

**EXAMINATION OF SOUTH  
GLOUCESTERSHIRE CORE  
STRATEGY**

**MATTER 15 –  
ENVIRONMENT/HERITAGE –  
POLICY CS9**

**WRITTEN STATEMENT ON  
BEHALF OF WELBECK  
STRATEGIC LAND LLP**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

1. This Statement has been prepared by Woodhall Planning & Conservation on behalf of Welbeck Strategic Land LLP (hereafter “Welbeck”). Welbeck has land interests at Hacket Farm, Morton Way South, Thornbury.
2. This Statement responds to the Inspector’s questions posed for the Matters for Examination as detailed in the Programme for the Examination of the South Gloucestershire Core Strategy, 25 April 2012. This Statement deals with questions relating to Matter 15 – Environment/ Heritage – Policy CS9.
3. We also refer the Inspector to Welbeck’s previous submissions on the Core Strategy. Welbeck has submitted representations in relation to the Core Strategy on six previous occasions as indicated in Welbeck’s Matter 1 Statement.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL/HERITAGE – POLICY CS9**

4. Welbeck provided representations on policy CS9 (see representations August 2010, Heritage; February 2011; and February 2012, Appendix W4).
5. We are providing responses to questions 1 and 2.

## **Q1: IS POLICY CS9 SUFFICIENTLY COMPREHENSIVE IN SETTING OUT CRITERIA TO PROTECT THE NATURAL AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT?**

5. We do not consider that Policy CS9 is sufficiently comprehensive in setting out criteria to protect the natural and built environment.
6. The wording of the Policy, as we set out below, is considered both imprecise and contradictory and, we would submit, fails to provide appropriate assessment criteria to give a clear indication of how decision takers should react to a development proposal, contrary to guidance in paragraph 154 of the National Planning Policy Framework (hereafter ‘the Framework’).
7. Policy CS9 is described under paragraph 8.4 of the CS as setting out a “*general approach to environmental resources and heritage assets in South Gloucestershire*”. In terms of the historic environment this is expressed under criterion 1 as an aspiration to ensure that sites, heritage assets and landscapes of importance are “*preserved, respected and where appropriate, enhanced.*”
8. The Framework defines a heritage asset as a building, monument, site, place, area or landscape which holds heritage significance based upon an archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic interest. A heritage asset includes designated assets and undesignated assets such as those defined by the local planning authority through local listing. The wording of Policy CS9 fails to clearly articulate the nature of a heritage asset or distinguish it from references to other sites or landscapes which do not hold heritage significance. Whilst reference is made to archaeological and historical ‘importance’ it is silent on assets which may hold architectural or artistic interest. In addition the wording conveys a meaning, presumably unintentionally, that it is concerned with sites, heritage assets and landscapes

which hold, in combination rather than individually, archaeological, historic, ecological, arboricultural and geological importance.

9. Policy CS9 indicates that it is the intention to ensure that such sites, assets and landscapes should be preserved, respected and where appropriate enhanced but does not set out the criteria on which such decisions should be based. Nor does it define the meaning of the terms used in the context of the historic environment. Reference should be made to the conservation of heritage assets, a term and concept which is clearly defined in the Framework (within Annex 1) as encompassing *“the process of maintaining and managing change to a heritage asset in a way that sustains and, where appropriate, enhances its significance.”*
10. Overall it is submitted that Policy CS9, as currently drafted, is too generalised to adequately guide decision makers considering proposals which may impact upon the historic environment. We would recommend that the Policy is re-worded to clearly differentiate between heritage assets and other site or landscapes which hold importance based upon ecological, nature or geological interest. The criteria upon which the historic environment will be protected should be clearly set out by reference to the Framework and the aim of ‘conservation’ balanced against the wider sustainability objectives it sets out, including other public benefits.
11. In the re-wording of the Policy as it pertains to the historic environment the Council should seek to identify, through reference to an appropriate evidence base, those elements of the historic environment within South Gloucestershire of particular importance, including particular areas of human made landscape and townscape which should be preserved or enhanced. At present we do not consider that the Council’s evidence base is sufficiently robust to allow this to be done in accordance with guidance within the Framework. As such the suggested wording for a broad policy framework within which to do this is set out below:

*The historic environment of South Gloucestershire, comprising archaeological remains, buildings, townscapes and planned landscapes and including designated heritage assets and locally significant non-designated heritage assets (including those identified on the local list) will be conserved. Through the process of plan-making and in decision-taking the Council will seek to ensure that:*

- *Priority is given to the conservation of heritage assets and their setting in a manner appropriate to their significance*
- *New development is consistent with the conservation of the historic environment and maximises opportunities for the enhancement of heritage assets and their setting*
- *Decisions are based upon a clear understanding of the nature of the significance of the heritage asset or assets affected by development and the contribution of their setting to that significance*

## **Q2: IS THE COUNCIL’S APPROACH CONSISTENT WITH THE GUIDANCE IN THE PLANNING FRAMEWORK?**

12. We do not consider that the council's approach is consistent with guidance in the Planning Framework for the following reasons.

13. The Framework, at paragraphs 156 and 157, indicates that Plans should set out strategic policies which, inter alia, deliver “*conservation and enhancement of the natural and historic environment, including landscape*”. They should “*contain a clear strategy for enhancing the natural, built and historic environment*” and “*identify land where development would be inappropriate, for instance because of its environmental or historic significance.*” Plans should be based upon a proportionate, up-to-date and relevant evidence base (paragraph 158) which, in respect of the historic environment, should be used to assess the significance of heritage assets and the contribution they make to their environment and predict the likelihood that currently unidentified assets will be discovered in future (paragraph 169).
14. As noted in the response to Question 1, Policy CS9, as currently drafted fails to properly reflect the guidance within the Framework or adopt the recognised terminology contained within the document. The Framework sets out the core planning principle that planning should “*conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance*” (paragraph 17) and that authorities, within their Local Plan, should set out a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment. The absence of reference to “conservation” in the context of the Annex 1 definitions set out within the Framework is a fundamental inconsistency in the Policy wording. The definition encompasses the aim of sustaining and enhancing the historic environment in a way consistent with the significance of the heritage asset concerned and with the principles of the Framework.
15. The reliance of the Policy upon more detailed assessment criteria set out in the 2006 Local Plan is inappropriate. These policies, as they pertain to the historic environment, pre-date current policy and best practice guidance. It is therefore recommended that the Policy is reframed with reference to the guidance within the Framework and in particular the over-arching criteria set out under paragraph 126 in relation to plan making. These criteria should be clearly expressed as intended to underpin policy within the Core Strategy, including allocations and more detailed development policies within future development plan documents. In respect of decision taking, the Policy should provide over-arching guidance which indicates that both plan-making and decision-taking should seek to conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance, whereby the nature of potential harm to heritage significance is clearly identified and understood.
16. As noted in our response to Question 1, the Framework makes clear that authorities, in the plan-making process, should have up-to-date evidence about the historic environment in their area and, amongst other things, prepare landscape character assessments integrated with assessment of historic landscape character. Whilst the written justification to Policy CS9 references the range of heritage assets within the area and states that the Council will “periodically appraise” them, no reference is made to a current evidence base in respect of the historic environment, including the historic environment record, nor to what evidence has been used to inform policy within the Core Strategy. Reference to periodic appraisals is too vague and does not articulate what this process will involve or how it will inform both plan making and decision taking. Such appraisals, including historic landscape character assessments, should be an integral part of the formulation of the Core Strategy. In the absence of this evidence and clear cross referencing to how it has informed the policies and options within the Strategy the Policy is contrary to the policies and guidance contained within the Framework.

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