

Note on implications of 2016 Landscape Assessment (LA09PM) for Radford Semele Sites

Background

- 1 This note has been prepared at the request of the Inspector following the Matter 7d hearings held on 17th November. At that hearing session, sites around Radford Semele were discussed including the omission site to the south of Southam Road. During the discussion, the site promoter pointed to landscape evidence relating to the omission site, undertaken on behalf of the Council by RMA consultants in 2016 (LA09PM). As the Council had not fully taken account of this evidence in its assessment of the site, the Inspector asked for a note to be prepared explaining: the background to the study; why this site was included when others were not; and what the Council considers the implications of the evidence to be.

Evidence prior to 2016

- 2 Prior to the modifications, the Council undertook two tranches of landscapes studies. One, undertaken by RMA consultants over a number of years, focused on parcels on the edge of urban areas. The other tranche was undertaken through a separate contract by WCC Landscape Services and focused on parcels and sites on the edge of villages and rural areas.
- 3 As Radford Semele is a village that lies close to the urban area, both tranches of landscape studies have covered parcels adjacent to the village.
- 4 The specific studies relating the Radford Semele undertaken prior to the modifications are:
 - a) **RMA 2009 Landscape Character Assessment for area to the south of Warwick (LA03)**: This study considered landscape issues for the area between Sydenham and Radford Semele. It did not include the area to the east of Radford Semele in which the omission site to the south of Southam Road is located. It concluded that retaining the separation between the town and the village is important but that there might be opportunities for development “within the smaller fields along the western edge of Radford”.
 - b) **RMA 2012 Considerations for Sustainable Landscape Planning (LA01)**: This looked more closely at the parcel of land between Radford Semele and the eastern edge of Leamington/Sydenham/Whitnash (referenced “Parcel ii” in the report). Again, it did not include the area to the east of Radford Semele in which the omission site to the south of Southam Road is located, although it did comment in general terms (para 2.2.9) that “*development on the higher ground east of the village is likely to be a prominent village expansion in views from the A425 and this is likely to give the impression of encroachment into rural areas*”. In terms of the western side of the village, it reached similar conclusions to the 2009 study at the same time as suggesting more specific areas for development and mitigation on the western side of Radford Semele, including the area encompassing the site at Spring Lane with

planning permission for 65 dwellings and the area proposed for allocation to the south (site H52).

c) **WCC 2013 Landscape, Ecological and Geological Study (V16)**: this study examined landscape sensitivity in relation to nine parcels around Radford Semele. The omission site to the south of Southam Road was included within a larger parcel RS04. In relation to Parcel RS04, the study indicates that (when viewed from Southam Road), “the zone reads as part of the wider farmed landscape and views are large scale and open in nature”. It concludes that “due to these open, rural views this zone is considered unsuitable for development”

d) **WCC 2014 Landscape Sensitivity – Landscape Assessment Update (V17)**: the study reviewed parcels RS02 (adjacent to the Church) and RS07 which covers the area between Radford Semele and the western edge of Leamington/Sydenham. In relation to parcel RS07 reached conclusions that were broadly similar with the 2012 RMA study (LA01) and concluded that whilst most of the parcel has high sensitivity to development, there is some scope in the area to the west of Spring Lane. The study did not change the assessment for parcel RS04 which encompasses the omission site to the south of Southam Road. This continued as an area with high sensitivity to development.

5 In considering the appropriate sites to allocate for the Publication Draft Local Plan, the Council carefully considered this landscape evidence and concluded that the land north of Southam Road should be allocated. In addition, the landscape evidence has been influential in the outcomes of planning applications including for the site to the west of the village at Spring Lane (granted on appeal), south of Offchurch Lane (granted) and east of the Church (refused and appeal dismissed). These outcomes show that the Council and planning inspectors have been able to place weight on the quality of the landscape advice received.

2016 Modification: Review of Landscape evidence

6 In preparing the 2016 modifications, the Council asked its landscape advisers to consider the potential for development on various sites, many of which had previously been considered in earlier evidence, but which needed to be reviewed. As a result two further studies were commissioned:

a) **WCC 2015/16 Landscape Sensitivity and Ecological and Geological Study – Landscape Addendum (LA08PM)**: this study sought to reconsider various landscape parcels adjacent to villages in the context of increased housing need and changing local circumstances. It did not re-assess any site adjacent to Radford Semele.

b) **RMA 2015/16 Considerations for Sustainable Landscape Planning (LA09PM)**: this study reconsidered landscape considerations predominantly relating to parcels adjacent to urban areas. The exceptions to the urban nature of the study included Radford Semele, where the consultant was asked to reconsider development options by considering the omission site to the south of Southam Road. This was felt to be

important as the site had been promoted as being available and suitable and on the basis of increased housing need, a reassessment was appropriate, particularly as earlier studies had considered this site as part of a wider parcel. The study concluded that development of the site was unlikely to lead to urban sprawl due to the enclosure to the east of the site. It went on to conclude that development here could be appropriate subject to mitigation. It should be noted, that the study did not revisit other parcels around the village, including the site that was eventually allocated through the modifications. This is because site specific landscape evidence had already been provided for other sites.

Conclusions

- 7 Clearly the 2015/16 RMA study carries weight in considering which sites to allocate for Radford Semele. However it should be noted that WCC Landscape advisers have raised an objection in relation to the current planning application and their advice remains consistent with the study they undertook in 2013. Warwick District Council therefore has two differing views from respected landscape advisers who have both provided robust and reliable evidence elsewhere.
- 8 In reaching a view on which sites to allocate the Council has taken account of landscape considerations as follows:
 - a. Site H52: unambiguous landscape advice that there is some development potential here, subject to mitigation
 - b. Land south of Offchurch Lane (application approved): unambiguous landscape advice that there is some development potential here, subject to mitigation
 - c. Land east of the Church: Clear landscape advice that the site highly sensitive to development – application refused and appeal dismissed, partly on landscape grounds.
 - d. Land south of Southam Road: Ambiguous landscape advice indicating on the one hand that with some mitigation development may be possible, and on the other, development here would be highly visible from the south east and would impact on the open landscape at Southam Road. On balance, the Council therefore considers that, if decisions were made on purely landscape terms, there are more appropriate sites within Radford Semele. This is supported by on the ground assessments undertaken by WDC planning officers which concur with the view that the development of this site would impact on open views particularly to and from the south east.
- 9 In addition to landscape issues, a number of factors were taken in to account at the time the 2016 modifications were prepared and submitted which meant the site was not allocated. This included unresolved access issues (concerns raised by Warwickshire County Council); education capacity in the village (advice from WCC education that a cap of 60 dwellings should be applied as a result of the capacity of the village primary school); and work on the indicative capacity of the village (V18PM - which suggested village growth of around 80 dwellings would be appropriate over and above existing commitments).

- 10 Whilst issues regarding education and access appear to have been resolved through the planning application process, the context of development in the village has changed significantly since the 2016 modifications were prepared as a result of a further 175 dwellings being granted planning permission. It should therefore be kept in mind that the Council is clear that there is a strong case to suggest that growth in Radford Semele has already exceeded the reasonable capacity for the village (as set out in the Council's Matter 7d statement and explained in more detail at the hearings on 17th November). In this context the Council does not consider it is appropriate to allocate this site in addition to existing commitments and allocations in the village.

- 11 In conclusion, having reviewed the landscape evidence in more detail and having taken account other factors, the Council remains of the view that the omission site to the south of Southam Road should not be allocated.