

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION: MATTER 13:

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (B Class Uses) (Policies SP3, ETC1 and ETC2)

Statement from CPRE Hertfordshire

1. I am Stephen Baker, DMS, BSc, Dip TP, MRTPI, Planning Manager at Campaign to Protect Rural England Hertfordshire (CPREH).
2. This statement supplements our original representations on Chapters 4 and 5 of the Proposed Submission North Herts Local Plan, which still apply, and seeks to address the Inspector's questions as set out in his schedule of Matters and Issues, on Matter 13, Economic Development.

Inspector's Issues and Questions

Employment uses (B Use Classes): requirements and land (Policy SP3)

Issue 13.2: Land Supply including land at Baldock

3. CPREH considers that the proposal to remove 19.6 hectares of land from the Green Belt for employment development at Baldock is not justified and not consistent with national policy, and we will refer to this in our statement on Baldock for week five under Matter 10 in due course.
4. We understand that the land at Baldock is intended to be used principally for meeting a shortfall in Stevenage, and that this will also be addressed under the Inspector's Issue 13.4.
5. The principle of removing land from the Green Belt for economic development purposes is however, a strategic as well as a site-specific issue, and must be justified by the Council through the demonstration of exceptional circumstances for doing so. CPREH does not consider that such circumstances have been demonstrated in the Plan or any of the Council's evidence documents.
6. The requirements of national policy are set out in paragraph 14 and section 9, as summarised in our statement on Matter 3 in respect of housing, and our original representations on Policy SP3.
7. NPPF paragraph 14 and footnote 9 state that Local Plans should meet development needs unless specific policies in the framework indicate development should be

restricted (CPREH emphasis), which limits the ability of authorities to fully meet needs. This caveat is a reference to constraints including '*land designated as Green Belt*' and '*Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty*', both of which apply to North Hertfordshire.

8. The Court in the Calverton case, referred to in the Plan and in our statement on Matter 3 said at paragraph 30 that one should 'take account of the constraints embodied in the policies in the Framework, such as Green Belt, when preparing the local plan'.
9. CPREH is unable to find any explanation in the Council's evidence documents submitted to the examination of what the Council considers to be the exceptional circumstances for the allocation of nearly 20 hectares of Green Belt at Baldock for employment uses.
10. Hence, for the above reasons, CPREH asks the Inspector to find the Plan unsound in proposing the removal of this land from the Green Belt because of the conflict this causes with national planning policy for the protection of the Green Belt as set out in the NPPF.

Employment uses (B Use Classes): development management policies (Policies ETC1 and ETC2)

Issue 13.8: Is the approach to appropriate uses in Employment Areas in Policy ETC1 justified and effective?

11. In our representations on Policy ETC1 we pointed out that as worded the policy would be inconsistent with national policy in NPPF paragraph 51 that urges Council's in areas 'where there is an identified need for additional housing', such as North Hertfordshire, to encourage the change of use of underused employment land for housing.
12. The Policy would now also be inconsistent with the latest change to the GPDO to allow changes of use of B1(c) light industrial use to residential under the prior approval process, for a period of three years.
13. The Policy also fails to recognise the now permanent GPDO provisions allowing the change of use of offices to residential that have so far contributed about 160 dwellings to housing supply in the District since they were introduced.
14. Given the current greater need for housing in the District than any other land use, CPREH considers that the policy should be more flexible to allow land and buildings in

employment use to contribute to housing supply in a greater range of circumstances than set out in Policy ETC1.

Issue 13.9: Is the approach to employment development outside Employment Areas in Policy ETC2 justified and effective?

15. CPREH considers that Policy ETC2 is far too restrictive in terms of resistance to changes of use of non-allocated employment land in the District, particularly in the context of the need for housing. NPPF paragraph 51 indicates that councils should be encouraging employment land to be used for housing unless there are strong economic reasons not to do so. CPREH does not consider that such reasons have been provided by the Council.

16. Paragraphs 12 to 14 above are equally relevant to Policy ETC2.

Employment uses (B Use Classes): Allocated sites

Issue 13.10: The Plan allocates land for employment uses in Baldock (BA10), and other locations.

e) Have all constraints been taken into account?

Issue 13.11 a): Do exceptional circumstances exist to warrant the allocation of the site for employment in the Green Belt? If so, what are they?

17. As stated above under Issue 13.2, CPREH does not consider that proper consideration has been given to national policy constraints in the allocation of the proposed 19.6 hectare Baldock employment site, and that exceptional circumstances have not been demonstrated as required by the NPPF.

Issue 13.11 d): If the site were to be developed as proposed, would the adjacent Green Belt continue to serve at least one of the five purposes of Green Belts, or would the Green Belt function be undermined by the site's allocation?

18. The fifth of the equally important purposes of the Green Belt defined in paragraph 80 of the NPPF is to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land. CPREH considers that all Green Belt land contributes equally to this purpose by deliberately pushing development into the towns which Green Belts surround, and to land beyond the Green Belt. By definition therefore Green Belt land adjacent to a new development allocation will still contribute to this purpose. Similarly, any removal of land from the Green Belt undermines this fifth purpose to some extent.

19. This is one reason why any decision to take land out of the Green Belt has to be backed up by a demonstration of exceptional circumstances for undermining one or more Green Belt purposes.

20. In the case of the proposed 19.6 hectare Baldock allocation, the consequences of the development are closely linked with the adjacent proposal for 2,800 houses to be built to the north, also in the Green Belt. As that site allocation will be considered under Matter 10 in week five of the examination, for which statements have yet to be prepared, we will seek to address this issue, and others relating to the specific impacts on the Green Belt, at that time.