



Gladman Developments Ltd

Examination of North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011- 2031

Matter 9: The Basis for the Housing Allocations and Settlement Boundaries

9.2 What process or methodology has been used to select sites for allocation? In particular:

a) Has information from the SHLAA formed the starting point, then the outputs from the SA and the Green Belt Review considered, along with an assessment of suitability, availability and achievability?

b) Have all sites put forward for allocation been considered through the process/methodology? Has the testing of reasonable alternatives been robust?

c) Have sites been discounted from possible allocation for any reason (for example, through the use of site size thresholds)? If so, are all of the reasons for excluding sites justified?

d) Aside from any reasons for excluding sites, has greater weight/importance been given to any site selection criteria over others and if so what is the justification for this 'weighting'?

e) Have all constraints been taken into account?

f) Have alternative uses been considered?

9.3 Overall, has the SA of sites and the selection process been appropriate and robust?

9.4 In general terms, do the proposed allocations reflect the outcomes of the sustainability appraisal and testing of reasonable alternatives through the site selection methodology? Is there a clear audit trail in this respect?

9.5 What methodology has been applied to the identification of the settlement boundaries around the towns and Category A Villages? Is the methodology appropriate and adequately robust?

9.1.1 The PPG¹ states, with regards to evidence needed to support policies in a Local Plan, that:

The evidence needs to inform what is in the plan and shape its development rather than being collected retrospectively. It should also be kept up-to-date... Local planning authorities should publish documents that form part of the evidence base as they are completed, rather than waiting until options are published or a Local Plan is published for representations.

9.1.2 Other than the PBA report, regarding site selection for meeting Luton's unmet housing need, the Council's evidence base does not provide any clarity about the planning judgements applied by the Council in its decision making in respect of sites allocated for housing development. The detailed selection of sites for allocation clearly involves a significant element of planning judgement. However, that judgement needs to be both explicit and transparent. In short, there needs to be a clear "audit trail" that shows how the final decisions were arrived at, and what factors were taken into account in making such decisions.

9.1.3 Similarly, there is little evidence regarding how the settlement boundaries for the Towns and Category A villages have been defined. It would appear that they have been tightly drawn simply so as to preclude any new development on the periphery of these settlements.

9.1.4 Gladman submits that it is inappropriate to use settlement boundaries as a mechanism to restrict or prevent otherwise sustainable development from coming forward. The NPPF is clear that development which is sustainable should go ahead without delay. The use of settlement limits to arbitrarily restrict suitable and sustainable development from coming forward on the edge of settlements would not accord with the positive approach to growth required by NPPF. Planning Practice Guidance² also advises that *"all settlements can play a role in delivering sustainable development in rural areas – and so blanket policies restricting housing development in some settlements and preventing other settlements from expanding should be avoided unless their use can be supported by robust evidence"*.

9.1.5 The North Herts policy approach appears to be based on the erstwhile PPS7 approach to countryside protection, which took a restrictive stance to development in the rural areas by only permitting certain types of development. There is nothing in NPPF which states that development in the open countryside should be restricted in the extensive manner which the Local Plan suggests. Instead, Gladman suggests that the Local Plan should take a more permissive stance. In reality, in its current form, the policy approach creates a 'presumption against development' in all areas beyond the settlement boundaries. Gladman recommends that the policy approach needs to be significantly

¹ Paragraph 014, Reference ID: 12-014-20140306

² PPG Rural Housing Ref 50-001-20140306

revised to provide a more permissive approach to development on land which might otherwise be categorised as being in the open countryside.

9.1.6 Greenfield sites on the edge of settlements, but lying outside of the currently built up area may offer opportunities for sustainable development which could help meet the housing needs of North Herts and help achieve NPPF's objective to '*significantly boost the supply of housing*' and would accord with the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

9.1.7 Gladman would commend to the Inspector the policy approach taken by Harborough District Council in its Submission Local Plan published in September 2017. Policy GD2 of that Plan concerns Settlement Development and states that:

1. *In addition to sites allocated by this Local Plan and neighbourhood plans, development within or contiguous with the existing or committed built up area of Market Harborough, Key Centres, the Leicester Principal Urban Area (PUA), Rural Centres and Selected Rural Villages will be permitted where:*
 - a) *In the case of housing, it does not, cumulatively with other proposals, significantly exceed the target for the delivery of new homes in the Rural Centres and Selected Rural Villages specified in Policy H1 Provision of new housing;*
 - b) *It reflects the size of the settlement concerned and the level of service provision within that settlement;*
 - c) *It is physically and visually connected to and respects the form and character of the existing settlement;*
 - d) *It retains as far as possible existing natural boundaries within and around the site and the settlement;*
 - e) *It does not harmfully diminish the physical and/or visual separation of neighbouring settlements.*
2. *Development involving the appropriate and efficient re-development of previously developed land which is not of high environmental value and re-use of buildings will be permitted where such re-use achieves the objectives of sustainable development.*

9.1.8 Such an approach, which allows identified settlements to grow in order to maintain rural vitality but ensures that rural communities maintain their identity and distinctiveness, would be fully in line with the NPPF objectives for rural housing and an appropriate approach for the North Herts Local Plan to adopt.

9.1.9 There is limited national planning policy and guidance on the definition of limits of development or settlement boundaries. The key paragraphs of relevance outlined in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) are Paragraph 17 (Core Planning Principles) which outlines the priorities for allocating land for development, and Paragraph 55 which sets out principles guiding the location of housing in rural areas in order to promote sustainable development. Specifically, Paragraph 17 states that plans should '*...set out a clear strategy for allocating sufficient land which is suitable for development in their area, taking account of the needs of the residential and business communities*', and '*Allocations of land for development should prefer land of lesser environmental value, where consistent with other*

policies' in the NPPF. It also states that planning should 'encourage the effective use of land by reusing land that has been previously developed (brownfield land), provided that it is not of high environmental value'.

9.1.10 Paragraph 55 states that *'To promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. For example, where there are groups of smaller settlements, development in one village may support services in a village nearby.'* and *'Local planning authorities should avoid new isolated homes in the countryside unless there are special circumstances'.*

9.1.11 Gladman contends that the identification of settlement limits should be indicative rather than prescriptive and, in order to be compatible with the above advice in the NPPF, a policy approach similar to that contained in the Harborough Submission Local Plan, should be put in place which allows for sustainable development of an appropriate scale to take place on the edge of settlements.