

Examination of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan (2011-2031)
Examination hearing sessions
Statement of North Hertfordshire District Council

Matter 24 – The proposed ‘East of Luton’ sites

Question 24.1 ...For the purpose of this examination, as part of the consideration of the existence or otherwise of the exceptional circumstances necessary to warrant the ‘release’ of the East of Luton Sites from the Green Belt, it is necessary to have regard to the alternative options available. Given that these sites are intended to assist in addressing Luton Borough’s unmet housing need, it is relevant to consider options outside of the North Hertfordshire District Council administrative area...

a) Does the Growth Options Study provide a comparative assessment of the options for addressing the unmet housing needs of Luton Borough?

1. Yes. The Growth Options Study ([HOU7](#)) compares each of the identified potential locations consistently across a range of factors. Each factor that is taken into account has its own described methodology which is consistently applied to all locations.
2. This approach can be seen in the Location Assessment Forms contained in Appendix 5 of HOU7. The assessment of constraints, access to services and facilities, Green Belt, deliverability and viability for each location is clearly and consistently set out. This analysis informs the main body of the report in which comparative results tables for each of these headings and associated criteria are again clearly and consistently laid out (see Tables 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.5 & 3.6). This allows for the relative performance of the location options to be compared.
3. An overall ‘result’ for each location is not presented in any form of ‘RAG rating’ or equivalent. This was a presentational decision by the commissioning authorities as the study was prepared. It does not indicate an absence of analysis which can be viewed on a comparative basis. HOU7 clearly identifies that:

*Having allocated locations to spatial options, **the relative performance of all locations within each spatial option was compared** (paragraph 2.67, p.17, emphasis added)*
4. This comparison of relative performance can be seen in the tables in Section 4 of HOU7 (pp.43-52). These utilise blue shading or bars to accentuate differences between the locations under each column heading.
5. The Inspectors examining the Local Plan of Central Bedfordshire – where the significant majority of the potential growth locations lie - have not raised any substantive concerns regarding the soundness of the Growth Options Study or the robustness of its methodology.

b) From the Council's analysis in Paper C (see paragraph 39) of its response to my letter dated 9 July 2019, the Growth Options Study does not identify sufficient alternative growth locations with strong links to Luton – either through physical proximity or high-quality public transport accessibility – that would allow Luton's unmet housing needs to be met on land that is preferable in Green Belt terms to the East of Luton sites. Is the Council's analysis correct, and if not how is it incorrect?

6. Yes. The figures informing the analysis in Paragraph 39 of the Council's Paper C ([ED173](#)) are directly informed by HOU7. The locations considered to have physical proximity are listed in Paragraph 30 of the Paper C. These were identified by NHDC, from the maps contained within HOU7, as those physically contiguous with the Luton / Dunstable / Houghton Regis conurbation.
7. The identification of sites with high-quality transport accessibility is based upon HOU7's assessment of sites (partially) within 1.2km of railway stations, busway stops and park & ride facilities. These sites are clearly identified in the third column of Table 3.2 (HOU7, p.23). The Growth Study considered access to these facilities should be given greater weight than other services as these "*will generally involve more significant capital investment, longer lead times and / or greater political commitment*" (HOU7, p.22, paragraph 3.9).
8. The dwelling estimates in the table above Paragraph 38 of Paper C are based upon the net capacity to 2031 figures for each site contained in HOU7. Paragraph 29 and footnote 3 of Paper C explain that these have been pro-rated across the different Green Belt categories using the percentage figures identified in Appendix 5 of HOU7. The calculations used by NHDC to inform this analysis are clearly set out in Appendix 2 of Paper C.

c) From the Council's analysis in Paper C (see paragraphs 40 and 41) of its response to my letter dated 9 July 2019, the Growth Options Study identifies a total capacity of approximately 12,800 homes in locations that (partly at least) make a lesser contribution to the purposes of including land in the Green Belt. Is the Council's analysis correct, and if not how is it incorrect?

9. There is an error in the commentary in Paragraph 40 of Paper C. This should read "...a total capacity of **13,100** homes in (parts of) locations have less than a 'strong' Green Belt contribution...". This corrected figure is arrived at by summing the relevant figures from the table following Paragraph 40 of Paper C:
 - $3,950 + 2,135 + 7,039 = 13,124$
10. The headings in the fifth and sixth columns of the table following Paragraph 40 should additionally omit the words "...or lower", consistent with the column headings used in the tables following Paragraphs 31 and 37 and in Appendix 2. The figures in the table following paragraph 40 are correct on this basis.

11. These minor drafting errors do not undermine the substantive points made in Paragraphs 40 and 41 or any other part of Paper C.

d) Without the 'East of Luton' sites, are there any realistic alternative options (with a reasonable likelihood of being delivered) for addressing Luton Borough's unmet housing need, bearing in mind the approach being taken in the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan and the current position in relation to the examination of that plan??

12. No, for the reasons set out in Paragraphs 24 to 59 of Paper C. There is not, on the face of the Growth Study, any clear surfeit of preferable alternative options to the proposed East of Luton sites for addressing Luton Borough's unmet need.

13. Central Bedfordshire has subsequently made a series of reasoned and evidenced choices as to which of the growth option locations identified in HOU7 should be taken forward in its own Plan alongside other sources of supply. This approach is currently being tested through its own Local Plan examination and it is for that examination alone to adjudicate upon. It is presently anticipated that this examination will not conclude until the end of 2020 at the very earliest. This Council's assessment of likely housing delivery over the period to 2031 in that part of Central Bedfordshire within the Luton HMA is set out in paragraphs 57 and 58 of Paper C.

e) The Sustainability Appraisal does not consider land or sites outside of North Hertfordshire. Should it?

14. No, for the reasons set out in Paragraphs 66 to 72 of Paper C. It is beyond the jurisdiction of the Sustainability Appraisal to make judgements about options beyond the Plan area.