

8 January, 2018

Matters and Questions
Melton Local Plan Examination

Dear Examiner,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Plan in the context of Matters and Questions. I am a Somerby resident and a member of the Neighbourhood Plan there, so when examples are necessary to illustrate my points, I will reference my Parish or village, but I believe observations may also apply for the other rural parts of the Borough.

Matter 5: Other Housing Allocation (Policy C1(A) and Appendix 1) and Reserve Sites

5.1 Overall, the site assessment process (SA, Evidence Base (EB) and content of Appendix 1) is not clear or robust, or consistent and not always informed by the SA.

For brevity, comments for sections i-iii will focus mainly on the historic environment component of the site assessments, using Somerby as an example.

i) Have an appropriate selection of sites been assessed

A key sustainability issue is to ensure brownfield sites are redeveloped and greenfield sites kept to a minimum. All three policy sites in Somerby are greenfield although there are two to three potential brownfield/agricultural yard sites in the village.

One, was submitted in the 2012 SHLAA, capacity 30 houses, and refused as too large in scale, however all current site allocations are larger. This site should be reintroduced in the SHLAA as a reasonable alternative to the greenfield sites in Somerby and would complete the housing requirement, given recent permissions more sustainably. Indications are this site will come forward which can be discussed.

Change:

- Include brownfield targets in the Plan and incentives for their development.
- Add the 2012 SHLAA site as the alternative to greenfield sites to meet the Somerby housing requirement.

ii) Has an appropriate methodology been used and applied consistently to selection of preferred sites, especially those with heritage issues

ii-a) No, sufficient evidence and appropriate methodologies weren't used when deciding that sites with heritage issues would have 'negligible effects' from development:

ii-a-1) The SA lacks sufficient evidence to do this.

In Appendix 1, Consultation Comments, Table A1.1, HE comments that the SA scoping report had 'overly narrow' information on the historic environment, little relevant local information, missed out historic landscape features and assets which are not designated, and references to settings and Significance. Policy amendments were made in Appendix 3, but it notes local information was still not adequate (p. 199)

In Table A1.3, HE suggested a number of questions to be used when assessing sites, including a question on settings, which to be answered proportionately would require knowledge of the contribution a setting makes to an HAs Significance.

ii-a-2) The selection of preferred sites with heritage issues doesn't appear to have used proportionate evidence when making conclusions.

In Chapter 6, points 6.37- 6.40, the SA states that the Council assessed smaller scale sites for heritage issues, and decided that 31 sites were 'most likely to have negligible effects' because HAs were 'outside the site and can be mitigated'.

It is not clear what evidence was used to determine this, or whether the site itself might be the HA's setting requiring

additional assessment before concluding that design and/or screening could provide effective long term mitigation.

ii-a-3) Sites with heritage constraints are not sufficiently justified to allocate as Policies in the Plan.

There are too many ' ? ' (no data) scores in the SA and inconsistencies with the EB. Inaccuracies exist. The Plan itself considers them 'uncertain' -- with a high degree of unpredictability -- until the planning application stage. Therefore, such sites are not reasonably deliverable, and should not be included as Policies in the strategic framework.

ii-b) Differences between the SA and EB site scores

The EB environmental scores are more positive than the SA scores and the reasons for this are not clear. For example only, for SOM 3, all ' ? ' uncertain (no data) scores changed to neutral or positive scores in the EB.

SOM 3	SA	EB
Landscape/Landscape Designation	-?	0
Biodiversity	-?	++
Historic Environment/Heritage Assets (CA)	0?	+
Land use agricultural land	--	-
Water	0	N/A
TPO/Ancient Woodland	N/A	++
Historic Park	N/A	++

Assuming the EB scores came after SA scores in time, what other evidence justifies the EB's more positive scores and its use as a better basis for sites being adopted as Policy?

This phenomenon is evident across all Somerby sites and for most appraisal items, and probably for other villages as well and suggests the Plan's negative effects on the historic environment are under-estimated.

iii) Are the reasons for selecting/rejecting sites clear and sufficient and are there inaccuracies which may undermine conclusions

iii-1) Using the information in Appendix 1 there are a number of overall issues to point out:

First, the Landscape constraint in Somerby is under-estimated. The Fringe Sensitivity Study (FSS) has failed to include pertinent landscape features or use proportionate evidence when assessing historic landscapes as medium sensitivity in LCZ 1 and 4 where two Policy Sites are located.

For LCZ1, which the FSS rated 'of low susceptibility to change due to a relative absence of distinctive landscape features', the study has not included the presence of an historic park land and gardens with over 200 mature and veteran trees adjoining sites SOM2 and SOM3, or an historic close/gateway adjoining SOM 3.

When assessing Somerby LCZ2, which also has an historic park, the study awarded a medium to high sensitivity rating and advice to avoid development in this location. The Plan has been informed and an Historic Landscape Appraisal submitted, but this has not been accepted as evidence, or the Landscape constraint amended and therefore both the SA and EB appraisals score both sites positively for no effect on historic parks, TPO's and veteran trees. This should be

amended in the final Plan.

For LCZ 4, the FSS mis-identified extensive and good condition earthworks of Somerby medieval village which the study called ridge and furrow. This has also been communicated to the Plan but not reflected in SOM2 Site Policy. The FSS did say this site was constrained and would be appropriate for only small scale development, but the Site Policy is for 42 houses.

Second, the employment area closest to Somerby is identified as John O'Gaunt Industrial Estate as a positive for the village. The Plan was informed that this is not an 'industrial estate' but a relatively small number of office spaces, mostly used by one or two staffed family businesses, one a car mechanic. It has not been amended in the Policy and the terminology exaggerates employment opportunities for Somerby.

It should be mentioned that SOM2 and 3 and Manor Lane (non-plan) are all of a piece at the southwest of the village, lead-on and are intervisible with each other, and these three sites cumulatively will significantly alter the historic character of Somerby village and surrounding landscapes in the same area described by the Appeal decision.

iii-2) SOM 2 Site Policy: (42 houses)

The Policy makes no mention of the site's location in the Green Infrastructure Network or features of the historic environment in and around it:

- Extensive good condition earthworks of medieval and post medieval Somerby village, including a medieval hollow way, visible house and street patterns. (recently registered HER-MLE22781).
- Site intervisible with Somerby Grade I Church, a rare late medieval and likely associated cruck house(HER), three Grade II buildings, conservation area and historic parkland of Grove estate (HER MLE 15305).
- Environmental Policies potentially in conflict: EN 1, 3, 6 and 13.
- Planning history: Part of area included in Appeal refusal APP/Y2430/A/14/2221470. The Pan rejected this as pertinent, but I believe has not understood the implications this decision had on establishing the importance of the historic environment at the south and west of Somerby.

iii-3) SOM 3: (35 Houses) This site is now under a planning application so is not a matter for the Examiner. However, if refused, the site should be considered for withdrawal from the SHLAA.

The site is a 3a green field, within the Green Infrastructure, and documented as the historic village close and part of of the Grove estate (HER:MLE15305) at the original north entrance to Somerby village. It is the setting for a rare Grade 2 listed Messenger glasshouse and six other related, but not designated heritage buildings, including a landmark water tower and stables. These buildings were intentionally built around the site at various periods and have group value and evidential features remain showing the site as part of the C19-early C20 successful equestrian business complex associated with persons of national historic importance, including famous artists. It contributes a unique 'sense of place' for Somerby character as a contemporary equestrian tourism destination. Adjoining the site is historic park land and gardens with over 200 veteran and mature trees. The site itself contains ridge and furrow and assessments also indicate pre-historic remains are likely.

Environmental polices potentially in conflict: 1, 3, 6 and 13.

Planning History: APP/Y2430/A/14/2221470 and 77/0581/6, refusal, Burrough Road (1977).

iii-3) Manor Lane (non-plan: 200 houses): This large greenfield site, adjoining SOM 2, was rejected as Policy, because it is currently too large in scale for Somerby. This decision should be amended to not its role as an important part of the historic environment and development effects upon the historic character of Somerby. The site overlooks a long view of undeveloped High Leicestershire Hills countryside, parts in Harborough District. It is intervisible with an extensive part of Somerby conservation area, four Grade II buildings, Grade I Somerby Church, the medieval earthworks, the Grove and listed glasshouse and parkland. Development at the scale proposed will also be intervisible with the SAM's of Owston Abbey and Whatborough Hill. It also is located in the area of Appeal Decision APP/Y2430/A/14/2221470.

iii-3) A review of Site policy statements in Appendix 1 across Borough villages, shows that Somerby was not assessed in the same way or at all for a number of issues it has in common with other places, which include: the extensive nature of its conservation area, quantum of traffic, level of intervisibility, impact on village character, intrusion on parkland character and erosion of settlement character.

iv) A reasonable balance has not been struck between the residual requirement and the allocation of sites because the overall Plan requirement is too high.

5.2 The assessments provide a very high level of flexibility because they exceed the residual requirements, especially in Service Centres.

5.3.No comments.

5.4 - 5.6 No comments.