

Latton Priory, Harlow

Epping Forest Local Plan – EiP Statements Matter 5



Boyer

Report Control

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1. MATTER 5: SITE SELECTION METHODOLOGY AND THE VIABILITY OF SITE ALLOCATIONS

- 1.1 This statement has been prepared by Boyer on behalf of CEG and Hallam Land Management in response to the Inspector Issues and questions for the examination of Matter 5.

Issue 1: Have the Plan's housing allocations been chosen on the basis of a robust assessment process?

c. What is the relationship between the SSM and the sequential approach to site selection set out in Policy SP2(A)?

- 1.2 The sequential approach to site allocation set out in Policy SP2(a) is reflective of Stage 3 of the Site Selection Methodology – 'Identify Candidate preferred sites.' The purpose of Stage 3 is to identify the candidate Preferred Sites which best meet the Council's preferred growth strategy. The first stage of the sequential approach in Policy SP2 A (i) is the creation of Garden Town Communities around Harlow (such as Latton Priory) and we consider it justified and appropriate for the Garden Town Communities to be first in the site selection sequence on the basis of their vital role in addressing the acute need for growth and regeneration at Harlow.

d. What was the role of the Sustainability Appraisal in selecting between the various sites?

- 1.3 A Sustainability Appraisal of the Strategic Spatial Options at the HMA level was published in September 2016. Six spatial distribution reasonable alternatives were chosen and these were then appraised against an 'SA Framework' of appraisal questions.
- 1.4 The options for Spatial Growth were informed by a Strategic Site Assessment study by AECOM that examined the appropriateness of strategic sites in and around Harlow town and their capacity to contribute to meeting housing need. We consider this to be a robust and wide-ranging assessment of all factors that bear on the selection of strategic sites around Harlow.
- 1.5 The Sustainability Appraisal together with the strategic site assessment by AECOM and the reports on site selection by Arup and appendices, in combination provide a robust and sound basis for site selection. Taking together, these reports represent an integrated site selection and SA process.
- 1.6 We understand the detailed site assessments were conducted on each site using the Site Selection Methodology. The Site Selection Methodology includes 5 stages which are as follows:

- **Stage 1** Major Policy Constraints – identified sites which were subject to one or more of these constraints and therefore were not considered to be suitable for development.
- **Stage 2** Quantitative and Qualitative Assessment – undertook more detailed assessment of sites to understand their relative suitability for development. The site assessment criteria were developed with the explicit purpose of reflecting the SA framework. The assessment applied a RAG (Red/Amber/Green) rating system utilising a scale of three to five scores.
- **Stage 3** Identify Candidate Preferred Sites – identified those sites which were considered suitable for development and were subject to further capacity and deliverability assessment. More detailed indicative capacity assessment was also undertaken for each site identified for further testing. We understand that the focus at this stage was to identify the ‘best’ fit sites for a particular settlement rather than those sites which might be ‘best’ at the District scale. To guide the identification of the most suitable candidate Preferred Sites, each settlement was considered in turn. The assessment considered the relative merits of the sites and combinations thereof and identified the more appropriate sites. A sequential approach to site selection was applied, in accordance with the following:
 - 1) A sequential flood risk assessment - proposing land in Flood Zone 2 and 3 only where need cannot be met in Flood Zone 1;
 - 2) Sites located on previously developed land within settlements;
 - 3) Sites located on open space within settlements where such selection would maintain adequate open space provision within the settlement;
 - 4) Previously developed land within the Green Belt (in anticipation of the NPPF being updated to take account of the proposed changes published in December 2015);
 - 5) Greenfield/Green Belt land on the edge of settlements:
 - a. Of least value to the Green Belt if the land meets other suitable criteria for development.
 - b. Of greater value to the Green Belt if the land meets other suitable criteria for development.
 - c. Of most value to the Green Belt if the land meets other suitable criteria for development.
 - 6) Agricultural land:
 - a. Of Grade 4-5 if the land meets other suitable criteria for development.
 - b. Of Grade 1-3 if the land meets other suitable criteria for development.
 - 7) Enable small scale sites in smaller rural communities to come forward where there is a clear local need which supports the social and economic well-being of that community.

Stage 4 Deliverability – assessed the availability and achievability of sites to enable decisions to be made about sites to allocate and to ensure the Council could demonstrate a sufficient housing trajectory over the Plan period.

Stage 5 Sustainability Appraisal/Habitats Regulation Assessment of Candidate Preferred Sites – established the impact of the candidate Preferred Sites alone and in combination.

- 1.7 The Site Selection Methodology also contained **Stage 6 Review of Candidate Preferred Sites Following Draft Local Plan Consultation**, which confirmed that following the Draft Local Plan consultation, the Council would review the draft site allocations against any representations received and updated technical information. In the updated SSM, Stage 6 was divided into six sub-stages, which can be summarised as follows. Broadly the sub-stages reflect the process followed for Stages 1 to 4 of the SSM.

Stage 6.0 Identifying Sites for Assessment – identified amended or new sites for assessment through the SSM.

Stage 6.1A Major Policy Constraints – identified sites which were subject to one or more of these constraints and therefore were not considered to be suitable for development.

Stage 6.1B Sifting Residential Sites against the Local Plan Strategy – determined whether sites accorded with the Local Plan Strategy and therefore proceeded to Stage 6.2.

Stage 6.2 Quantitative and Qualitative Assessment – undertook more detailed assessment of sites to understand their relative suitability for development. The site assessment criteria were developed with the explicit purpose of reflecting the SA framework.

Stage 6.3 Identify Candidate Preferred Sites – identified those sites which were considered suitable for development, best met the Council's Local Plan Strategy and were subject to further capacity and deliverability assessment. More detailed indicative capacity assessment was also undertaken for each site identified for further testing.

- Stage 6.4 Deliverability – assessed the availability and achievability of sites to enable decisions to be made about sites to allocate and to ensure the Council could demonstrate a sufficient housing trajectory over the Plan period.

- 1.8 In advance of undertaking the SSM the sites to be subject to it were identified. Two tranches of sites were subject to the SSM: Tranche 1 sites were assessed in 2016, with Tranche 2 sites assessed in 2017, post additional information being submitted from the draft local plan representations and taking additional information from the following sources:

- Employment Review and Employment Land Supply Assessment studies;
- Call for Sites submissions received between 18 May 2016 and 31 March 2017;
- Refused and withdrawn planning applications, live planning applications and pre-application enquiries received between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017;
- Updates to the strategic sites around Harlow to align the HMA and District level site assessment processes to reflect up-to-date information available.

- 1.9 Tranche 2 sites were subject to stage 6 of the SSM. Latton Priory formed part of the Tranche 2 sites.
- 1.10 It clear that the SA fed into the site selection process through the Strategic Spatial Options, and through Stage 2 and Stage 6.2 of the Site Selection Methodology. Stage 2, in effect, provided a site by site sustainability appraisal.
- 1.11 We consider the site selection process for both strategic and district level sites was sound and robust which appropriately filtered through the sites submitted for allocation.

e. Was any other evidence taken into account in the site selection process? In particular, how has the historic environment been taken into account? Have Historic Impact Assessments been undertaken as recommended by Historic England and, if not, is this necessary?

- 1.12 The Strategic Land Availability Assessment informed the initial selection of sites for the site selection process for both the Tranche 1 and Tranche 2 sites.
- 1.13 The following sources of information were used to in order to identify Tranche 2 sites:
- Call for Sites submissions received between 18 May 2016 and 31 March 2017;
 - Refused and withdrawn planning applications, live planning applications and pre-application enquiries received between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017;
 - Representations from site promoters received in response to the Draft Local Plan consultation which identify new sites and/or amended proposals for Tranche 1 sites which are materially different from that previously assessed; and
 - Updates to the strategic sites around Harlow to align the HMA and District level site assessment processes to reflect up-to-date information available.
- 1.14 In regard to the Harlow Strategic Site Assessment (2016) in Stage 2 of the assessment, liaison with Statutory consultees took place which included Historic England. Stage 4 of the assessment included Area-wide GIS analysis, in which one of the constraints related to heritage. Stage 5 included an individual assessment of each site, and the pro-forma **did** include detailed criteria under the theme of heritage. Under each theme, a RAG score was given of Suitable, potentially suitable, probably unsuitable or unsuitable.
- 1.15 In regard to the District Site Selection process, Stage 2 and 6.2 of the site selection process included an impact on Scheduled Ancient Monument/Listed Building/ Conservation Area/ Historic Park or Garden. The detailed assessment regarding heritage can be found in document EB805E “Detailed Methodology for Stages 2 and 6.2” under section 1.8a. Latton Priory was involved in both the Harlow Strategic Site Assessment 2016 and the District Site Selection 2018.

Issue 3: Have the Plan’s new employment allocations been chosen on the basis of a robust assessment process?

Q1: How were the five new employment site allocations chosen from the alternatives indicated to be suitable in the Employment Land Supply Assessment?

- 1.16 Table 3.1 within the submission Local Plan classifies Dorrington Farm as a ‘New Employment site allocation.’ This should be clarified as this is an expansion of an existing employment site (as stated in Table 11 of the Employment Land Supply Assessment). The five ‘new’ employment site allocations were chosen from the alternatives in the Employment Land Supply assessment because they passed stages 1-6 as outlined in the Site Selection Methodology 2018.
- 1.17 We question the basis for the Dorrington Farm site being allocated to B1a and B1b uses specifically in Table 3.1 of the Plan. We consider that the Latton Priory allocation, as currently proposed, has the potential to generate a significant number of jobs in connection with a mixed use hub that includes a local centre and schools and consider that Policy SP5.1 should focus on this employment potential rather than defining a precise land area in a particular location for a narrowly defined range of employment opportunities.
- 1.18 The promoters of Latton Priory promoted a Strategic Employment site allocation of approximately 12-15ha through local plan representations. The site (reference SR-0006-N) was assessed through the site selection process, but was not allocated. The Council should be identifying, or at least be safeguarding, additional strategic scale employment land to meet its requirement as a contingency measure, in the event that the redevelopment of existing employment land does not (as the Council seems to expect) deliver half of the employment land/ number of jobs required over the plan period and in order to accommodate the unallocated employment requirement across the FEMA.

Issue 2: Have the Plan’s allocations for Gypsies & Travellers and Travelling Showpeople been chosen on the basis of a robust assessment process

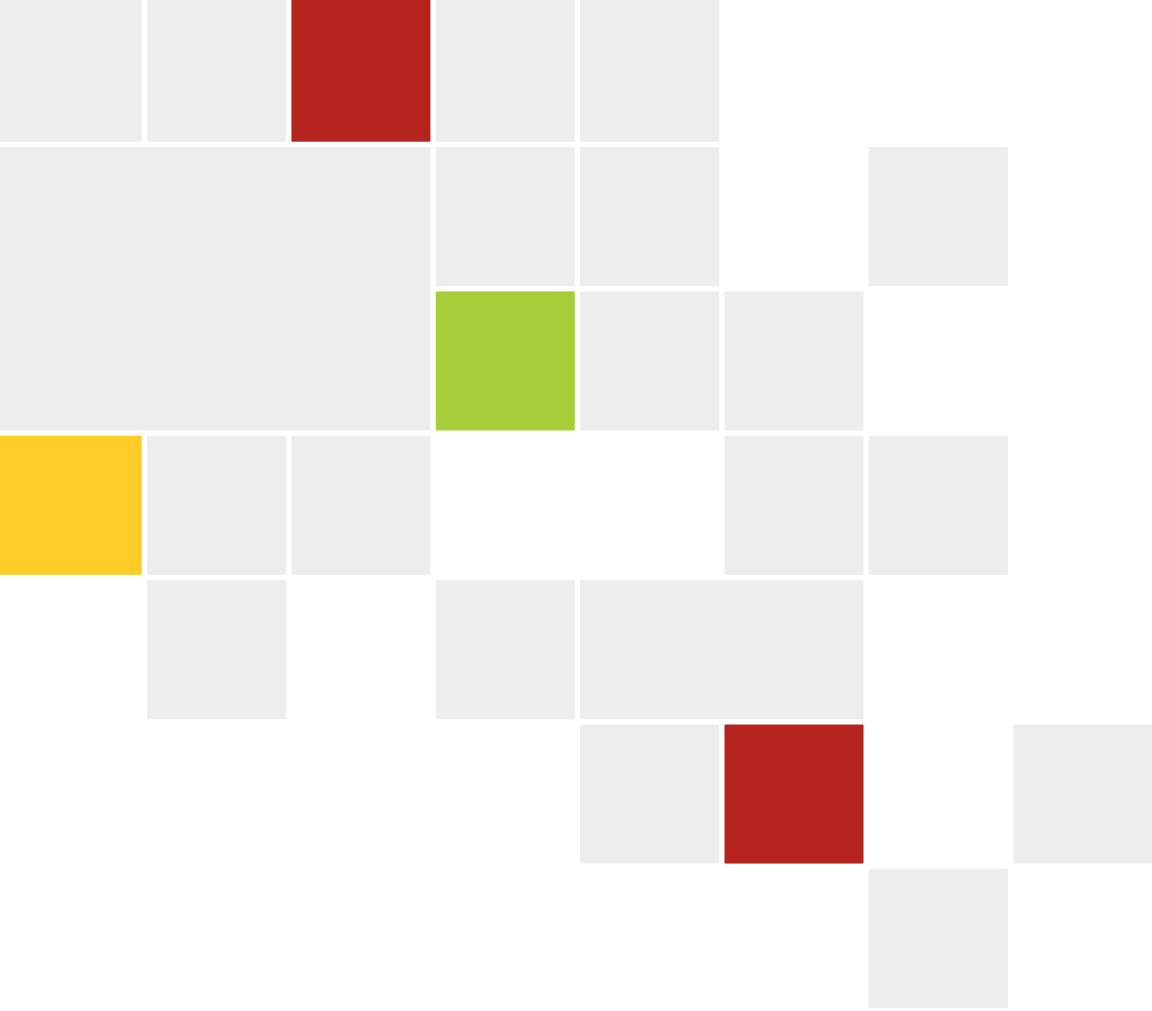
- 1.19 In response to the Inspector’s question 2b for this issue: “Is it justified to prioritise the provision of new sites in the countryside and Green Belt over making provision as part of the development of other allocated sites?”, we are not clear about the methodology for the allocation of 0.5ha or 5 pitches to each garden Town community. There appears to be no specific Gypsy and Traveller site assessment for Latton Priory and the other Garden Town sites. For example, Latton Priory does not appear in document EB805R – overview of assessment of traveller sites.
- 1.20 It is therefore difficult to answer this question from the Plan’s evidence base and the matter is worthy of further examination.

Viability

Issue 4: At the broad strategic level, are the Plan's allocations financially viable?

Q1. Having regard to paragraph 173 of the NPPF, are the Plan's allocations for housing (including for Travellers) and employment financially viable, having regard to the normal cost of development and mitigation; and all relevant policy costs, including for affordable housing, space standards, building requirements, design and potential infrastructure contributions?

- 1.21 We have dealt with this question in our Statement for Matter 8 under the heading "Viability", which deals with the viability of the Garden Town Communities. However, the points we make in our Statement for Matter 8 are also relevant to the issue of viability "**at the broad strategic level**" and are, where necessary, repeated below in relation to this wider question raised by the Inspector under Issue 4.
- 1.22 It is clear that this Plan is being examined under the viability policy set out in NPPF 2012. However, in addressing this question, we are mindful of the new provisions in the NPPF 2018 (and PPG) which essentially define viability as a matter to be considered at the Plan making stage, with the onus on the applicant to justify addressing viability in the context of a subsequent planning application.
- 1.23 The promoters of Latton Priory are in constructive engagement with the Council and their consultants with regard to the work in progress on the Garden Town IDP and viability assessment and we expect this work to come to a satisfactory conclusion. However, it is inevitable that viability will have to be considered to some degree through the planning application stage and the promoters of Latton Priory must reserve their final position until such time as viability can be fully assessed and determined.
- 1.24 As set out in our Statement for Matter 8, we consider it important that this fact is specifically acknowledged by the Inspector through the examination to ensure that the need for more detailed consideration of viability at the application stage is safeguarded against the new provisions of NPPF 2018.
- 1.25 If however, the Council is able to complete its IDP and viability work in sufficient detail for the matter of viability to be examined at this EiP, representors must be allowed sufficient time to consider and make statements on the output from this work and for this to be properly examined through an additional hearing arranged for this purpose.
- 1.26 The Local Plan viability assessment is at a strategic level and necessarily based on high level assumptions. This will need to be tested when further detailed site specific information is available. The Promoters are generally satisfied that they can bring forward a viable scheme within the requirements of the policy, albeit there are requirements, including the Sustainable Transport Corridors that are not fully defined at this time. Thus, it is likely to be necessary for a viability statement to accompany the application when submitted.



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