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**Re: Ecton Neighbourhood Development Plan Regulation 16 Consultation**

Dear Sir/Madam,

This letter provides Gladman's representations in response to the draft version of the Ecton Neighbourhood Plan (ENP) under Regulation 16 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012. This letter seeks to highlight the issues with the plan as currently presented and its relationship with national and local planning policy. Gladman has considerable experience in neighbourhood planning, having been involved in the process during the preparation of numerous plans across the country, it is from this experience that these representations are prepared.

**Legal Requirements**

Before a neighbourhood plan can proceed to referendum it must be tested against a set of basic conditions set out in paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 4b of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended). The basic conditions that the Ecton Neighbourhood Plan (2016-2031) must meet are as follows:

- (a) Having regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State, it is appropriate to make the order.*
- (d) The making of the order contributes to the achievement of sustainable development.*
- (e) The making of the order is in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the development plan for the area of the authority (or any part of that area).*
- (f) The making of the order does not breach, and is otherwise compatible with, EU obligations.*
- (g) Prescribed conditions are met in relation to the Order (or plan) and prescribed matters have been complied with in connection with the proposal for the order (or neighbourhood plan).*

**National Planning Policy Framework and Guidance**

On the 24<sup>th</sup> July 2018, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government published the revised National Planning Policy Framework. The first revision since 2012, it implements 85 reforms announced previously through the Housing White Paper. This version was itself superseded on the 19th February 2019, with the latest version, largely only making alterations to the Government's approach for the Appropriate Assessment as set out in Paragraph 177, clarification to footnote 37 and amendments to the definition of 'deliverable' in Annex 2.

The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. In doing so it sets out the requirements for the preparation of neighbourhood plans to be in conformity with the strategic priorities for the wider area and the role they play in delivering sustainable development to meet development needs.

At the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should be seen as a golden thread through plan-making and decision-taking. This means that plan makers should positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of their area and Local Plans should meet objectively assessed needs, with sufficient flexibility to adapt to rapid change. This requirement is applicable to neighbourhood plans.

The recent Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) updates make clear that neighbourhood plans should conform to national policy requirements and take account of and most up-to-date evidence of housing needs in order to assist the Council in delivering sustainable development, a neighbourhood plan basic condition.

The application of the presumption in favour of sustainable development will have implications for how communities engage with neighbourhood planning. Paragraph 13 of the Framework makes clear that Qualifying Bodies preparing neighbourhood plans should develop plans that support strategic development needs set out in Local Plans, including policies for housing development and plan positively to support local development.

Paragraph 15 further makes clear that neighbourhood plans should set out a succinct and positive vision for the future of the area. A neighbourhood plan should provide a practical framework within which decisions on planning applications can be made with a high degree of predictability and efficiency. Neighbourhood plans should seek to proactively drive and support sustainable economic development to deliver the homes, jobs and thriving local places that the country needs, whilst responding positively to the wider opportunities for growth.

Paragraph 29 of the Framework makes clear that a neighbourhood plan must be aligned with the strategic needs and priorities of the wider area and plan positively to support the delivery of sustainable growth opportunities.

## **Relationship to Local Plan**

For Wellingborough, the Local Plan is made up of two parts:

- Part one: The North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (JCS)
- Part two: The Plan for the Borough of Wellingborough (PBW)

### Part 1: The North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (JCS)

To meet the requirements of the Framework and the Neighbourhood Plan Basic Conditions, neighbourhood plans should be prepared to conform to the strategic policy requirements set out in the adopted Development Plan. The adopted Development Plan relevant to the preparation of the ENP is the North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy, adopted in 2016. The JCS provides the vision, objectives and spatial strategy for the district over the plan period 2011 – 2031, covering the districts/boroughs of Corby, East Northamptonshire, Kettering and Wellingborough; forming a strategy for North Northamptonshire as a whole. The ENP should therefore seek to support and meet those policies contained in the JCS.

The housing requirement set out in the strategic housing policy states the total requirement for all Council's within the JCS is 35,000 dwellings over the plan period, with Wellingborough set to take 7,000. This figure is reliant on the delivery of Sustainable Urban Extensions (SUEs) which will be the key building blocks for growth in North Northamptonshire during and beyond the plan period to 2031. This policy does not set specific targets for neighbourhood areas and as such to meet the requirements of the Framework the neighbourhood plan should not seek to constrain potential sustainable development opportunities from coming forward.

### Part 2: The Plan for the Borough of Wellingborough (PBW)

The Council adopted the Plan for the Borough of Wellingborough on the 26 February 2019, which replaces the policies currently in the Town Centre Area Action Plan (2009) and the saved policies from the Borough of Wellingborough Local Plan (1999-2004). The PBW also replaces the Site-Specific Proposals Development Plan Document that reached preferred options consultation stage in 2010. The PBW includes local specific policies that will guide the future of the Borough over the next 15 years and will supplement the strategic policies in the North Northamptonshire JCS.

The closest Key Service Centre to Ecton is Northampton to the west, with permitted and proposed development abutting the settlement extending into the neighbourhood area. To accord with basic condition (a) it is important that the ENP does not include policies that seek to restrict further sustainable expansion of Northampton, whilst also according with the policies in the two adopted plans discussed previously.

### **Ecton Neighbourhood Plan**

This section highlights the key issues that Gladman would like to raise with regards to the content of the ENP as currently proposed. It is considered that some policies do not reflect the requirements of national policy and guidance, Gladman have therefore sought to recommend a series of alternative options that should be explored prior to the Plan being submitted for Independent Examination.

### **Policy 6 – Local Green Space**

This policy seeks to designate 4 areas of land as Local Green Space (LGS). In order to designate land as LGS the Parish Council must ensure that it is able to demonstrate robust evidence to meet national policy requirements as set out in the Framework. The Framework makes clear at §99 that the role of local communities seeking to designate land as LGS should be consistent with the local planning of sustainable development.

Paragraph 99 of the Framework states that:

***‘The designation of land as Local Green Space through local and neighbourhood plans allows communities to identify and protect green areas of particular importance to them. Designating land as Local Green Space should be consistent with the local planning of sustainable development and complement investment in sufficient homes, jobs and other essential services. Local Green Spaces should only be designated when a plan is prepared or updated and be capable of enduring beyond the end of the plan period.’***

Further guidance is provided at paragraph 100 which sets out three tests that must be met for the designation of LGS and states that:

**‘The Local Green Space designation should only be used where the green space is:**

- a) in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;**
- b) demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and**
- c) local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.’**

With regards to the proposed designations, there appears to be very little consideration of how each proposed LGS meets the criteria for designation beyond fleeting reference contained in the supporting text. In order to designate land as LGS the ENP should be supported by proportionate and robust evidence as required by the PPG. Failure to demonstrate how each parcel meets the test above is contrary to the requirements of national policy and guidance and is therefore inconsistent with basic condition (a).

### **Policy 9: Maintaining the separate identity of Ecton village**

This policy seeks to avoid coalescence of settlements and development will only be permitted if they do not impinge on the current gaps between Ecton and neighbouring Northampton. This area of land has been identified on the ENP Policies Map as 'sensitive to coalescence'.

The Parish Council is not the decision making authority and therefore cannot 'permit' development. The ability to determine planning applications is the sole responsibility of the decision making authority. This reference should therefore be deleted from the policy wording.

Furthermore, Gladman consider that this is a strategic issue that should only be considered through the Local Plan process. Indeed, no such designation exists in the NNJCS or the PBW. The area identified as sensitive to coalescence covers vast swathes of land. In such circumstances, we would question the purpose of this policy as it may jeopardise the delivery of otherwise sustainable and deliverable housing opportunities to meet wider housing needs (i.e. Northampton) which is contrary to the PPG which makes clear:

**"A wide range of settlements can play a role in delivering sustainable development in rural areas, so blanket policies restricting housing development in some types of settlement will need to be supported by robust evidence of their appropriateness."**<sup>1</sup>

If this policy is to be retained then the key consideration of the policy is whether development would erode the visual separation between settlements. Gladman submit that the wording of the policy should be altered to allow for a balancing exercise to be undertaken which assesses any harm to the visual or functional separation of settlements against the benefits of the proposal.

### **Policy 10: Important public views and vistas**

The above policy identifies 6 'important' views which the plan makers consider are important for the setting of Ecton and would ensure that the visual impact of development on these views is carefully controlled. Gladman suggests that this is a subjective issue and the policy does not provide support for a decision maker to apply the policy predictably and with confidence.

Identified views must ensure that they demonstrate a physical attribute elevating a view's importance beyond simply being a nice view of open countryside. The evidence base to support the policy does little to indicate why these views should be protected, other than providing a nice view of the surrounding fields. Gladman consider that to be valued, a view would need to have some form of physical attribute. This policy must allow a decision maker to come to a view as to whether particular locations contain physical attributes that would 'take it out of the ordinary' rather than selecting views which may not have any landscape significance and are based solely on community support. Gladman therefore suggest this element of the policy is deleted.

### **Conclusions**

Gladman recognises the role of neighbourhood plans as a tool for local people to shape the development of their local community. However, it is clear from national guidance that these must be consistent with national planning policy and the strategic requirements for the wider authority area. Through this consultation response, Gladman has sought to clarify the relation of the ENP as currently proposed with the requirements of national planning policy and the

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<sup>1</sup> PPG ID: 67-009-20190722

strategic policies for the wider area. Gladman hopes you have found these representations helpful and constructive. If you have any questions do not hesitate to contact me or one of the Gladman team.

Yours faithfully,

Beth Scott  
Gladman