

Mrs V Robinson
Operational Manager for Development Management
The Vale of Glamorgan Council

23 May 2016

Dear Mrs Robinson

RE: Vale of Glamorgan LDP Examination – Housing Provision

WITHOUT PREJUDICE - Inspector comments on the Council's draft Statement in response to Action Point 5 of Hearing Sessions 2 and 3

I write in response to your letter dated 20 May 2016 which relates to the matters raised under Action Point 5 of Hearing Sessions 2 and 3 (Housing Provision). Specifically, and without prejudice, I shall attempt to set out my initial comments on the Council's proposal to amend the Plan's flexibility allowance so that the proposed 10% is only applied to the 'residual housing requirement' (i.e. the overall housing requirement minus those dwellings that have been completed or otherwise under construction).

As you are aware, there is no set requirement within national planning policy for a Plan's contingency or flexibility allowance to be set at 10%. As such, it follows that such matters should be agreed on a case by case basis, based on the evidence available. Indeed, whilst a contingency figure below the typical 10% may be justified in areas where there is little doubt over deliverability, it may also be appropriate to have a contingency figure that exceeds 10% where questions remain as to the likelihood of delivery within the Plan period.

Both the Plan's housing requirement figure and the required flexibility allowance were discussed at some length at Hearing Sessions 2 and 3 and, despite on-going work which may result in modest changes to such figures, the Council has consistently submitted that the provision of some 10,450 units is necessary to deliver the housing requirement figure of 9,500 units. This equates to a contingency or flexibility allowance of some 950 dwellings and, despite some calls from the development industry for a greater flexibility margin, this appeared at the hearings to be proportionate to the extent of infrastructure and other site constraints.

The approach to flexibility is fundamental to the whole strategy and should not be considered or amended in isolation. Specifically, the flexibility margin of some 950 dwellings formed important contextual information for Hearing Sessions 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 which covered site specific matters, as well as Hearing Session 4 which concentrated on matters relating to 'Infrastructure and Delivery'. Indeed, whilst it has not been found to date that any of the allocated housing sites are subject to insurmountable constraints, it does not necessarily follow that delivery of the sites would be problem free. Specifically, it was clear from the aforementioned hearings that delivery of some of the allocated housing sites would be challenging, not least because of necessary infrastructure requirements and the need to achieve relatively high build rates.

I recognise that there is no question over the deliverability of those dwellings that have already been completed, or indeed those sites that are currently under construction. However, it is common for the least constrained sites to be delivered first, with the more difficult sites being delivered later in the Plan period. In this respect it is important to note that many of the more constrained sites remain undeveloped, despite the fact that they form an equally important element of the housing land supply.

The approach advocated would reduce the overall contingency from 950 units to some 657 units and, according to my calculations, would only amount to around 6.9% of the overall housing requirement. It does not appear that such a reduced margin is justified by the evidence available, regardless of construction taking place at a number of the housing allocations. Notwithstanding this, the general approach of basing the flexibility allowance on the 'residual housing requirement' is not one that is generally recognised and has certainly not been replicated in any of the adopted LDPs in Wales.

For these reasons, and without prejudice to any evidence that may arise from subsequent consultation exercises or hearings, I would raise significant concerns for the soundness of the Plan should such an approach be progressed. Indeed, it would appear that, on the balance of the evidence available, a figure resembling 10% of the overall housing requirement is absolutely necessary to ensure that the Plan would deliver on its aims and objectives.

I trust this is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Jenkins

INSPECTOR