

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN 2011-33 EXAMINATION
HEARING STATEMENT – MATTER 4: THE SPATIAL STRATEGY / DISTRIBUTION OF
DEVELOPMENT (ISSUE 4)

On behalf of:
Manor Oak Homes

Respondent ID: **19/LAD0090**

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LR/08816/LP Examination Matter 4 – Issue 4

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This statement is prepared on behalf of Manor Oak Homes, the promoters of land at West Sumners, Harlow, which forms the southern part of the proposed allocation at Water Lane (SP5.2). It is prepared in relation to **Matter 4: The Spatial Strategy/Distribution of Development** and provides Manor Oak Homes' response to **Issue 4, Questions 1 and 2**.

2.0 Issue 4: Is the distribution of development justified in respect of the need for, and approach to, Green Belt release?

1. Paragraph 14 of the NPPF generally requires that a Local Plan should meet the objectively assessed development needs of the area. However, it also confirms (via footnote 9) that Green Belt is one of the constraints which indicates that development should be restricted. How has this tension been resolved in favour of the conclusion that there are exceptional circumstances to justify the alteration of Green Belt boundaries? In particular:

- a. How do the specific development needs of the District weigh against the importance given to Green Belt protection?**
- b. What would be the consequences of not releasing Green Belt land to help meet development needs?**
- c. Have alternatives to Green Belt release been fully considered:**
 - i. Has full use been made of previously developed land? Has a Brownfield Land Register been published and how has it been taken into account?**
 - ii. Has the density of development been maximised, on brownfield and greenfield allocations?**
 - iii. Could vacant homes be brought back into use? Have approximately 1000 properties in the Epping Area been empty for more than 6 months?**
 - iv. Has the potential for windfall development during the Plan period been underestimated?**
 - v. Could any other authority within the HMA have accommodated some of the District's housing need on non-Green Belt land?**

- 2.1 Manor Oak Homes support the decision of Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) to release Green Belt land for development. In a largely rural District where over 92% is designated as Green Belt, a number of issues conspire to constitute the exceptional circumstances necessary to justify the alteration of Green Belt boundaries, not least the scale of future housing and economic needs which represent a 'step change' from previous delivery, the lack of available land outside the Green Belt that is of a scale and nature that it would secure sustainable patterns of development and promote climate change objectives, and the need to provide the right type of housing and jobs in the right locations and contribute to the regeneration of Harlow. These issues are commensurate with those identified in the Calverton Judgement¹ to consider when assessing whether exceptional circumstances are present, namely: the acuteness/intensity of the objectively-assessed need; the inherent constraints on supply/availability of land; the consequent difficulties in securing sustainable development without impinging on the Green Belt; any resulting harm

¹ Calverton Parish Council v Greater Nottingham Council & Others (EWHC 1078), 2015

caused to the Green Belt and the degree to which this could be ameliorated.

- 2.2 The limited opportunities for further development within its urban areas mean that the scale of the development needs of the District, and in particular the issues of housing affordability, are simply not sustainable without the amendment of Green Belt boundaries. Were EFDC not to release Green Belt land to help meet development needs the consequences would be grave. The constriction of supply would mean land and house prices continue to increase and the current affordability problems experienced in the District and across the Housing Market Area (HMA) would intensify. The result being greater inequality and little contribution towards the reversal of the housing crisis. Having regard to the absence of non-Green Belt land outside the urban areas these inequalities can only be addressed through the development opportunities created by the release of Green Belt land.
- 2.3 It is clear from its evidence base that the Council and its neighbours have gone to great lengths to consider the alternatives to releasing Green Belt land. However, it is equally clear that the scale of the identified need in the District, allied to the constraints its faces, are such that the need to amend boundaries and release Green Belt to enable delivery is unavoidable. The assumptions made regarding the scope to meet need via other means, including greater use of previously developed land, building at higher densities, bringing vacant properties back into use and cross-boundary agreement, are well documented and appear to be realistic. The scope of other authorities in the HMA to accommodate some of EFDC's need has in particular been extensively explored with a number of different permutations having been considered².
- 2.4 Manor Oak Homes are of the view that the Council's decision to release Green Belt land is sound and proportionate to the need and that the need for exceptional circumstances is fully evidenced and justified and that the Council has examined all other options for meeting its need for development as required by national planning policy and guidance.

2. Are the changes proposed to the Green Belt boundary informed by a robust assessment of the contribution made by individual sites to the purposes of the Green Belt (EB74A-B; and EB705A-B)? How were the findings of the Green Belt Review weighed in the balance with other planning considerations in the site selection process?

- 2.5 Having considered the Council's evidence base at great length, Manor Oak Homes is of the view that the changes proposed to the Green Belt boundary have been informed by a robust Green Belt Review and thorough assessment of urban capacity and site suitability, which demonstrates the lack of alternative available and sustainable sites. The result is that the Plan would secure the achievement of the most sustainable patterns of development, key considerations when determining whether the 'exceptional circumstances' test for Green Belt release has been met. The decision to accommodate a significant

² EB1202 – Memorandum of Understanding on Distribution of Objectively Assessed Housing Need across the West Essex/East Hertfordshire Housing Market Area, March 2017

proportion of growth around Harlow, one of the most sustainable locations within the HMA, by amending Green Belt boundaries to enable the release of a number of strategic sites, is a clear example of this. Indeed, it is a direct response to the findings of detailed work³ undertaken to consider and evaluate potential strategic sites, establish an up-to-date direction of travel in terms of the acceptability of growth and to take account of the infrastructure implications of particular sites, both individually and in combination. The approach adopted towards other strategic and non-strategic sites is considered to have been no less robust in its approach and keenness to promote the most sustainable patterns of development. These findings have enabled the Council to weigh the loss of Green Belt land against other relevant planning considerations in order to make sound decisions regarding the boundaries to be changed.

³ EB1500 – Harlow Strategic Sites Assessment, AECOM, September 2016