

**Examination of the South Lakeland Land Allocations
Reference Ex055**

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Dear Mr Dan Hudson

Re: Examination of the South Lakeland Land Allocations

Thank you for your letter dated 16 November 2012.

I note the Council's view that further work is needed in relation to viability issues. I understand that this may have implications for the sites proposed to be allocated and consequently could lead to further main modifications being put forward. I fully concur that any main modifications arising as a result of this work should be subject to consultation ahead of the hearings being resumed, along with any other changes which have so far not been consulted upon. Given this, I agree to your request to suspend the examination.

I do have doubts about the suspension period you suggest, particularly given the issue I raise below. On the face of it, four months appears an ambitious timescale for completing the work involved. To help clarify matters in this regard, I would be grateful if you would set out in a note to me the steps to be taken and the likely period needed for each. I would also ask that you keep me apprised of progress on at least a monthly basis, and let me know when key milestones are met.

Given the above, I shall not set any specific date for resuming the hearings now. Rather, I will announce the date in the light of progress at an appropriate time in due course. Rest assured that as soon as the picture is sufficiently clear, I will contact you again with a view to identifying the earliest hearing dates realistically possible.

In the light of the current position, I wish to take the opportunity of raising a preliminary concern with you. This stems from the approach taken to site selection in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) says that AONBs have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. As such, in the AONB, the weight to be given to environmental considerations when balancing them against social and economic issues should be greater than

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elsewhere. However, the Council has taken a uniform approach across the district of discounting sites below 0.3 hectares from consideration for allocation. But in the context of its status of protection, consideration of smaller sites in the AONB would amount to a reasonable alternative. Indeed, it seems to me that smaller sites would be more likely to ensure that the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB is protected in the way envisaged by the NPPF.

Moreover, some of the sites proposed for allocation add to my misgivings. From the hearing session, I understand that the Council considers that the land proposed to be allocated for housing at Station Road (RN337#), Hollins Lane (RN225-mod) and Redhills Road (R81) currently performs a greenspace function. My understanding is that you judge these sites to have amenity value, in that they contribute positively to the character and appearance of the settlement and thus of the AONB, to some degree. From my site visits, I concur with that analysis.

Overall, in the context of the policy protection applying to the AONB, the combination of discounting smaller sites from the site selection process and the visual contribution made by some of the sites chosen for allocation raises the distinct possibility of soundness problems. I strongly recommend that the Council takes the opportunity of the examination's suspension to address this issue.

I suggest that work should be done to identify smaller sites in the AONB with a view to bringing them forward if they prove to be deliverable/developable and viable options. Arnside Parish Council has already begun the attempt in this respect, and I encourage the Council to collaborate with the Parish Council, the AONB Partnership and others. I appreciate the implications that this may have for the examination's timescales. Once you have had the chance to consider this in more detail, I would be grateful if you would contact me, via Gillian Dobson, and let me know the process and associated timeline you envisage. It would be helpful to include this in the note I have requested above.

My raising this concern now should not be taken as an indication that I have no others. Clearly, many overarching matters rest on evidence as yet to be tested through hearing sessions. I still have many site visits to undertake before I can reach a clear and comprehensive view on the soundness of individual allocations. Given this, and bearing in mind the possibility that some of the allocations proposed may change as a result of the viability work you now intend, I will not be in a position to reach a view in this regard until the hearing sessions are completed. Indeed, it is highly probable that changes to the proposed allocations will lead to the need for further hearing sessions in relation to the settlements concerned.

I trust that you find this letter helpful, and in the spirit of assistance I am happy to answer any questions you may have in relation to procedural issues. I will do all I can to help the Council in relation to the way forward, although you will

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appreciate the restricted nature of my role in this regard and that any advice given is without prejudice.

I look forward to hearing from you at the earliest opportunity in relation to the steps and timescales involved in progressing the viability and AONB matters.

Yours sincerely

Simon Berkeley

Inspector