

Examination of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031

Statement of Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) Property Development Services on behalf of HCC Services

Matter 10 – The housing allocations and the settlement boundaries: the Towns: Luton (Cockernhoe)

10.25 (c) deliverable, having regard to the provision of the necessary infrastructure and services, and any environmental or other constraints?

10.26 Are all of the proposed housing allocations justified and appropriate in terms of the likely impacts of the development?

10.27 Are all of the proposed allocations the most appropriate option given the reasonable alternatives?

10.28 (f) Are the proposed Green Belt boundaries consistent with the Plan's strategy for meeting identified requirements for sustainable development?

General response (applicable to all questions)

1. HCC considers that the housing allocations proposed at East of Luton (Cockernhoe) are not deliverable as insufficient and inappropriate education infrastructure is planned within the development.
2. NHDC is proposing 2100 new homes as part of the East of Luton site allocation, sites EL1, EL2 and EL3, with up to 4FE of primary and secondary education provision to be provided on the site. HCC assumes that Policy SP19 (e) intends up to 4FE of primary and up to 4FE of secondary provision (so provision for up to 8FE in total) but would ask the Inspector to obtain specific confirmation of this. However, even on this basis, provision is inadequate.
3. NHDC has accepted Hertfordshire County Council's pupil yield methodology used to underpin strategic planning for education provision, which uses a calculation of 500 homes equating to 1 form of entry (FE) of pupil demand.
4. The scale of new housing proposed at East of Luton would result in a demand for 4.2FE of both primary and secondary school places.
5. At least 4FE of primary school provision is therefore required within these sites to meet that demand, ideally in the form of 2 x 2FE sites. HCC would seek to continue to work with NHDC and the developers to adequately masterplan the whole site to ensure a sustainable development is brought forward that is capable of delivering new primary schooling for those new local communities. Policy SP19 (e) therefore should be changed to refer to ***“At least 4FE of primary-age education provision...”***
6. In addition 4.2FE of secondary school places are required to serve these developments. However, this does not mean that the provision of a site that could provide a 4FE secondary school would be adequate to meet this requirement. Whilst a school of that size would broadly meet the quantitative calculation of the expected pupil yield from the developments, a successful school requires more than simply a space that can accommodate a given number of pupils or a given number of forms.

7. The County Council does not support new 4FE secondary schools. Hertfordshire has a successful model of secondary school provision based on 11-18 schools, incorporating 6th form. A key pillar of the success of Hertfordshire's secondary schools is that they are of a scale to be financially viable and offer strong 6th form provision, offering stimulating environments to teach and learn pre and post 16. This model of strong 11-18 provision is only sustainable through secondary schools which are of a large enough size at 11-16 to sustain viable 6th forms. This requires more than 4FE, and requires a school to be sized at least at 6FE. A 4FE secondary school would generally have no more than 120 students in Year 11 (i.e. the GCSE year). When allowing for the range of choices made by students for different forms of post-16 education and/or training, a 'leaving' cohort of no more than 120 students is insufficient to form a viable 6th form, which is able to offer a wide range of subjects (including specialist subjects) for those students who choose to 'stay on'.
8. 4FE 11-18 secondary schools also face significant challenges in the current financial climate and are at a much greater risk of being unsustainable. The County Council, as local education authority with a statutory duty under the Education Act 1996 to ensure sufficient education provision is available to meet the needs of the population in its area, does not consider it appropriate to support the establishment of new 4FE secondary provision within its area. Appendix A outlines in detail the County Council's position statement on size of secondary schools. Whilst HCC acknowledges that land use planning is a matter for NHDC, it is not, with respect, for NHDC to circumscribe the nature or form of educational facility that HCC can make provision for by restricting the land made available for education so that only a 4FE secondary school could be provided at the SP19 allocation. NHDC has no responsibility to deliver educational outcomes and is not best placed to judge what forms of educational provision are appropriate to meet the identified needs of the developments at East of Luton.
9. Notwithstanding the County Councils position for secondary schools of at least 6FE for educational reasons, there is also an identified need for additional capacity across the area to meet future need.
10. Although it is acknowledged that provision of 4.2FE of secondary capacity would mitigate the impact of the east of Luton development in simple numeric or quantitative terms, establishing a larger school would not only support financial and long term viability but would also assist in meeting the long term secondary need across the wider Hitchin area.
11. Within the Hitchin Secondary Education Planning Area (in which the East of Luton development is located), the housing growth proposed by NHDC is anticipated to yield 8.2FE of pupils (1:500). 4.2FE of this yield is anticipated from the East of Luton developments (Policy SP19) where HCC has sought sufficient land for a new 6FE secondary school (to accommodate around 4FE yield from the East of Luton developments and up to 2FE yield from the Hitchin villages, for whom this would be their closest school).
12. The County Council outlined in its representations to NHDC's Local Plan that there is no available capacity in the closest Hertfordshire secondary schools in

Hitchin to meet the yield arising from the East of Luton developments. The three secondary schools in Hitchin, approximately six miles from the East of Luton developments, are all full at year of admission and expansion proposals are currently being implemented to increase the number of Year 7 places available at Hitchin Boys' School and Hitchin Girls' School by 1.5FE each, thereby providing an additional 3FE of permanent capacity across the town from 2018. This additional capacity is required to meet the immediate needs from the existing community, and is not therefore available to accommodate any part of the 8.2FE anticipated demand which is required to meet the housing growth now planned by NHDC.

13. The only school with expansion potential in Hitchin following the implementation of these current expansion proposals is the Priory School. The Priory is a Foundation school and as such is its own admitting authority, outside of Local Authority control. The Priory School has indicated it is only prepared to expand by 2FE to 8FE. The County Council has no authority to force it to expand. The expansion potential remaining at The Priory is therefore limited to 2FE and is required to cater for the yield from new housing at HT1, HT2, HT3, HT5, HT6, HT8 and HT10 (totalling 1009 new homes). Notwithstanding the travel distances involved, expansion of The Priory cannot be used to cater for the yield arising from the East of Luton developments.
14. Therefore there is a risk that there is insufficient capacity across the three Hitchin schools and a 4FE secondary school within the East of Luton developments to accommodate all the yield arising from the new housing in the Hitchin Secondary Education Planning area. Therefore, for strategic planning purposes an additional 2FE of provision at the secondary school within the East of Luton developments is sought to ensure sufficient education infrastructure can be provided to meet the yield from new housing proposed by NHDC.
15. In light of the rising forecast demand in Hitchin and the anticipated yield from new housing within the Hitchin SPA, the County Council is seeking a larger secondary school (of at least 6FE) within the East of Luton development site to meet the needs of both the new homes as well as the needs of the surrounding Hitchin villages for whom this new secondary school would become their closest Hertfordshire school. To achieve this outcome is likely to require some adjustment (i.e. expansion) of the proposed development area as shown on the Proposals Map). The alternative would be to reduce the scale of the residential proposals so that there was sufficient space within the allocated site to accommodate a 6FE secondary school. However, this latter option is likely to lead to a reduction in the number of dwellings thereby reducing the pupil yield and increasing the risk of a secondary school being sustainable in this location. Furthermore, allocating previous housing land for education would result in this option being unaffordable to the County Council as the s17 alternative land value would be residential.
16. Currently, a number of children from the Hitchin villages are unsuccessful in being allocated a preference at secondary transfer and are allocated a place at a school they have not ranked as a preference in either Luton or Letchworth; the next nearest schools with a vacancy. Para 72 of the NPPF makes it clear that local planning authorities are expected to take a proactive, positive, and collaborative approach to meeting the requirement of ensuring

that a sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing as well as new communities. Para 157 of the NPPF indicates that a crucial role for a local plan is to plan positively for the infrastructure required in an area to meet the objectives, principles, and policies of the NPPF (which obviously includes para 72). NHDC's Plan therefore provides the appropriate opportunity to readdress the pattern of secondary education provision in the area. Whilst HCC accepts that it cannot expect new development to meet/fund the cost of remedying existing deficiencies, that is not to say that the Plan should not be expected to include proposals to allow those deficiencies to be addressed. Plan provision and the funding of provision are separate matters.

17. Delivery of a 6FE secondary school within the development would be of a sufficient size to accommodate existing Hertfordshire pupils for whom it would become their nearest school and thus both shorten school travel distances for pupils who would otherwise travel to Luton or Letchworth and reduce future pressure for places in Hitchin.
18. With NHDC Local Plan only proposing 4FE of secondary capacity within East of Luton, and with remaining expansion capacity limited to 2FE at The Priory School in Hitchin, HCC believe the site allocations are not deliverable as this would provide insufficient secondary capacity to meet the total anticipated yield arising from proposed growth across the area as a whole.

10.25 Are all of the proposed housing allocations deliverable? In particular, are they:

c) deliverable, having regard to the provision of the necessary infrastructure and services, and any environmental or other constraints?

19. No. Notwithstanding the need for additional secondary capacity to ensure the future needs of East of Luton and Hitchin are catered for, only a 6FE school would be large enough to support financial sustainability and long term viability along with successful post-16 6th form provision. However, Policy SP19 (e) as currently worded restricts secondary provision to "up to" 4FE and this is not an adequate form of infrastructure provision. The allocation is not therefore deliverable having regard to the need for infrastructure provision.

10.26 Are all of the proposed housing allocations justified and appropriate in terms of the likely impacts of the development?

20. No. For the reasons already set out in relation to deliverability of the required educational provision, HCC considers that the allocation at East of Luton is not justified or appropriate in terms of the likely impacts of that development. A development which makes inadequate provision for education will fail to be sustainable.

10.27 Are all of the proposed allocations the most appropriate option given the reasonable alternatives?

21. No. The allocation at East of Luton makes insufficient provision for education. It would be a reasonable alternative to extend the extent of the allocation to

ensure that a 6FE secondary school can be provided in addition to at least 4FE of primary education provision.

10.28(f) Are the proposed Green Belt boundaries consistent with the Plan's strategy for meeting identified requirements for sustainable development?

22. No. The identified requirements include the necessary education infrastructure provision (see Policy SP10 (e)). Those education requirements entail the provision of at least 4FE primary education provision and a secondary school of 6FE. Unless the scale of residential development is reduced, it will be necessary to increase the size of the allocation. However, as outlined in para 15, reducing the size of residential development and allocating this land for education would make the secondary school unaffordable and unsustainable. This will require a further adjustment to the proposed Green Belt boundaries to ensure that the allocation includes sufficient land to allow for all of the identified requirements to be provided.

Changes required to make the Plan 'sound'

23. Notwithstanding HCC's separate concerns about the failure to satisfy the Duty to Co-operate, Policy SP19 could only be made 'sound' if it was amended to ensure that item (e) provides:

'At least 4FE of primary-age and 6FE of secondary-age education provision to ensure the needs arising from this allocation can be met within the site'

24. Consequential adjustments would be needed to the site allocation boundary and to the Green Belt boundary as shown on the Proposals Map (i.e. the submission policies map).