

WELSH GOVERNMENT
Examination Hearing
Statement

Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan

Session 2 - Matter 2

Plan Preparation

12 March 2015

Matter 2: Plan Preparation – Growth and Spatial Strategies, Overarching and Area Based Policies

Key Issue: Is the overall strategy coherent and based on a clear and robust preparation process? Are the strategy and policies realistic and appropriate in the light of relevant alternatives and are they based on robust and credible evidence?

The principles of sustainable development are embedded within Planning Policy Wales (PPW). All aspects of sustainable development should be taken into account when determining the scale and location of development i.e. economic and social factors as well as environmental issues. The strategy should represent the outcome of such deliberations, supported by an SA/SEA, based on robust evidence. **We have no concerns about the options considered.**

The Welsh Government (WG) is generally supportive of Council's strategy to increase its labour force through the creation of job opportunities and homes in order to deliver the growth strategy and key objectives of the plan. As economic development and the creation of jobs to boost the Welsh economy is a key Government priority, the WG supports the local planning authority seeking to maximise economic opportunities and prospects for the local community. It would be contrary to national policy to stifle/hinder such development. **Therefore, we support the principle of this approach.**

However, in light of improved economic trends, namely the role and function of Neath Port Talbot within the Swansea Bay City Region, the increase of the working age population and reduced unemployment rates, **the Welsh Government considers that the level of growth proposed, 7800 dwellings, (within the Observations on the Focussed Changes Doc - Jan 2015) is an absolute minimum and must not be reduced any further.**

The Welsh Government **considers that the LDP could plan more positively through an increase of around 400 dwellings** in order to capitalise on these trends and maximise the delivery of key objectives in the plan such as affordable housing. We comment in detail in respect of the economic model and the level of housing provision within our statement for matters 3.

Q1. Is the LDP's overall strategy consistent with those of neighbouring authorities? What are the main cross boundary issues and how have these been addressed?

Neighbouring Authorities / Wales Spatial Plan

It is a matter for the local planning authority to demonstrate that it has undertaken collaborative working with neighbouring authorities to discuss the cross-boundary implications of issues when preparing the LDP and ensure a consistency policy approach, where appropriate. For example, in respect of the Welsh Language how does the Council's threshold of 25% in Welsh Language Sensitive Areas, align with the adopted Carmarthenshire LDP which includes a threshold is 60%? What is the relationship of the joint economic evidence base with the emerging Swansea LDP?

It is important that any designations / areas that extend to the boundaries of the LDP proposals map should align with neighbouring LDPs' proposals maps with justification provided for any differences.

Development plans need to have regard to the Wales Spatial Plan (WSP) and reflect the policy goals of the WSP. The WSP (update 2008) situates Neath Port Talbot within the 'Swansea Bay - Waterfront and Western Valleys' area which is described as "a network of interdependent settlements with Swansea at its heart which pull together effectively as a city region with a modern, competitive, knowledge-based economy designed to deliver a high quality of life, a sustainable environment, a vibrant waterfront and excellent national and international connections". **The authority's vision, objectives and spatial strategy are closely aligned to the Wales Spatial Plan. We have no concerns in this respect.**

Swansea Bay City Region

Neath Port Talbot is one of the four local authority areas within the Swansea Bay City Region (Neath Port Talbot, Swansea, Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire). The overarching vision is that the region, by 2030 will be a confident, ambitious and connected European City Region, recognised internationally for its emerging knowledge and innovation economy (City Region Economic Regeneration Strategy Report). The report highlights the importance of attracting and retaining talented people in order to facilitate economic growth through the provision of attractive and good quality housing, neighborhoods, parks, green spaces and the necessary infrastructure to both attract and retain people within the region.

As previously stated, the Welsh Government considers that in order for Neath Port Talbot to fully capitalise on its role and function within the City Region, and deliver on the key issues and objectives that the plan is seeking to address, the level of growth proposed should be the minimum and should not be reduced any further.

There may well be grounds to provide increased opportunities to benefit employment provision subject to transport /infrastructure and financial constraints through an increase in housing provision.

Q2. Is the vision appropriate and sufficiently detailed? Is the overriding theme of sustainable development explicit and is its full breadth covered in the vision? Will the identified objectives enable it to be achieved? Should OB 15 include a reference to the countryside of the County Borough?

The vision is a detailed description of how Neath Port Talbot is envisaged to change over the plan period. The vision is closely aligned with the authority's spatial strategy and clearly communicates the future role of the two spatial strategy areas - the waterfront and coastal corridor and the rural areas and valley communities.

The principles of sustainable development are embedded within Planning Policy Wales. The vision appears to address the three pillars of sustainable development, social, economic and environmental.

The vision is closely aligned with the authority's area based objectives (OB5 & OB6). The objectives are grouped under the themes identified in the WSP and provide further detail on a breath of issues, linked to the key issues. We note that health and Welsh language are identified as key issues (KI 2 & 18) and objectives (OB 2 & 25) however we note these key issues are omitted from the vision. It is a matter for the authority to determine whether there should be specific references within the vision, given the overarching nature of these objectives within the policy framework of the plan. **On balance, we consider that the plan as a whole does provide sufficient clarity of strategic purpose.**

Q3. Does the key diagram accurately reflect the Spatial Strategy? Are other diagrams helpful and necessary?

The key diagram broadly illustrates the spatial strategy, showing the two spatial areas of the coastal corridor and rural and valleys areas, as well as key areas and sites for future regeneration, employment and growth. The diagram also articulates functional linkages and benefits of growth which is helpful. **We have no concerns in this respect.**

Proposals / Constraints Map

Para 2.24 of LDP Wales states that the proposals map must illustrate each of the policies and proposals with a spatial component in the plan including, defining sites for particular developments or land uses and the areas to which specified development control policies will be applied. We have some concerns over the clarity of the proposals map in respect of whether it adequately reflects the spatial implications of some policies and proposals within the plan as follows:

Welsh Language Sensitive Areas (Policy WL 1) – Should be included on the Proposals Map

Flood Zones (Development Advice Maps (DAMs) January 2015) are omitted from the proposals map (*or constraints map – see below*). See also our response to Q12 Flood Risk below. In addition, we will expand further on this matter in our statement for Session 13, Matter 7 – Environment and Resources.

Para 5.4.6 of PPW states that designations should be included on the proposals map **wherever practical**. As a general comment the proposals map is overlaid with a significant amount of data / designations many of which are identifiable by similar colours / patterns (most notably environment and heritage).

We note that the authority does not have a constraints map. Many adopted plans in Wales have included those designations that are outside of their control (i.e. NRW, CADW and Welsh Government) on a separate constraints map in order to improve both the clarity of the proposals map and to allow for quick updates. The constraints map is not part of the development plan and therefore can be updated on a more regular basis. It will be for the LPA to consider what is appropriate and reasonable in this respect.

To be clear, **we do not consider that this is a matter of soundness**, but the Council could consider overlaying some designations, especially those outside of their control on a constraints map, to aid the clarity of the plan.

Q4. How does the employment-led growth model used in NPT differ from those which focus on population change? What are its benefits and why is it appropriate in this case?

PPW paragraph 9.2.2 requires that the latest Welsh Government household projections form the starting point for assessing housing requirements. It is for the local planning authority to evidence and justify the level of housing provision set out in their plan, having regard to PPW (paragraphs 9.2.1 & 9.2.2). Local authorities can undertake further modelling to take account of more refined local circumstances, if appropriate, to produce alternative outputs based on evidence. The authority has used an economic-led growth strategy to determine the level of growth appropriate for the plan, 'Economic Assessment and Employment Land Study' and Update (Peter Brett Associates, 2012, 2015).

The authority's economic led scenario approaches the need for housing based on job growth and projected economic activity rates to identify the required working age population to support jobs. This is a different approach to the Welsh Government's population and household projections which are based on assumptions of natural

change, migration and household formation to identify the potential population and subsequent household demand. Whilst the two sets of projections are not directly comparable, the Council has used assumptions from the Welsh government projections (2008 and 2011 based) in its economic calculations. Therefore, this is not an issue of 'soundness' in respect of PPW and diverging from assumptions used, i.e. migration rates, household size. The economic study is generally supported, alongside the Council's aspirations to improve economic activity and increase the resident labour force.

However, we do have some concerns in respect of the relationship between jobs and homes and the impact on the level of housing provision which is detailed within our Housing statement.

Q5. With regard to the chosen economic-led growth scenario, what is meant by the term 'aspirational'? Is it also realistic and deliverable?

This is a matter for the local planning authority.

Q6. With regard to growth and population what alternative strategies and outcomes were considered? Does the LDP propose too great a level of growth and should some sites be de-allocated?

No. As previously stated we consider the level of growth proposed should be the absolute minimum in order to capitalise on the role of function of Neath Port Talbot within the City Region and to deliver the LDP strategy and the key issues and objectives the plan is seeking to address. Indeed the level of housing provision has already decreased significantly from that set out in the Deposit Plan.

The Welsh Government considers that the **level of housing provision should be increased by 400 dwellings**. See our statement in respect of housing provision and delivery.

Q7. How were the Coastal Corridor and Valleys Strategy Areas identified? Were genuine alternatives considered?

This is a matter for the authority.

Q8. What is the purpose of the flexible approach to development in the Valleys Strategy Area? Is there sufficient guidance as to what type and scale of development will be permitted? Are sufficient allocations made in this area?

The Welsh Government is generally supportive of the authority's flexible approach to development in the valleys, supported by the identification of settlement boundaries. All sites/allocations should be deliverable in the plan period. The authority has

already acknowledged there are viability/deliverability issues in some valleys areas. It will be for the authority to explain the rationale and spatial distribution, in relation to the chosen LDP strategy.

Policy SC1 states that 'development within settlement limits that is proportionate in scale and form to the role and function of the settlement as set out in the settlement hierarchy will be acceptable in principle.' Whilst the policy makes reference to the settlement hierarchy there does not appear to be any priority given to the higher tiers of the settlement hierarchy. It is unclear how the plan will ensure that development is channelled towards the higher level tiers of the settlement hierarchy which are the most sustainable locations. **We consider that the reasoned justification supporting Table 3.1 and Policy SC1 could better articulate the character, role and function of the various settlement tiers**, highlighting the broad type and scale of development that may be appropriate.

In addition, we note that Dormitory Settlements do not have settlement boundaries. On this basis it is unclear why they are specifically mentioned within the settlement hierarchy given they are not sustainable and development is to be strictly controlled. It is unclear as to whether criteria 1-12 in Policy SC1 applies to dormitory settlements? Would dormitory settlements warrant a specific mention with Policy SC1? It would be helpful if the authority could explain how dormitory settlements differ to other unidentified land and smaller settlements outside settlement boundaries in terms of scale, role and function.

Q9. Is it necessary to identify Pontardawe and the Upper Neath Valley as Strategic Growth Areas? What is the benefit of this designation? How will it affect the consideration of development proposals?

It is unclear how the Upper Neath Valley has been identified as a strategic growth area. It is also unclear as to what specific spatial area this designation covers; is it the whole of the Neath Valley, the individual settlement of Glynneath, or another spatial area?

We note that the Settlement Topic Paper (SD40) incorporates the settlement review / urban capacity study which assessed the role and function of settlements, the capacity of land within existing settlements and the potential for settlement expansion. **However, it is unclear how the settlement analysis and the weight attributed to different facilities and services have influenced the settlement hierarchy.** For example, it is unclear why Ystalyfera is not identified as a strategic growth area as it would appear from the settlement review to have a number of services and facilities, almost identical to Glynneath, yet they are within different tiers within the hierarchy. (See Table G.2 & I.2, Settlement Background Paper).

The WSP and its Western Valleys Strategy identifies three key settlements within the authority; Neath, Port Talbot and Pontardawe / Clydach and a number of smaller of supporting communities, namely the Dulais Valley, Glynneath / Resolven, Upper Afan Valley, Upper Amman Valley and **Ystalyfera** / Ystradgynlais. In essence, we consider that the settlement hierarchy and the relationship to the role and function of settlements, including any identified growth areas, would benefit from further clarification.

Q10. Is development within dormitory settlements as restricted as that proposed within the open countryside?

See previous comments (Q8).

Q11. Will the climate change and health objectives be properly addressed? How will the LDP achieve meaningful improvements in these areas? How can these be measured?

This is a matter for the local authority.

Q12. How is the matter of flood risk addressed in the LDP? Is this approach adequate?

It is critical to ensure that serious flood risk issues will not affect deliverability of the plan's strategy. National policy relating to Flood Risk, is set out in PPW (paragraphs 5.13.2 & 5.13.3) and TAN15 'Development and Flood Risk'. The Development Advice Maps (DAMs) should have informed the site selection in the deposit plan. TAN 15 (paragraph 10.8) states that sites in Zone C2 should not be allocated for highly vulnerable development (including Class C3 residential use and Gypsy and Traveller Sites), and the thrust of national policy is to avoid development in such areas rather than mitigate. The Welsh Government published updated DAMs in January 2015. The authority should clarify that it has taken account of the latest DAMs and whether there are any impacts on policies or proposals within the LDP.

As previously stated within our response to Q3 above, we consider that the LDP should be amended to better reflect national planning policy in respect of flood risk, including identifying flood zones C1 and C2 on the proposals/constraints map.

We consider that the policy framework (SP1 – Climate Change) in respect of flood risk is inadequate and should be strengthened to align with national policy, emphasising that highly vulnerable development will not be permitted in Zone C2.

The plan would benefit from additional criteria within an appropriate policy, emphasising that highly vulnerable development will not be permitted in Zone C2. The authority should consider specific references to the sequential approach within the policy, including references to the justification and acceptability tests within the

reasoned justification, if appropriate. In essence it should be clear from the LDP that it would not be appropriate to design out flood risk, rather than avoiding it.

Q13. What is the purpose of the Settlement Hierarchy? Is it clear what scale and type of development will be appropriate in each tier of the hierarchy?

See response to earlier question (Q8)

Q14. How were settlement boundaries defined? Should Glyncastle be drawn within the Resolven settlement boundary?

This is a matter for the local planning authority.

Q15. What is the current position with regard to Coed Darcy Strategic Regeneration Area?

This is matter for the local authority to explain.

Q16. The assumed rate of housing development per annum at Coed Darcy increases over the plan period. What evidence is there to support this rate of delivery? Is it realistic to expect an additional 250 units to be provided there (ED008, paragraph 2.4.1.6)?

This is for the local authority and / or developer to answer.

It is important that the plan makes provision for and enables delivery of a range and choice of sites that it itself has identified. Lead in times for larger sites, the inter-relationship between such sites, the relationship of potential constraints and infrastructure/funding and assumptions for small/windfall sites should be a key consideration. It is imperative that annual completion rates are delivered as expected. This is to ensure that a five year supply can be maintained.

It is also vital that the monitoring framework includes key triggers and action points so that any significant shortfalls do not arise and that appropriate action can be in place in advance to avoid such a situation. It is considered that the monitoring framework has some shortcomings which will be discussed at the relevant session. The flexibility allowance and how this relates to delivery should also avoid this scenario.

If, after careful consideration of the evidence, the housing trajectory highlights under-delivery in the early years of the plan, appropriate alternative sites should be identified to remedy this deficiency. Such sites should align with the spatial strategy,

be based on principles of sustainability and deliver on the key issues identified in the plan.

We comment in detail on the housing matters including the proposed housing trajectory within our housing statement.

Q17. Does FC03, which reduces the number of dwellings proposed, adequately resolve the flood risk issue at the Harbourside Strategic Regeneration Area (Policy SRA 2)?

See response to Q12 above. No highly vulnerable development should be allocated within the C2 flood plan.

Q18. Is the Plan clear about when key Supplementary Planning Guidance will be produced?

It is noted that the authority has provided a list of SPG to be produced to supplement the policies in the plan (section 7). The monitoring framework should include target time periods for the production of SPG with suitable triggers identified, especially where SPG is required to deliver a specific policy.

The Welsh Government is prepared to work with the Council to improve the monitoring framework.