

Bristol Local Plan Examination

Matter 4: Development Strategy and Site Selection
Process

Written Statement prepared by Savills
on behalf of Bristol, Clifton & West of England Zoological
Society
(Participant ID 418)

Introduction

1. Bristol, Clifton & West of England Zoological Society (BCWEZS) submits this Statement in relation to the following Issue identified under Matter 4 of the Inspector’s Draft Matters, Issues and Questions:

Issue 4.6: Whether the proposed site allocations are justified taking into account the reasonable alternatives, effective in terms of deliverability and consistent with national policy in enabling sustainable development?

2. BCWEZS have engaged with the draft Local Plan during the plan making process, including submitting representations to the two Regulation 19 (Reg 19) consultations and Call for Sites. They submitted representations specifically in respect of their land at Bristol Zoo Gardens (‘BZG’ or ‘the site’).
3. Since the submission of Reg 19 representations, Acorn Property Group Ltd (Acorn) have exchanged contracts to acquire Bristol Zoo Gardens. This hearing statement has been prepared on behalf of both BCWEZS and Acorn.
4. A copy of the representations submitted during the most recent Reg 19 consultation can be found at the following link as respondent number 418: <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/files/documents/7679-240508-catalogue-of-representations-received-may-24/file> or full version here https://files.smartsurvey.io/3/1/00DZ3ZH4/237071417_20966066_3299418.pdf.
5. As requested within IN4 Appendix 2, we have not repeated our Reg 19 concerns which remain outstanding but have referred to them where we feel this is helpful. This response should therefore be read in conjunction with these Reg 19 comments.
6. Since the Reg 19 stages of consultation in November 2022 and November 2023, planning permission (ref: 22/02737/F and 22/02889/LA) has been granted for the residential redevelopment of the site, to include the delivery of 196 dwellings.

“Redevelopment of site to include 196 residential units (Class C3), the provision of community floorspace (Class E, F1 and F2), and open space with associated landscaping, play space, parking, accesses (pedestrian, cycle and vehicular), infrastructure, works to listed buildings, and selective demolition of buildings.”

7. A link to the full planning application and all supporting evidence base is available here <https://pa.bristol.gov.uk/online-applications/simpleSearchResults.do?action=firstPage>

8. The granting of planning permission demonstrates the site is suitable for development, however as outlined below, it remains unallocated in the emerging Local Plan, despite Bristol City Council (BCC / the Council) relying upon it for their housing targets.

Q4.27: Are the proposed allocations identified by policies DS11, DS12, E4 and DA1 justified as appropriate when considered against reasonable alternatives and would they be consistent with national policy?

9. This Statement responds to the following questions set out under the above Issue 4.6:

- Q4.27 a)
- Q4.27e) – I)

10. Documents referenced below include the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA), dated April 2024 (EVEH01) and the Housing Need and Supply Topic Paper (April 2024) (TPC004). It is worth nothing both of these documents were prepared just shortly before the submission of the Plan, and we understand them to be the Council’s primary source of evidence for the housing supply matter.

11. In summary, the Council has not considered all reasonable alternatives when identifying the proposed allocations, and therefore their strategy approach to allocation of sites is not justified.

a) Does the evidence demonstrate that the sites have been selected based on a robust, consistent and objective basis? What criteria were used to identify suitable sites and are the reasons for selecting some sites and rejecting others clearly set out and justified?

12. The Council's evidence fails to demonstrate that the sites have been selected based on a robust, consistent or objective basis. There is no clear methodology for the identification and assessment of sites. The SHLAA (EVEH01) claims to capture all known sources of land supply in Bristol to arrive at an overall deliverable capacity for new homes in the city. However, the document fails to undertake a site assessment of those sites with planning permission, such as BZG.
13. Appendix C of the document states it assessed sites which were submitted at Reg 19 stage, however there is no evidence of the Council assessing BZG. As outlined within our response to Matter 2, the Council has been aware of BCWEZS's intentions for the site since 2020, including both the applications which resulted in the grant of planning permission for the residential redevelopment of the site to accommodate 196 homes, and the promotions through the call for sites process and associated Local Plan representations.
14. The Council's strategy is therefore not justified and is not sound. There is no criteria as to why the site has been omitted from Policy DA1 and the reason for rejecting other sites are not clearly set out nor justified. To avoid repetition, we ask that the Inspectors review BCWEZS's Written Statement response to Matter 2, Question 2.3a, on this matter.
15. The BZG site benefits from planning permission and has therefore been demonstrated through a planning application process that it is suitable for residential development. In line with our reps made in both previous Reg 19 consultations, we continue to promote the allocation of the site and object to its omission from the Plan.
16. The Council produced a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) (CSD004) in 2023 to assess potential sites. The SA recognises the statutory requirement for sustainability appraisals to test 'reasonable alternatives' to what is proposed, taking account of the objectives and geographical scope of the plan. However, the SA fails to assess any of the sites which were submitted to the Council but not put forward for allocation (for example those included within Appendix C of the SHLAA), or even those such as BZG which benefit from planning permission but do not have a policy position.
17. In summary, the Council's reasons for rejecting other sites are not clearly set out or justified, and the criteria to select sites is unknown.

Flooding and drainage issues

- e) Has the selection of sites, and the spatial strategy, been informed by a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment based on up-to-date flood risk data and climate change allowances, taking advice from the Environment Agency?
- f) Has a sequential risk-based approach been taken to identifying the spatial strategy and specific allocations, as required by paragraph 161 of the NPPF? Are any locations identified for growth within Flood Zones 2 and 3? If so, has the exception test been carried out and are the conclusions justified?
- g) Notwithstanding specific questions relating to Policy FR2, to what extent is the spatial strategy and delivery of housing and employment dependent on the delivery of the Bristol Avon Flood Strategy? What status does this project have and what is the deliver timescales?

18. The Council has prepared a Strategic Flood Assessment and this forms part of the evidence base at EVEF01 and EVEF02. It has also produced a 'Flood Risk Topic Paper' (TPC002) in which the Council refers to sequential testing.
19. It is acknowledged that various sites within Appendix 1 of the Topic Paper, and those within the areas of growth and regeneration, fall within Flood Zones 2 and 3. These sites are listed in the SHLAA and then carried through as draft allocations.
20. Given the significant constraints arising from flood risk that impact a number of the allocated sites, there could be implications for the timing of their delivery. Their locations within Flood Zones 2 and 3 will require significant detailed design to mitigate any potential flood risk, before the sites can progress.
21. In addition, the Council has counted dwellings provided by allocations in areas at risk of flooding without sequentially testing them against reasonable alternatives. This presents the potential risk that these housing numbers are lost from the pipeline, as they have failed to sequentially test sites through the plan making process, instead delaying the assessment to application stage.
22. It is therefore essential that appropriate sites unconstrained by flood risk are given certainty through the local plan with appropriate allocations, rather than solely relying upon existing planning permissions.

23. BZG is an example of a site which falls within Flood Zone 1, the area at lowest risk of flooding, and yet has not been allocated despite the Council’s evidence base confirming that it is being relied upon to deliver residential development. It is the position of BCWEZS that the site should be allocated for residential led development, as set out within its Reg 19 representations.

<p>Other Matters</p> <p>h) How were effects on air quality and the presence of air quality management areas (AQMA) taken into account in site assessment? Are any allocated sites within an AQMA and how does the Plan ensure such development would be acceptable?</p> <p>i) How were the effects on open space and green infrastructure assessed? For example, on what basis was it determined that some allocations did not need to be retained as part of the City’s green infrastructure / open space provision?</p> <p>j) Were other factors such as the effect on landscape character, biodiversity and heritage appropriately taken into account as part of the site selection process?</p> <p>k) How was appropriate mitigation for the impacts of development, individually or cumulatively, identified and is this adequately reflected in relevant policies?</p>
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24. Taking all the questions in their totality, there has been no evidence that the factors have been taken into account by the Council when assessing and allocating sites. The SHLAA only provides a brief description of each site, not a full assessment. Furthermore, as already discussed, the SHLAA (including Appendix C) fails to pick up all sites which were submitted as part of the Call for Sites processes, including BZG.

25. There is no scoring methodology or matrix of scores to demonstrate why certain sites have been allocated over others. The Council’s limited methodology means it is virtually impossible to assess individual sites against one another on an objective basis.



26. The Housing Need and Supply Topic Paper (April 2024) (TPC004) references that 9,087 homes will be delivered on sites with planning permission. However, there is no breakdown on how this figure is calculated. It is assumed the BZG site is included within this figure, and that the Council are relying upon it to deliver the housing need. If the consent lapses, the site falls away and therefore the Council would lose the 196 homes from its trajectory, a further and significant loss of supply.
27. The planning permission for BZG is currently the subject of a Judicial Review brought by objectors to the proposals. If the Judicial Review is successful and the permission is quashed, the absence of an allocation on the site provides an unnecessary uncertainty regarding the acceptability of residential development at the site.
28. The Council’s SA (CSD004) dated 2023 fails to assess any other sites apart from those within proposed allocations. Given the Council failed to undertake this assessment of the BZG site, it did not have appropriate regard to the questions outlined above. Using the Council’s SA criteria, BCWEZS undertook its own assessment of the site in Reg 19 representations which are available at the following link:
https://files.smartsurvey.io/3/1/00DZ3ZH4/237071417_20966066_3299418.pdf
29. The site scored positively across almost all of the metrics assessed within the SA. There were no minor or significant negative descriptions identified for the site. The information from our representations demonstrate the site is deliverable and developable. Furthermore, the Council granted planning permission for the residential redevelopment of the site in June 2024, which further demonstrates the Council’s support for the site and that the principle of residential development is established.

I) Has the deliverability of allocations been appropriately assessed, having regard to infrastructure provision and other policy requirements?

30. The Council has failed to properly assess the deliverability of allocations. The SHLAA, which is seen by the Council as their primary source of evidence for the housing supply, makes little reference to the deliverability of sites which are proposed for allocation. Several of the sites included within the SHLAA do not have planning permission, however the Council still expect them to come forward early within the plan period, despite no evidence as to why they consider these timelines to be realistic.



31. It is evident from the Inspector’s questions (see PQ67) that there are concerns regarding the deliverability of sites. The Council anticipates delivering 1,925 homes per year, but they state the plan aspires to exceed that target if services and infrastructure permit. However, they acknowledge that there is no specific infrastructure intervention included in the plan despite stating ‘there are circumstances where additional dwellings may be plausibly facilitated’.

32. Turning to the deliverability of sites with planning permission, the Housing Need and Supply Topic Paper (TPC004) includes the below table:

Source	Capacity
Areas of growth and regeneration	20,386
Planning permissions	9,087
Existing development allocations	1,381
Proposed development allocations	1,125
Green Belt locations	1,400
Small sites windfall	3,600
Urban potential	2,219
Student accommodation	600
TOTAL	39,798

33. The table sets their capacity at 39,798 homes and includes a figure of 9,087 homes with planning permission. There is no evidence within either the SHLAA or Topic Paper as to what this 9,087 figure is based on, or whether BZG contributes towards it. This figure equates to 22.83% of the overall housing supply over the plan period. The Council has failed to outline when these homes will be delivered over the plan period. Planning permissions are typically subject to time limits on their implementation. If any of these sites with planning permission are not implemented, they will lapse and the principle of development may be in doubt. If this were to happen, and owners/developers/funders are cautious about planning risk, then these sites risk falling away.

34. A lack of understanding of the deliverability of these sites, including those which are allocated, could result in the Council significantly under delivering on its anticipated housing figures.



35. However, information from our representations submitted in response to Reg 19 consultation (which are available at the following link: https://files.smartsurvey.io/3/1/00DZ3ZH4/237071417_20966066_3299418.pdf) demonstrate that of those sites, BZG is deliverable and developable. The acceptability of the site is further emphasised by the evidence base supporting the detailed planning permission granted for 196 homes at BZG demonstrates the site is deliverable and developable.

36. Given the above, BCWEZS ask that the BZG site be allocated for a residential-led scheme to provide certainty through the plan-making process.

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