This is the only factor that has led to the Council overriding its Officers professional assessment and deciding to consider the re-designation of the site for housing. We contend that the Council has given undue weight to this offer given that:

- a. the improvements to the stadium are entirely unrelated to the development of the Weetwood site. This is acknowledged by the Council's own Officers in their report to the Council of 20<sup>th</sup> May 2015. On this basis, the offer should have no bearing on the Plan-making process and certainly not in respect of such a major decision involving a change to a statutory Green Belt boundary;
  - b. If the site is re-designated for housing in the Local Plan this establishes the principle of development, irrespective of any offer to use the proceeds from the site towards the stadium. In the context of a Local Plan process, the offer is, at best, of limited weight and, arguably, irrelevant. As this is the only basis on which the site is now being proposed for housing designation, and Green Belt boundaries changed, the Plan-making process appears unsound.
  - c. Even if the offer regarding the use of the proceeds from the site was to be considered relevant in planning terms, there is no evidence that such proceeds would result in the stadium improvements going ahead given the overall level of funding required.
8. There is no overriding need for the site to be designated for housing and to override Green Belt protections. There is no shortage of housing land supply in this part of the city and certainly no case that statutory Green Belt boundaries need to be changed to address housing shortage in this area of the city. The Council's own analysis of the North Leeds HMCA has confirmed this position.
  9. The proposed capacity of the site for housing development, currently identified as 30 units, means that if it is retained in Green Belt this will have no material impact on the soundness of the Plan in terms of housing land supply in this part of the city.

This proposal is entirely inappropriate in planning terms and will be strongly resisted. The basis for the proposed change in the Green Belt boundary and allocation of the site for housing development is unsound and the proposal should be removed from the Site Allocations Plan. The Plan fails the tests of soundness in terms of consistency with National Planning Policy and lack of justification. The site should remain in Green Belt and the proposed housing allocation should be deleted from the Plan.

MR Colin Megson, 3 Becksides Gardens, Weetwood, LS16 5QZ



Nov 9th 2015