

08 March 2023

South Norfolk Council Offices
Thorpe Lodge
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SENT VIA EMAIL TO: localplan.snc@southnorfolkandbroadland.gov.uk

Dear Sir or Madam

**SOUTH NORFOLK VILLAGE CLUSTERS HOUSING ALLOCATIONS PLAN: REGULATION 19
CONSULTATION**

RESPONSE ON BEHALF OF PIGEON INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT LTD

Thank you for consulting Pigeon Investment Management Ltd ('Pigeon') on the Regulation 19 South Norfolk Village Clusters Housing Allocations Plan ('the Village Clusters Plan'). We very much welcome the opportunity to participate in the current Regulation 19 consultation.

Pigeon and their Landowners have previously made representations to the Regulation 18 Village Clusters Plan and emerging Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP), urging the Councils to give further consideration to the allocation of the following sites within South Norfolk:

- Land at Hethersett (GNLP4052, GNLP1023A and GNLP1023BR, GNLP4054 and GNLP4053);
- Land at Rightup Lane, Wymondham (GNLP0355);
- Land at Walcot Green Lane, Diss (GNLP1044); and
- Land west of Neslon Road, Diss (GNLP1045).

The following representations are made on behalf of Pigeon and their Landowners.

We wish to **object** to the Regulation 19 Village Clusters Plan and, as drafted, **we do not consider the Village Clusters Plan to be sound.**

Further to our written representations set out below, we wish to reserve the right to take part in any future hearing session(s) for the Village Clusters Plan.

In the meantime, if it would be of assistance, then we would be happy to meet with the Council to discuss our comments.

Emerging Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP)

South Norfolk Council is working with Broadland District Council, Norwich City Council and Norfolk County Council to prepare the Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP). The GNLP will build upon the joint working arrangements for Greater Norwich, set out within the current Joint Core Strategy (JCS), planning for the housing and jobs needs of the area to 2038.

The Regulation 19 Publication GNLP was published for consultation in February 2021. The GNLP has been the subject of examination hearing sessions in 2022 and further hearing sessions in respect of the impact of nutrient neutrality on the Councils housing trajectory are due to take place in March, with further hearing sessions on the provision of Gypsy and Traveller sites due to take place in Summer 2023.

The Publication draft GNLP establishes the following settlement hierarchy:

1. Norwich urban area (Norwich and Norwich Fringe)
2. Main towns
3. Key service centres
4. Village clusters

The Publication draft GNLP provides for a “total minimum housing commitment” of 4,220 homes in Village Clusters, which are then split into ‘Existing deliverable commitment’ and ‘New allocations’ within Broadland and South Norfolk, as detailed in the table below.

Areas		Existing deliverable commitment	New allocations	Total minimum deliverable housing commitment
Village Clusters	Broadland	1,146	482	4,220
	South Norfolk	1,392	A minimum of 1,200	

Unlike the Broadland allocations, the new allocations for South Norfolk Village are not set out within the GNLP and it is of note that the Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Greater Norwich Local Plan (Lepus Consulting, January 2021) stated at paragraph 2.7.2 of the SA/SEA document that:

“It should be noted that the SA of the GNLP has not assessed smaller reasonable alternative sites located in South Norfolk because the ‘South Norfolk Village Clusters’ will be considered as part of the South Norfolk Village Clusters Housing Allocations Plan”.

It is evident from the above that the strategy to direct at least 1,200 homes to South Norfolk Village Clusters was devised in advance of assessing the suitability of potential allocation sites within South Norfolk. As such, the decision to effectively ‘ring fence’ this element of the GNLP housing requirement was taken without having first assessed whether there are suitable sites to deliver this strategy. It is therefore difficult to see how this strategy can be considered to be an ‘appropriate

strategy’, as required by paragraph 35 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which states that Plans are sound if they are justified – i.e. **“an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence”**.

In order to remedy this situation, we consider that it is not only necessary to assess the potential Village Cluster sites in isolation (as per the current Village Clusters Plan), but to assess them alongside other potential allocation sites within the Main towns and Key Service Centres.

Furthermore, the Publication draft GNLP is the subject of ongoing Examination and there are outstanding objections to the GNLP that have not yet been resolved. The GNLP is not expected to be adopted until Winter 2023/2024 and it remains to be seen whether the GNLP will be found sound.

As such, we consider that it is premature to progress the Village Clusters Plan, which is predicated on the draft strategy set out within the GNLP, until such time as it has been confirmed by the Examining Inspectors that the GNLP has been prepared in accordance with the relevant legal and procedural requirements, and whether it is sound.

Summary: the Village Clusters Plan is not sound and is not consistent with paragraph 35 of the NPPF.

The Settlement Hierarchy and Village Clusters

The overarching strategy for growth across Broadland, Norwich and South Norfolk, as set out in the GNLP, seeks to determine how the overall housing requirement of 40,541 homes between 2018 and 2038 should be distributed across the City and urban fringe, the Main Towns, Key Service Centres, and Village Clusters. As detailed above the Publication Draft GNLP does this by setting out a proposed settlement hierarchy.

The Village Clusters are defined in the GNLP as a group of villages which share services and facilities and the Village Clusters Plan identifies that the extent of the individual Village Clusters in South Norfolk is based upon primary school catchment areas, as detailed in the extract below.

The site assessments for the potential Village Cluster sites have therefore been undertaken without regard to the availability of alternative sites within Key Service Centres and Main Towns. Whilst Pigeon support the principle of enhancing and maintaining the vitality of rural communities, this needs to be balanced with other sustainable development objectives, such as actively managing patterns of growth so that walking, cycling and public transport use are promoted.

The settlement hierarchy has been developed with regard to the size, range of services and facilities and access to jobs within the existing settlements. As such, there are increased opportunities to deliver sustainable development within the settlements that form the upper tiers of the settlement hierarchy. In this regard, we suggest that the proposed Village Cluster sites should be assessed alongside alternative sites in Key Service Centres and Main Towns, where there are opportunities to deliver growth that will have greater access to services, facilities and jobs.

In particular, national planning policy advises that transport issues should be considered from the earliest stages of plan-making and development proposals (NPPF, paragraph 104) and goes on to state that the planning system should actively manage patterns of growth in order to promote sustainable transport measures (NPPF, paragraph 105). Artificially ring-fencing the Village Clusters

and the failure to undertake a comparative assessment of the Village Cluster sites alongside alternative sites within Main Towns and Key Service Centres, gives rise to the potential for sites that are unsuitable or will give rise to less sustainable patterns of development being allocated.

As such, we consider that the Village Clusters Plan is not consistent with national policy.

Summary: the Village Clusters Plan is not consistent with national policy set out in paragraphs 104 and 105 of the NPPF.

Settlement Limits

On the whole settlement limits are identified within the Village Clusters Plan to include the main built form of the particular settlement and sites that are allocated. The consultation on the Village Clusters Plan invites respondents to comment on the extent of the settlement limits and any proposed changes.

We note that there appears to be no such provision to review settlement limits within the Main Towns and Key Service Centres. This means that potential opportunities for infill development within more sustainable locations may be overlooked in favour of development within Village Clusters. As such, the Village Clusters Plan is not consistent with the above referenced NPPF paragraphs that seek to actively manage patterns of growth in order to promote sustainable transport measures.

In order to remedy this, a review of settlement limits within all settlements within South Norfolk by way of a focussed review of the Site Specific Allocations and Policies Document and Area Actions Plans should be undertaken.

Summary: the Village Clusters Plan is not consistent with national policy set out in paragraphs 104 and 105 of the NPPF.

Nutrient Neutrality

A number of the allocation sites within the Village Clusters Plan (30 in total), fall within the catchment of the River Yare and are located within areas affected by Nutrient Neutrality. In total these site allocations (including carried forward sites) amount to 671 homes, a significant proportion of the proposed Village Clusters Plan allocations.

While the Council is in the process of setting up a joint venture with the intention of securing land that can deliver mitigation which will be divided into credits that can be purchased by small and medium sized developers, this scheme is not yet in place and there is no certainty that it will deliver mitigation that allows sites within the affected areas to come forward.

Furthermore, the price at which credits are to be sold is yet to be established and therefore the impact that the requirement to purchase credits will have on the proposed allocation sites within the affected areas is unknown.

As such, there is no certainty that these sites are deliverable over the Village Clusters Plan period.

Summary: there is no certainty that the allocation sites affected by nutrient neutrality are deliverable over the plan period.

If the Village Clusters Plan is submitted for examination then we wish to reserve the right to participate in any subsequent hearing sessions.

In the meantime, if it would assist the Council to discuss any of the matters raised in our representation then we would be happy to do so.

Yours faithfully



Rob Snowling MRTPI
Associate Director