

Bristol Local Plan Examination –
Matter 4: Development Strategy and
Site Selection Process

Land North of Goodneston Road, Fishponds, Bristol

Prepared by Knight Frank on behalf of Castel Ltd

30 January 2025

Confidential

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Knight Frank have prepared this written statement on behalf of Castel Ltd, the owners of land north of Goodneston Road (part of Central Fishponds Development Strategy Area – Policy DS7), in respect of the Bristol City Council Local Plan Examination 2025. A site location plan is provided below.

Figure 1: Site Location Plan



- 1.2 This statement sets out our comments with respect to the issues and questions raised by the Inspectors regarding Matter 4, as relevant to the Central Fishponds Growth Area.
- 1.3 This statement is prepared by William Dale MRICS. I am a Chartered Planning and Development Surveyor and have been practicing in the Bristol and Southwest market for 5 years. I am representing several clients with development interests in the city. Knight Frank Planning and Development Team work on behalf of a wide range of landowners, developers and businesses in Bristol to help deliver new development and infrastructure. I am familiar with the practical implementation of planning policies, the way in which they guide proposals and influence delivery.
- 1.4 Castel Ltd has engaged with the Council and Design West in pre-application discussions on site specific development proposals and the Atlas Place Framework Masterplan (a private sector led exercise), which covers 14.8 hectares of Central Fishponds Growth and Regeneration Area. Castel's objective is to work with the Council and other key stakeholders to develop a comprehensive scheme which:
- Optimises the capacity of the site through a design-led approach, recognising the potential for tall buildings and a new type of urban living in the area;
 - Makes best use of land to deliver against Bristol's housing targets on a sustainable brownfield site;
 - Enhances the vitality and viability of Fishponds Town Centre; and
 - Enables the delivery of new infrastructure to support the transition of the area from industrial uses to a mixed use residential-led development.

- 1.5 The Atlas Place Framework Masterplan has been developed by three adjoining landowners and is currently in draft for subject to final formalisation. This has been a private sector-led exercise, and the Council have been involved in regular meetings and provided guidance on the document.
- 1.6 To deliver these objectives, the Plan needs to be sufficiently flexible, recognising that this is a once in a generation opportunity to deliver much needed new housing. Castel's ownership is one of the single largest freehold ownerships in the Local Plan and offers great potential for higher density masterplanning and placemaking.
- 1.7 Knight Frank understand that the Plan was published under regulation 19 consultation on 21st November 2023 and that under the transitional arrangements set out in previous versions of the National Planning Policy Framework (the NPPF), the plan will be examined under the NPPF published on 5th September 2023.

2. Matter 4: Development Strategy and Site Selection Process

Issue 4.1: Whether the development strategy and strategic policies of the Plan are positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy?

Q4.1: Are the specific areas of growth and regeneration justified, consistent with the development strategy and the Plan's overall Vision and Objectives?

- 2.1 Knight Frank supports the inclusion of Central Fishponds (Policy DS7) within the growth areas proposed in the new Local Plan. Knight Frank maintain that a more flexible approach to the growth targets maximises the Council's ability to meet its housing targets in the context of a persistent and significant need for new housing in Bristol. This flexibility should be considered for all the Growth and Regeneration Areas.

Q4.2: Several of the policies for areas of growth and regeneration refer to development having to 'accord' with regeneration frameworks. Notwithstanding the Council's response to PQ9, is it justified or effective for proposals to have to 'accord' with documents that do not form part of the development plan?

- 2.2 It is not justified or effective for the Local Plan to state that proposals have to 'accord' with documents that do not form part of the development plan or have the same statutory endorsement.

- 2.3 It is encouraged that the Local Plan include the following text to ensure that development can proceed without Frameworks for each growth area:

The Council seeks comprehensive development of the Central Fishponds Growth Area. The area remains in different (and multiple) land ownerships and the Council will seek to ensure that development and delivery within the Growth Area of these strategic areas is co-ordinated and that one area does not delay nor fetter another.

- 2.4 This text would allow developers of each site to demonstrate as part of a planning application that their site comprises development that is comprehensive and co-ordinated to a point that does not delay nor fetter another site in the Local Plan. Such policy wording has been successful in the Barnet Local Plan. In the context of Central Fishponds, the three largest sites have produced a private sector-led masterplan that would form a material consideration as part of a planning submission and decision-making process.
- 2.5 Where development frameworks or guidance documents have been or are being produced, these should only add further detail to policies and guidance for development on specific sites, or on particular issues such as design. To be effective, the policies, such as DS7, need to be standalone and allow development to come forward without reliance on other documents not included in the plan.
- 2.6 Should the Council wish to include reference to their own frameworks or SPDs in Growth Areas, the text below could be included –
- The Council or stakeholders will seek to prepare a more detailed planning framework for this area, such as through a Supplementary Planning Document or other Area Plan, potentially through joint working. This planning framework will help to provide more detailed guidance for Central Fishponds Growth Area and the development sites within and should be considered as a material consideration.*
- 2.7 To allow co-ordinated development, it is proposed that the above text inclusion be sufficient to allow Frameworks to rightly influence the decision-making process. Where Frameworks or other such documents are in place they will form a material consideration, the wording should be adjusted to "have regard to" the framework, ensuring flexibility without requiring development to 'accord' to these documents where they do not have equal status to the plan.
- 2.8 The Regulations (Regulation 2 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012) indicate that a Supplementary Planning Document [SPD] does not have statutory force and is not the subject of examination. It is defined as something that is not a local plan. Consequently, policies should not devolve fundamental matters to SPDs. Several policies within the submitted Plan require compliance with a SPD or other standalone document thereby giving development plan status to documents which are not part of the Plan and which have not been subject to the same process of preparation, consultation and examination. This would not be compliant with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 [2012 Regulations].

Q4.3: Several of the policies for areas of growth and regeneration refer to comprehensive or co-ordinated forms of development. The response to PQ28 states that this would be guided by masterplans or development frameworks and established through design and access statements. Having regard to this, are the relevant policies sufficiently clear and unambiguous, such that it would be clear to either decision makers or applicants what would be expected on an individual site?

2.9 Knight Frank refer to the proposed text above in our response to (Q4.2) which covers how policies should consider comprehensive or co-ordinated development. The policies should guide development as standalone policies and should not require or rely on future masterplans or frameworks being developed outside of this Local Plan process.

Q4.4: The reasoned justification for several policies refer to potential housing capacity figures. The response to PQ23 confirms that these are not meant to be a target or a requirement. Notwithstanding this, are the anticipated capacities justified? Without a requirement for each area, and no specific allocations within any of the areas, will the relevant policies be effective in delivering the anticipated levels of housing?

2.10 The Growth Area policies should set out the number of new homes that the Council is expecting from the area as a minimum, this should be based on a minimum density figure that is appropriate for that particular location and should build in flexibility to increase this subject to a design-led approach. For example, policies should consider the below text:

Support the provision of a minimum of 1,500 new homes, with provision for uplift through a design-led approach, comprising a mix of types, sizes and tenures, including affordable housing in accordance with Policy AH1 'Affordable housing provision.'

2.11 Knight Frank consider it is appropriate for the purposes of plan making to establish a density and indicative capacity for each of the Growth and Regeneration Areas. However, policies should be centred around a design-led approach to housing delivery where higher densities are achievable.

2.12 The principle of intensification in Central Fishponds is aligned with national and local policy. The site represents an opportunity to create a higher-density residential cluster, adjacent sustainable transport options (Bristol to Bath cycle path and public transport connections), to promote sustainable travel and contribute to Bristol's housing targets. Central Fishponds and particularly the sites surrounding Goodneston Road are unencumbered by heritage assets compared to other areas of Bristol. The site has a BrisTAL (Bristol Transport Access Level) of 6, yet it is severely underutilised and underperforming against its development potential. Policy directs growth to this location and a design-led approach can facilitate the delivery of circa 1500 homes on this site alone, in a way that responds to the site's context and capacity for growth, and existing and planned supporting infrastructure capacity.

Q4.5: Several of the policies for areas of growth and regeneration set out the expectation for a range of uses to come forward over the plan period. Other than for housing (as set out above) there is no indication in any policy or reasoned justification as to the scale of development expected. Are the relevant policies sufficiently clear as to what type and scale of development is envisaged?

2.13 The relevant policies are not clear and an alternative approach to the amounts and distribution of these uses are required within the Growth Areas. The policies should ensure the fair and equitable delivery of these uses across sites.

Q4.6: The reasoned justification for several of the policies for areas of growth and regeneration include reference to possible housing densities. Are these justified and, to be effective, should they be included in policy? How do these densities relate to other relevant policies, such as policies UL1 and UL2?

2.14 The densities proposed in Policy UL1 and UL2 are a reasonable starting point, but more detail should be provided to justify these densities, possibly linking them to the sustainability of certain locations (BrisTAL score). Establishing a minimum density gives the Council a better indication and provides sufficient accuracy in terms of indicative numbers at plan making stage. A minimum density figure is important and would provide a good basis for a more detailed design led approach as proposals near the planning application stage. It is considered that the policies should reflect the potential for a design-led approach to increasing these densities in appropriate locations as stated above.

2.15 In growth areas, the policies should be strengthened to ensure the delivery of homes and to provide sufficient flexibility for increased densities where it is appropriate. To do this, we would recommend the consideration and inclusion of the wording below in policy UL1.

Growth and Regeneration Areas

The Growth Areas are designated within the Bristol Local Plan as the City's principal opportunities for accommodating large scale development. Growth Areas have the highest expectations for delivering new homes and new jobs as well as supporting infrastructure. More intensive forms of development will be expected and secured through a design-led approach on suitable sites, including:

- *Within Bristol City Centre, Bristol Temple Quarter and St. Philip's Marsh;*
- *Within or close to the city's town and district centres; and*

- Close to major public transport routes and corridors.

This includes the areas of growth and regeneration set out in the Development Strategy (Policies DS1-DS14).

- 2.16 Policy UL2 should also refer to the acceptability of a design-led approach to density. The below text should be considered –

~~In the areas of growth and regeneration set out in the Development Strategy the density sought will reflect the amount of development proposed by those policies and any specific policy approaches in those areas.~~

In ensuring the delivery of sustainable growth the Local Plan has allocated land for development as set out in the areas of Growth and Regeneration. All development must make the best use of land by following a design-led approach that optimises the capacity of sites, including site proposals, ensuring that it is aligned with Policy UL1.

Issue 4.3: Are the policies relating to East Bristol justified, effective and consistent with National Policy.

Policy DS7 Central Fishponds

Q4.21: Is Policy DS7 justified, consistent with national policy and effective? In particular:

- 2.17 Our response for Policy DS7 is “yes”, for the reasons explained herein and subject to minor modifications considered below.
- 2.18 The Castel Ltd Site is located in an urban area of Bristol i.e. surrounded by existing infrastructure, including the amenities, services and transport links associated with Fishponds and its Highstreet as a Local Centre. Future sensitive redevelopment would also enable the delivery of significant public benefits, including new homes affordable homes, employment opportunities and community facilities.
- 2.19 The inclusion of Castel Ltd’s land within Policy DS7 is appropriate and justified
- a) Is the policy sufficiently clear in defining what uses would be acceptable within the area?**
- 2.20 Policy DS7 provides a broad but structured vision for Central Fishponds, emphasising a mix of residential, workspace, retail, leisure, and community uses.
- 2.21 In regard to workspace or employment uses, there are no quantitative targets for this and so the level of employment generating development and type proposed as part of mixed-use developments within this area may come forward differently and at differing quanta within each site. It is important to ensure that each site that comes forward in this area takes due responsibility in ensuring this requirement is met under the policy.
- 2.22 Regarding leisure, retail and office development, the following policy text may be appropriate as an opportunity to consolidate the provision of these uses within the policy –
- Appropriate location-based provision levels of floorspace for community, retail and other main town centre uses including offices that are proportionate to supporting proposed housing growth and subject to impact assessment of applications for retail and leisure development (where required by Policy SSE4 ‘Town centre first approach to development’) to ensure no unacceptable impact upon the vitality and viability of nearby town centres.*
- b) Is the boundary shown on the diagram at page 38 of the Plan appropriately defined?**
- 2.23 Policy DS7 refers to underused sites and declining industrial areas. The Castel Ltd Site is an underutilised site that can accommodate mixed use development. On this basis, it is considered that the boundary is justified in respect to this site.
- c) Is the anticipated housing capacity of 1,500 set out in paragraph 3.2.16 justified? To be effective, should the policy identify the expected level of housing delivery in this area?**
- 2.24 It is our understanding that this figure is not based on detailed site assessments and the work undertaken with the Council since the submission of the Local Plan has identified that the Castel Ltd Site can deliver in excess of 1,500 units as a standalone development. Given the capacity of the surrounding sites, including that permitted, subject to S106 at application site ref: 23/03104/P (Graphic Packaging International), and land at Verona House (sites included in the Atlas Place Masterplan referred to in the SHLAA Report 2024), there should be a minimum figure set within the policy that allows uplift through a design-led solution and ensuring that development makes efficient use of land.

- 2.25 Without a clear methodology for calculating this figure as referenced in the density discussions above, it risks being too conservative, affecting housing supply projections and potentially causing issues in the decision-making process when sites come forward in excess of this figure.
- 2.26 It should be clear that the new homes figure is a minimum expectation and not a ceiling to provide necessary flexibility for any subsequent planning framework and planning application process.
- 2.27 It is considered that the policy would be more effective with the inclusion of the minimum number of homes and inclusion of the following into the policy may assist in making the policy more effective and consistent with national policy in enabling sustainable development and making efficient use of land.

Support the provision of a minimum of 1,500 new homes, with provision for uplift through a design-led approach, comprising a mix of types, sizes and tenures, including build to rent.

d) Is it clear how a decision maker should react to any proposals which suggest that the bus depot at Eastern Road is no longer required?

- 2.28 No comments required on this in regard to Policy DS7.

Q4.22: Are the requirements set out in Policy DS7 justified, consistent with national policy and would they be effective in securing sustainable development? In particular:

a) Is the approach to tall buildings consistent with Policy DC2 and is it justified within this area?

- 2.29 Tall buildings are supported and justified in this area and the Council need to consider the evolution of sustainable centres and their responsibility to accommodate greater densities as the City evolves.
- 2.30 Policy DC2 should specifically reference the Growth and Regeneration Areas, particularly where Policy DC2 is referenced in their own policy text. In the absence of a detailed Tall Buildings Assessment as part of the Local Plan evidence base to determine suitable locations for these developments, the policy requires assessment for these through the planning application process and refers to design and liveability policies.
- 2.31 Knight Frank support the assessment of the suitability for tall buildings at the planning application stage, but Council should provide a clear framework for this assessment and specifically make reference to the Growth and Regeneration Areas in the Tall buildings Policy DC2.

b) Are the place principles for the area consistent with Policy CHE1 and national policy in respect of heritage assets?

- 2.32 The area has a very limited numbers of immediate heritage assets. Any planning application would be required to be considered against Policy CHE1 in the text of Policy DS7, requiring the assessment of harm as part of any subsequent planning application.

c) Are the requirements set out in bullet 1, relating to Goodneston Road justified?

- 2.33 The first bullet point regarding Goodneston Road is assumed to be a very brief assessment of the required infrastructure improvements for the development in this location to come forward. Whilst the principles of the delivery of this infrastructure is supported, there is no justification or detail on how this will be expected to be delivered or phased as the regeneration of the area is commenced.
- 2.34 It is proposed that the Council consider the level of detail in regard to the requests of this policy in terms of infrastructure and make the policy more effective in securing it at appropriate times. A further understanding of the infrastructure requirements within the policy and its proposed mechanisms for delivery would provide developers more certainty and clarity. It would also make funding the delivery of this infrastructure more equitable across the sites coming forward in this area.
- 2.35 Knight Frank would like to ask the Inspector to interrogate this specific point with the Council.

d) Paragraph 3.2.18 refers to densities of 100 dph and that higher densities may be acceptable in some circumstances, is this approach justified and will it be effective?

- 2.36 Refer to Q4.21 (C) above. Knight Frank consider that it is a reasonable starting point as a minimum capacity. However, development proposals should be able to come forward in excess of this through an acceptable design-led approach. This should be made explicit in the Local Plan and the supporting text of Policy DS7.

e) Are the requirements set out under the remaining place principles (design, active uses, and transport, workspace and housing mix, clear and unambiguous such that it would be evident to a decision maker how to react to a proposal, and will they ensure the aspirations of the policy are met?

2.37 The Council should consider clearly defining metrics or benchmarks for each of these elements and ensure that they are not covered by other policies in the Plan that may be more effective in ensuring the delivery of what is being requested. At present, there may be inconsistent interpretation about important matters such as infrastructure and this may not mean the policy aspirations are met in full.

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