

MATTER 4



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Examination

Of the

Epping Forest District Local Plan 2011 - 2033

Inspector's Matters, Issues and Questions

January 2019

CLIENT: Gladman Developments Limited



Matter 4: The Spatial Strategy / Distribution of Development

4.1 The following statement has been prepared by Johnson Mowat on behalf of Gladman Developments Limited in relation to their land interests within the District.

Issue 1: Does the distribution of development in the Plan place too much reliance upon the Garden Community Site around Harlow at the expense of testing the capacity of the other settlements in the District?

4.1.1 Whilst the principle of large-scale strategic sites is supported, they should be provided as one element of a wider variety of sites in the widest possible range of locations to ensure that all types of house builder has access to suitable land, which in turn increases housing delivery.

1. *How was the amount of housing proposed in the three Garden Town sites allocated in Policy SP5 determined (3,900 dwellings in total)?*

4.1.2 The Local Plan identifies three Garden Town sites as part of the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town that lie within EFDC, and form a significant proportion of the overall housing requirement. The three Garden Town sites are:

1. Latton Priory 1,050 homes
2. Water Lane 2,100 homes
3. East of Harlow 750 homes

4.1.3 It is for the Council to justify the amount of housing proposed. However, there appears to be no clear explanation in the Submission Draft of the proposed dwelling capacities of the individual Garden Town sites.

4.1.4 The evidence base on the Council's website includes the 'Report on Site Selection' (Arup, March 2018) which post-dates the Submission Draft Local Plan. Included at Appendix B1.6.6 '*Decisions on Residential Sites for Allocation*' is allocation justification text along



with a dwelling capacity. The dwelling capacity for the three Garden Town sites do not correlate with that included within the Submission Draft.

2. *Could a higher level have been accommodated and would this have reduced the impact of growth proposed elsewhere in the district?*

4.1.5 Similar to question 1 above, it is expected that the Council will provide clear justification regarding the proposed dwelling yield of the three Garden Sites.

3. *Conversely, will the level of growth proposed elsewhere in the district be sufficient to support the vitality and viability of individual settlements over the Plan period?*

4.1.6 Gladman support growth across Epping Forest, particularly around the larger settlements which are well connected to London by public transport such as Epping. However, we would suggest that there are insufficient smaller sites and an over reliance on the three Garden Town sites in the Local Plan in the early part of the Plan period.

4.1.7 Gladman are part of the Epping Forest Housing Forum which objects to the OAN in the Local Plan and suggests an OAN of at least 886 dwellings per annum across the plan period (see further detail in the Epping Forest Housing Forum Matter 3 Statement). Notwithstanding the objections to the housing requirement in the Local Plan, the National Standard Methodology for Epping Forest is 923 dwellings per annum. Both the standard methodology and the Epping Forest Housing Forum OAN are significantly higher than the Memorandum of Understanding agreed annual requirement of 518 dwellings in the Local Plan. It is therefore necessary for additional sites to be allocated within this Local Plan to meet the actual level of housing need in the district.

4.1.8 Aside from the need to identify additional sustainable residential sites, there is a need to identify sufficient alternative smaller sites that are capable of delivering in the immediate short term, given the likely time taken for the strategic Garden Town sites to start delivering. The recent completion rates in the District have been poor, and there is a need now for the District to increase the housing delivery in the early part of the plan period.



4.1.9 The Housing Trajectory Appendix 5 of the Submission Local Plan sees the three Garden Town Sites delivering dwellings from 2021/22 onwards, with Latton Priory and East of Harlow each delivering 100 dwellings per annum, and Water Lane Area delivering 200 dwellings per annum. Gladman are concerned about the realism of the anticipated year of delivery commencement on these sites.

Garden Town Sites Lead in Times:

4.1.10 Whilst the principle of large-scale strategic sites is supported. It is important that realistic assumptions are made regarding the timescales for delivery of these sites to ensure that a robust and continuing supply of housing land is achieved.

4.1.11 In relation to the timescales of the commencement of delivery of the three Garden Town sites, we note that according to EFDC public access system, there are no planning applications pending consideration on the three Garden Sites. The fact that there are no submitted applications brings into question whether these sites will start delivering dwellings in 2021/22.

4.1.12 The Arup Report on Site Selection – March 2018 identifies potential deliverability issues which support our concerns regarding the Council’s trajectory. The below are extracts from the allocation justification of individual sites that form part of the Garden Town sites:

SR-0046A-N Latton Priory Farm:

“Whilst it is acknowledged that there are particular complexities around the deliverability of the site, in part due to infrastructure which needs to be planned and delivered in co-ordination with Harlow District Council and Essex County Council as well as the constraints posed by access (which would need to be provided from London Road), it was considered that these will be resolved through the proposed Latton Priory Strategic Masterplan.”

SR-0964-Z Land to the West of Harlow between Old House Lane, Epping road, Water Lane and Katherines:

“Whilst it is acknowledged that there are particular complexities around the deliverability of the site, due to infrastructure which needs to be planned and delivered in co-ordination with Harlow District Council and Essex County Council



as well as a limited part of the site being located within Harlow District, these can be resolved through the proposed Water Lane Strategic Masterplan.”

SR-0146C-N Land East of Harlow:

“It is acknowledged that there are particular complexities around the deliverability of the site, in part due to infrastructure which needs to be planned and delivered in co-ordination with Harlow District Council and Essex County Council. Identified challenges include site viability, the possible relocation of Princess Alexandra hospital, on-site infrastructure requirements and the need to avoid built development on parts of the site located on higher Flood Risk Zones. However, it was considered that these can be resolved through the proposed East of Harlow Strategic Masterplan.”

4.1.13 There is a clear trend in the above in relation to the ‘complexities around the deliverability’ yet the housing trajectory sees the delivery of the Latton Priory Area and Water Lane area from 2021/22 onwards and East of Harlow the following year.

4.1.14 The lead in times assumed by the Council potentially under estimate inherent delays in the planning process (e.g. the approval of reserved matters and discharge of planning conditions) as well as time taken to implement development (e.g. marketing land and completing land purchase; preparing detailed designs for infrastructure; mobilising statutory utilities; and, commencing development).



Issue 2: Beyond the Harlow area, is the distribution of development in the Plan justified having regard to the defined settlement hierarchy?

1. What are the key factors which informed the distribution of development in the Plan beyond the Harlow area?

4.2.1 Gladman support the wider distribution of development within Epping Forest particularly around good transport hubs and towns with good public transport connections to London.



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?

4.4.1 In 2017 the Royal Statistical Society¹ revealed that only 0.1% of the UK land area is densely built upon. Further only 5.4% of the UK is built upon. According to the Office for National Statistics, England has one of the lowest levels of built environment per capita in the whole of the European Union (behind the Netherlands and Cyprus).

4.4.2 The Green Belt was introduced to control urban growth in selected cities and towns by allocating surrounding countryside as protected areas. Roughly 13% of England is Green Land with the most prominent areas located mainly around London, where there is a continuing need for affordable homes.

4.4.3 The stringent planning regulations associated with Green Belt complicate the provision of new dwellings, leading to a weak housing supply which reduces affordability and the matching of skills to jobs and in turn “*weakens productivity*”.

4.4.4 On this basis we support the Council’s decision to amend Green Belt boundaries. Such an approach recognises that the scale of the development needs of the district and increasing cost of accommodation was not a sustainable position and one that could only be addressed through the amendment of Green Belt boundaries. In particular the poor affordability and rapidly increasing accommodation costs within Epping Forest attests to the acuteness of the issue with regard to housing supply in the district and the limited

¹ Royal Statistical Society, ‘Statistic of the Year’ (December 2017)



opportunities for further development within its urban areas. However in light of identified affordability issues, it is important that Green Belt areas which do not contribute to the five purposes set out in the NPPF2 (§134) are not solely protected for political gain at a local level.

4.4.5 The HBF have also recognised the need for further amendments as a direct consequence of 1) the Standard Methodology which has served to transfer housing need from the north to the south and 2) our own calculation of Objectively Assessed Need (OAN) at 886 dwellings per annum. Both calculations would require a significant uplift in housing numbers over the plan period.

4.4.6 Based on the Standard Methodology and OAN figures we have concerns that the extent of Green Belt releases will not be effective in ensuring the delivery of the necessary scale of housing across the district. The Council must be able to demonstrate that it has identified sufficient sites to deliver the proposed housing requirement and that the Plan also provides a degree of flexibility and contingency for instances when other sites may not come forward as planned.

b. What would be the consequences of not releasing Green Belt land to help meet development needs?

4.4.7 The Green Belt covers the vast majority of the district (over 92%) and it is accepted that Green Belt release is required to meet the development needs. The Green Belt is so tightly drawn around existing settlements resulting in no non-Green Belt land outside the urban area. It is therefore inevitable that Green Belt boundaries are amended in the District to meet the need. The consequences of not releasing land from the Green Belt will be significant. The District will be unable to meet the housing need or the likely future increased housing need; oppressing the market will lead to increasing house prices resulting in worsening affordability ratios both in the District and the HMA as those unable to form households will seek to move elsewhere within the HMA.



- 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?**

4.4.8 It is the Council's responsibility to provide information and justification of the full consideration of alternatives to Green Belt release. However, that said, even if the alternatives have been sufficiently considered it is inevitable, due to the scale of need within the District that Green Belt boundaries will still need to be revised in order to support delivery.

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 (EB704 A-B; and EB705 A-B)? How were the findings of the Green Belt Review weighed in the balance with other planning considerations in the site selection process?

4.4.9 We have no comments regarding the robustness of the assessment of individual sites but would question the need for a wider strategic review to cover more of the District, given the likely early increase in the housing requirement and the need to identify additional land.

5. Having regard to paragraph 85 of the NPPF, and to the potential for an increased level of housing need in the District to be identified in the future, how has the Council satisfied itself that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the Plan period? Is it necessary to identify areas of safeguarded land between the urban area and the Green Belt?



- 4.4.10 The Local Plan does not propose sufficient amendments to Green Belt boundaries to account for future housing need and therefore it cannot be satisfied that boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the plan period.
- 4.4.11 The Standard Methodology for calculating housing need is likely to see an increase in the housing requirement (see Matter 4, Issue 1, Question 3). Given the likely increased housing requirement and therefore early review of the Local Plan it is highly likely that the Green Belt boundaries will not endure the plan period, never mind beyond the plan period and will need to be reviewed within the first five years post adoption.
- 4.4.12 If Green Belt boundaries are to endure well beyond the plan period, then at the very least it is suggested that safeguarded land will need to be identified and removed from the Green Belt in the Local Plan, with an appropriate trigger for its release, in all likelihood within the plan period.
- 4.4.13 It is suggested that there needs to be a larger scale strategic Green Belt Review in the District and perhaps the HMA, rather than the Stage 1 and Stage 2 Review which largely assessed Green Belt land surrounding settlements based on their settlement size (Town = a 2km area of search buffer; Large Village a 1km area of search; and a small village 0.5km area of search - Green Belt Review Methodology EB704B).
- 4.4.14 The Submission Local Plan reveals that over 92% of land in the Epping District is designated as Green Belt, with the Green Belt Review Stage 1 report stating that:
- “The Metropolitan Green Belt around London, and specifically within Epping Forest District has performed a key role in restricting development and the further outwards spread of London over the last 70 years. The Green Belt in Epping Forest District has remained largely unchanged since its original designation in the mid 1950’s.”
- 4.4.15 It is well documented that the UK is in the midst of a severe housing shortage, with numerous professionals discussing how to tackle the shortage, including the need to re-assess Green Belt land and its current restrictions. Given the vast coverage of the District within the Green Belt, Gladman consider that now is the time for a strategic Green Belt



Review, as is the case for other authorities, including those within the HMA. This is a general issue raised by Chris Young QC on 21st January 2019, in an article where he states:

“The Green Belt is severely constraining the supply of new homes...the scale of unmet housing need in this country is so vast, that there is a real need to properly address the extent of the Green Belt...by far the greatest significance of the Standard Methodology is the transfer of housing need from the north to the south. Under the Standard Methodology the housing need in London is eyewatering. Yet as everyone knows, London is completely enveloped in Green Belt, which in places is 15 – 20 miles wide. Which leads some of the Outer London borough’s to claim that they cannot possibly meet their housing need.”

4.4.16 Chris Young questions the approach to Green Belt Reviews, stating that: “The experts advising the Council on Green Belt release are often not to identify enough land to meet housing needs. The more usual instruction seems to be to justify the release of one or two sites. It is all far too haphazard.”