



Epping Forest Local Plan

Examination Hearing Statement

Matter 6 - Housing Supply, including Sources of Supply; the Housing Trajectory; and the Five Year Supply

Prepared by Strutt & Parker on behalf of City & Country (19LAD0020)

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Context

1. Strutt & Parker have made representations on behalf of City & Country (Stakeholder ID 19LAD0020) throughout the preparation of the Epping Forest Local Plan, in respect of two sites:
 - Land at Bowes Field, Ongar (reference site reference SR-0120)
 - Land at Sheering Lower Road, Lower Sheering (site reference SR-0121)
2. Participation in the plan-making process included representations on the Local Plan Submission Version (LPSV) (Regulation 19) consultation: representations ID 19LAD0020-1 (in respect of Bowes Field, Ongar); and 19LAD0020-2 (Sheering Lower Road, Lower Sheering). Supplementary representations were also made in respect of both sites.
3. Land at Bowes Field, Ongar is proposed to be allocated for development through the LPSV (allocation ONG.R2) as part of the West Ongar Concept Framework Plan Area.
4. Land at Sheering Lower Road, Lower Sheering (SR-0121) has been rejected for allocation through the plan-making process, albeit – in our view – based on erroneous assessment of the site, and without justification.
5. This Hearing Statement seeks to avoid repeating matters already raised within our representations on the Regulation 19 iteration of the Local Plan; and in respect of other Hearing Statements already submitted in respect of other Matters.
6. This Hearing Statement addresses Matter 6, and follows the Council's acknowledgement at Day 3 of the Local Plan Examination Hearing Sessions, the Council confirmed that the submitted Local Plan will not provide enough homes in the early years of the plan period to meet needs. This alone means that, modifications to the Local Plan are required to ensure it is sound.

7. We consider that modifications to the submitted Local Plan (the LPSV) can be made which will make the plan sound. We would also stress the importance of ensuring a Local Plan is in place to manage the growth of the District in a sustainable manner, and the potential significant negative consequences of not having a plan in place – it is imperative that the LPSV be made to be sound.

Issue 1: Will the Plan provide a land supply sufficient to deliver the housing requirement of at least 11,400 dwellings over the Plan period?

Question 1

8. It must be recognised that the NPPF not only requires development needs to be met in full, but:
 - With sufficient flexibility to adapt to rapid change (paragraph 14); and
 - In the event that Green Belt boundaries are altered through a Local Plan, new Green Belt boundaries drawn up should be capable of enduring beyond the plan-period (paragraph 83).
9. The components of housing supply in Table 2.3 of the LPSV suggest an approach with no flexibility to be able to respond to any unforeseen changes in circumstance. The components when totalled do not even deliver the minimum number of new homes they are purportedly intended to meet, let alone with any degree of flexibility.
10. In addition, it is noted that the supply set out within Table 2.3 includes reliance upon windfall, which, by definition, cannot be considered a reliable source of supply in the future.
11. Table 2.3 illustrates the importance of proposed allocations to meeting housing land need, further underlying the importance of ensuring an up-to-date Local Plan is in place. At the same time, it also illustrates the reliance on such sites, and the lack of flexibility to account for a situation in which any proposed allocations may not deliver as quickly as expected, i.e. it demonstrates the need for modifications to ensure the strategy can respond to changing circumstances and still deliver much-needed homes.

12. Turning to the issue of Green Belt, it must be recognised that the District is predominantly Green Belt, and that all options to make any meaningful contribution to meeting housing needs without revisions to Green Belt boundaries have been exhausted. Consequently, in the event that a review of the Local Plan is required to meet housing need (such as is suggested at paragraph 2.81 of the LPDV) a further review of the Green Belt through such a process appears inevitable. However, it should not be the case – the submitted Local Plan should ensure sufficient flexibility to enable the Green Belt boundary to endure beyond the plan period.

13. As such, to ensure the Local Plan is sound, modifications are required. Such modifications should include the allocation of additional sites for housing, to ensure flexibility and to maximise prospects of the Green Belt being able to endure beyond the plan period.

Issue 2: Will the Plan ensure that there is a reasonable prospect of a five-year land supply being achieved upon adoption and throughout the lifetime of the Plan as required by paragraph 47 of the NPPF?

Questions 1 and 2

14. As noted within the introductory question to Issue 2, the NPPF requires a five-year housing land supply to be in place at all points within the plan period.
15. The Council has published a revised Housing Implementation Strategy (2019), which post-dates the LPSV. This has been added to the evidence base for the Local Plan, as document EB410A, and includes a revised housing trajectory (EB410B).
16. The Housing Implementation Strategy (2019) demonstrates, unequivocally, that the LPSV will *not* achieve a five-year housing land supply at all points in the plan period.
17. The Housing Implementation Strategy (2019) and accompanying appendices clearly demonstrate the LPSV's failure to allocate sufficient small sites which can be delivered relatively quickly and without large strategic infrastructure improvements, hence the inability of the LPSV to meet housing needs in the short term.
18. The LPSV should be subject to modifications which ensure it will meet housing needs within the first five year of the plan period, i.e. additional sites which are deliverable within five years should be allocated.
19. In terms of the housing requirement, the Council consider this to be a total of 11,400 homes between 2011 and 2033 (though this is much disputed, and, in our view, should be substantially higher). This equates to 518 dwellings per annum. Between 2011 and 2018, the Council reports that 1,856 dwellings were completed

- a shortfall over this period of 1,770 homes. The PPG is clear¹ that Local Planning Authorities should aim to deal with any undersupply within the first five years of the plan period (or, where not possible, should work with neighbouring authorities under the Duty to Cooperate). As such, the total housing requirement for the District for 2018 to 2023 is five times the annual requirement, plus the total shortfall: 4,360 dwellings. The NPPF goes on to confirm that a 20% buffer should be applied where there has been a record of persistent under delivery, as there clearly has been in Epping Forest District. This results in a total five-year requirement of 5,232.
20. The Housing Implementation Strategy (2019) suggests (paragraph 5.2) that, because of the housing delivery proposed by the LPSV, the housing target for 2018-2023 should be reduced to just 2,550 – equivalent to just 48.7% of need (58.5% if one were to ignore the requirement to apply a buffer).
21. The Housing Implementations Strategy's (2019) approach to addresses this issue is to simply alter the target, to one that does not reflect the true scale of need; and apply a stepped approach to meeting need, i.e. to put off meeting what is a current and acute need for housing until later in the plan period. This is no solution, and will merely mask the problem – the fact that the plan will not be providing sufficient housing for the District.
22. It is considered therefore that the Council should review sites it has rejected, and the Local Plan should allocate additional sites to ensure housing needs can be met in the early years of the plan period.
23. There is nothing within the relevant NPPF or accompanying PPG which supports a stepped approach to housing delivery and the provision of fewer homes than needed in the early years of the plan period. On the contrary, the NPPF and PPG provides a clear message to local planning authorities that they must seek to meet housing needs, and seek to address historic shortfall within the early years of the plan period.

¹Paragraph: 035 Reference ID: 3-035-20140306

24. We recognise that there are cases where – exceptionally – a stepped housing trajectory has been deemed appropriate. However, in such instances there were clear local circumstances which necessitated such an approach. We have seen no evidence that this is the case in respect of Epping Forest District. On the contrary, rather than the stepped approach being necessary due to local circumstances, the trajectory appears to be very much simply a function of the submitted Local Plan – specifically, its failure to allocate sufficient land to meet housing need in the early years of the plan period.
25. We consider that the only circumstances where a stepped approach could possibly be considered sound, would be in the event the Local Plan has exhausted the potential of all suitable, available and achievable sites which could contribute to housing supply in the earlier years of the plan, yet still cannot meet immediate development needs in full.
26. However, this is not the case in respect of this Local Plan. As set out within our representations and Hearing Statements on other Matters, sites which are entirely suitable, available and achievable have been rejected based on flawed reasoning and erroneous assessment. Whilst the Council has explained and justified sites that are proposed to be allocated, the same cannot be said for those it has rejected. There is clearly opportunity to revisit assessment of rejected sites, and to modify the LPSV, allocating additional sites.
27. It should be noted that small sites are generally well-placed to deliver early within the plan period, as they will rarely require long lead-in times, provision of significant infrastructure, overcoming over land assembly constraints, etc. This is of particular relevance in respect of the LPSV and its now acknowledged inability to meet housing needs in the short term, as the Council has automatically rejected all sites considered incapable of delivering at least 6 homes. Such sites include SR-0121, as noted within our Matter 1 Hearing Statement and our representations on the LPSV (19LAD0020-2 (supplementary)). In this case, the Site Selection Report erroneously concluded it could not deliver at least 6 homes, but even if it could only deliver 6 homes, this still represents a further contribution. Sites such

as SR-0121 have the potential to make a contribution early in the plan period. Cumulatively, the scale of contribution could well be significant.

28. As with other issues identified in respect of the LPSV, the plan can be made sound through modifications. In this case, through allocation of additional sites, including SR-0121. We consider it of particular importance to cure the defects in the LPSV, rather than to withdraw the Local Plan, given the reliance placed on new allocations to ensure the District's growth can be sustainably managed and its acute housing shortage addressed.
29. We have already requested a modification to allocate Site SR-0121 (as it is considered required for reasons we have cited in response to other Examination Matters). Issues vis-à-vis the Local Plan and the latest accompanying housing trajectory further underline the need for such a modification.