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Representor ID: 943764

Dear Ms Parker

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### **Kirklees Local Plan Examination**

#### **Comments on EX38: Additional evidence relating to distribution of growth between settlements**

Thank you for the invitation to comment on the above document EX38 titled '*Additional evidence relating to distribution of growth between settlements*'. We write on behalf of our clients, Mrs Margaret Dugdill and Mr Brian Dugdill, to express our serious concerns that this document entirely fails to justify the proposed distribution of growth between the settlements, and therefore fails to respond to the Inspector's questions on this matter.

In her letter to the Council dated 25th October '*Stage 1 Hearings – interim views and key matters*' [EX32], the Inspector raised key concerns with the spatial development strategy being proposed in the Local Plan. The Council was asked to provide additional evidence to explain how the distribution and location of growth was determined across the district and between different settlements, and what weight was given to settlement sustainability and other factors. This question - about whether the proposed strategy represents a justified approach which directs development to the most sustainable locations - clearly lies at the very heart of whether the Local Plan can be considered sound in accordance with the tests in Paragraph 182 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

The fundamental importance of this issue to the Examination of the Local Plan was left in no doubt, with the Inspector stating in paragraph 7 of her letter [EX32] that:

*"this evidence is essential to demonstrate consistency with the spatial strategy in the Plan and with paragraph 84 in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which states that the review of Green Belt boundaries should take account of the need to promote sustainable patterns of development. **This work should be completed as soon as possible, and the Council is requested to provide details of the timelines.**"* [original emphasis]

We agree that the provision of further evidence and justification on this issue is of utmost importance to the Local Plan and have set this out in our previous representations (our Hearings Statement to Matters 2 [M2.32] and 8 [M8.43]). It is difficult to see how the suitability of specific sites can be examined before outstanding questions around the proposed spatial distribution of development have been addressed.

We are therefore extremely concerned that, in our view, the Council has still not provided a robust justification for the proposed distribution between the settlements.

Document EX38 *'Additional evidence relating to distribution of growth between settlements'*, seemingly produced in answer to the Inspector's request, purely represents a re-formulation of previous evidence. As stated in its introduction, the note *'does not present any new assumptions/ data which the council did not have available when preparing the plan or which is already set out in the evidence base.'* In this regard, we believe that it is important to reiterate that the Inspectors Interim Views [EX32] specifically requested 'additional' (i.e. new) evidence relating to spatial distribution. Accordingly, we do not believe that the Council's submission satisfies this clear request.

### **Concerns in relation to Mirfield**

Our concerns about the proposed spatial strategy for the Local Plan are set out in our Hearing Statement to Matter 2 [M2.32]. By not making a clear distinction between individual settlements and acknowledging any form of top-down hierarchy, it is not clear how the distribution in the Local Plan reflects the status of the largest six settlements (of Huddesfield, Dewsbury, Batley, Heckmondwicke, Mirfield and Cleckheaton) as hubs for shopping, employment and leisure needs and the most sustainable locations in the Borough to direct development.

As we set out in our Hearing Statement in relation to Matter 2 [M2.32], Mirfield is to accommodate a vastly disproportionate amount of the overall housing growth when compared to the majority of other key settlements in the Borough, despite being the fifth largest settlement and a highly sustainable location to accommodate additional residential development. This seems to have occurred because of the consideration of Dewsbury and Mirfield under the same sub-area. The 5,000 dwellings to be delivered in Dewsbury equates to a 27% increase above the existing number of dwellings, yet by comparison Mirfield has a housing distribution of just 400, or a 5% increase. By considering Dewsbury and Mirfield under the same sub-area, and disproportionately distributing the vast majority of development towards Dewsbury, the Local Plan fails to address housing needs in Mirfield, particularly the need for additional affordable housing.

The only justification provided for the low level of housing growth attributed to Mirfield provided within this 'Additional Evidence' document is set out on page 30 as below:

*"The relatively low level of green belt release [in Mirfield] is attributed to the settlement's position attached to Ravensthorpe to the east and green belt constraints to the north and south. The south-east of the settlement is in close proximity to the large strategic site at Dewsbury Riverside."*

Nexus consider this rationale for such a disproportionate under-provision of new growth in Mirfield to be wholly unjustified.

The first part of the above quoted paragraph within document EX38 states that Mirfield is attributed a relatively low level of green belt release because of "the settlement's position attached to Ravensthorpe to the east and green belt constraints to the north and south".

We have undertaken a thorough assessment of the Green Belt Review [SD19] and the accompanying Green Belt Edge Map for Dewsbury and Mirfield [SD20]. There is nothing presented within these evidence base documents that supports the view that the characteristics of the Green Belt around Mirfield are such that this precludes additional development in Mirfield to any greater degree than any other settlement. Green Belt represents a policy constraint as opposed to a physical constraint to development and the Local Plan preparation process is the very (indeed, the only) opportunity for the extent of the Green Belt to be reviewed. The citing of 'green belt constraints' around the settlement as a Mirfield-specific justification for limiting development is therefore unjustified.

Significant amounts of Green Belt is proposed for release adjacent to other settlements in the Borough. Large sections of the perimeter of Mirfield satisfied the Stage 1 and Stage 2a assessment within the Green Belt Review and of these, the majority had a final score of 3. A score of 1 is where development would be considered to

represent a negligible impact upon the Green Belt and a score of 5 would lead to a significant impact. As highlighted in our Hearing Statement to Matter 8 [M8.43], a number of sites have been identified for release from the Green Belt elsewhere despite scoring 3, or even 4 or 5. It is therefore borne out in the Council's submitted evidence that opportunities to release Green Belt around sections of the perimeter of Mirfield clearly exist, particularly to the north east of the settlement.

A more detailed assessment of the Green Belt Review findings is provided in our Hearing Statement to Matter 8 [M8.43], but the overview of the evidence base findings provided here clearly points towards Mirfield not being constrained to the extent that housing distribution should be fettered in any way, contrary to the justification put forward within the '*Additional evidence relating to distribution of growth between settlements*' [EX38].

The second reason given within document EX38 for the low level of green belt release in Mirfield is because "*The south-east of the settlement is in close proximity to the large strategic site at Dewsbury Riverside.*"

The Council seem to be justifying the low number of dwellings attributed to Mirfield on the grounds that the strategic allocation at Dewsbury Riverside (site ref. H2089) is in close proximity. For the following reasons, we consider the Council's suggestion this allocation will meet the development needs of Mirfield to be entirely unjustified:

- Whilst we acknowledge that a proportion of the allocation falls within the ward boundaries of Mirfield, the Dewsbury Riverside allocation relates to the settlements of Dewsbury and Ravensthorpe, and not to Mirfield. This is evident upon a review of the Dewsbury Riverside High Level Delivery Statement (April 2017) [SS14] which describes the vision for Dewsbury Riverside as creating up to 4,000 new homes in an urban extension to Dewsbury – which will create sufficient economic impetus to deliver new infrastructure and regenerate Dewsbury Town Centre, Ravensthorpe and the riverside. The Statement does not mention Mirfield once.
- The allocation is physically separated from Mirfield by the River Calder, the trainline and a buffer of undeveloped Green Belt land. The proposed 'potential new rail and river bridge' connecting the site with Ravensthorpe will not alleviate the physical or perceived sense of separation from Mirfield.
- What is more, the majority of the eastern part of the allocation (1,690 dwellings), and that closest to Mirfield and within the Mirfield ward boundary, is not due to be delivered until after the plan period (Dewsbury Riverside Delivery Framework - SS14). As such, the argument that Dewsbury Riverside will contribute towards housing need in Mirfield in this plan period, and the opportunity to release Green Belt in Mirfield discounted on these grounds, is not justified and is not an effective plan for meeting housing needs in the area.
- We appreciate that the nature of Kirklees Borough is one of multiple closely related settlements. However, the Local Plan still recognises the need to differentiate between the settlements. In terms of Mirfield and Dewsbury, the Local Plan and evidence base does indeed make a distinction between the two settlements. It recognises that each settlement is independently served by its own range of shops, services and sources of employment, which to a large degree serve the residents of each town. There is also a recognition that Mirfield, independent from Dewsbury, has a strong housing market in its own right. On this basis, there is no justification whatsoever to re-direct the vast majority of housing growth within the sub-area towards Dewsbury at the expense of Mirfield.

With regard to the above, we reiterate our serious concerns that the level of growth being directed to Mirfield in the Local Plan is wholly inappropriate with regard to its size, sustainability and capacity.

This disproportionate approach has still not been justified by the Council either in the original Submission Documents or in the information submitted since [EX38], despite the Inspectors specific question on this matter. It is essential that this matter is addressed to ensure the Local Plan is based on a sustainable and effective development strategy and is able to meet the tests of soundness contained in paragraph 182 of the NPPF.

We trust the above concerns will be taken into consideration.

Yours sincerely



**Helen Hartley**  
Principal Planner