

North East Derbyshire Local Plan - Issues and Options Consultation on the Strategic Approach to the Location of Development and Refined Sites (March 2026)

**P&DG on behalf of Hurst Homes and Wibb Builders Ltd (Land at Stonebroom,
Shirland, and Wessington)**

29th April 2026

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Settlement Hierarchy

All plans should promote a sustainable pattern of development that seeks to: meet the development needs of an area; align growth and infrastructure; improve the environment; and mitigate and adapt to climate change. In doing so, they must play an active and central role in directing development towards sustainable spatial solutions.

Strategic policies should establish a clear and robust framework for the pattern, scale and design quality of development. It is therefore essential that a coherent and effective spatial strategy is adopted, ensuring the efficient and equitable distribution of growth across all levels of the settlement hierarchy. The existing settlement hierarchy provides a well-established, tested and proven framework, forming a sound and appropriate starting point for directing sustainable growth. It provides a clear and logical structure which appropriately balances development across settlements with varying levels of infrastructure, services and accessibility.

The proposed settlement hierarchy, as set out in Table 8, clearly identifies settlements that are demonstrably sustainable. We strongly support the methodology underpinning these conclusions, which evidences a consistent and robust application of established settlement hierarchy principles.

Within Chapter 5 of the NPPF, paragraphs 81 to 83 set out clear guidance that planning policies should be responsive to local circumstances and should support housing delivery which reflects local needs. In promoting sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be directed to locations where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of communities. Furthermore, authorities should identify opportunities for settlements to grow and thrive, particularly where this will sustain or enhance local services. Importantly, where groups of smaller settlements exist, development in one settlement can appropriately support and reinforce services in another.

Significantly, and of particular positive relevance to our client's interests, the Council has identified three 'Settlement Clusters'. Of these, the 'Shirland Cluster' is of particular importance, recognising that Stonebroom, Shirland, Mickley and Higham lie within the same

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Parish and exhibit clearly established functional relationships, including shared service provision, movement patterns and community interaction.

This represents an adaptive, pragmatic and highly effective spatial response, which we strongly support. It provides a clear mechanism for directing development towards a sustainable and policy-compliant solution, while enabling the Council to meet housing needs more effectively within the Parish. In doing so, it will also support the delivery of more resilient and vibrant communities. Importantly, it appropriately recognises that sustainability is not a fixed characteristic, but one that can be strengthened through well-planned, proportionate and coordinated growth.

In locational terms, the Shirland Cluster forms a well-integrated and highly connected group of settlements, underpinned by strong spatial, functional and community relationships. We strongly support the conclusions of the Council's Settlement Hierarchy Topic Paper and further emphasise the cluster's excellent accessibility to higher-order settlements and key infrastructure corridors.

The cluster benefits from close proximity to Alfreton to the south and Clay Cross to the north, both of which provide a wide range of higher-order services, employment opportunities and facilities. These relationships are reinforced by the A61 transport corridor, which provides strong north-south connectivity and facilitates convenient access to these urban settlements. In addition, established public transport services further enhance accessibility, providing sustainable travel options between the cluster and these centres.

The cluster also benefits from strong functional connectivity to key employment areas, including Somercotes, as well as excellent access to the strategic highway network via the A38 corridor and Junction 28 of the M1 motorway. These connections significantly enhance the sustainability profile of the cluster by supporting access to both local and regional employment, alongside wider commercial and service destinations.

Taken together, these relationships provide a sustainable pattern of development, characterised by realistic and practical opportunities to access employment, services and facilities through a range of transport modes. These are established patterns of movement which should be afforded positive weight in the formulation of the Council's spatial strategy.

By identifying and formalising the functional and community relationships between these four settlements, the Council has appropriately recognised the opportunity presented by the cluster approach. This enables development to be planned in a coordinated manner, ensuring that growth supports and reinforces existing services and facilities across the Parish as a whole.

This is a robust, progressive and policy-aligned approach which we strongly support. It is fully consistent with national planning policy objectives, particularly those relating to the promotion of sustainable rural communities and the efficient use of existing settlement networks.

Finally, we are supportive of the Council's overarching strategy to maximise development in areas outside of the Green Belt and the proposed use of a cascade approach to the distribution of housing allocations. This approach is of critical importance to ensuring housing delivery across the plan period. Whilst the focus is appropriately directed towards Level 1 settlements, it is recognised that capacity within these locations is constrained in by the presence of extensive Green Belt designations, with the exception of Clay Cross.

It is important to recognise that the settlement hierarchy represents a theoretical assessment of settlement capacity and does not, in itself, account for the practical constraints imposed by planning designations and environmental limitations. In reality, even higher-order settlements, including Priority 1 locations, may be significantly constrained in their ability to accommodate development.

Given the Government's clear commitment to the protection of Green Belt land, and the requirement that any alteration to Green Belt boundaries must be fully justified by exceptional circumstances, it is considered that the proposed cascade approach may require a greater proportion of development being directed to unconstrained, sustainable settlements. This includes Level 2 settlements such as the Shirland Cluster, Calow, Holmewood, North Wingfield, the Pilsley Cluster, Tupton and Wingerworth, all of which are recognised as sustainable locations for growth. A proportionate application of this approach should also extend to Level 3 settlements, including our client's land interests at Wessington.

In this context, it is essential that the Council fully examines and maximises all reasonable alternatives outside of the Green Belt before any consideration is given to Green Belt release. This should include the optimisation of all available sites within sustainable, unconstrained settlements, including the consideration of increased densities where appropriate. Only once all reasonable and unconstrained opportunities have been fully exhausted should the Council then consider any release of land currently designated as Green Belt.