



WHITE PEAK Planning

Matter 7 Hearing Statement: Countryside and Green Belt: the Green Belt review and the approach to safeguarded land (Policy SP5)

North Hertfordshire Local Plan Examination

On behalf of Bloor Homes and The Crown Estate

November 2017

Ref: 2012.002

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Authorised for and on behalf of White Peak Planning Ltd.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rob White', written over a horizontal line.

**Rob White
Director**

This report takes into account the particular instructions and requirements of our client. It is not intended for and should not be relied upon by any third party. Any such party relies on this report at their own risk.



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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 Bloor Homes and The Crown Estate control a substantial tract of land within the area identified in the Local Plan submission version as the Land East of Luton allocation (refs: EL1, EL2 and EL3).
- 1.1.2 Bloor Homes has submitted an outline planning application to North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) for the majority of sites EL1 and EL2 (ref: 17/00830/1) for up to 1,400 new homes.
- 1.1.3 The Crown Estate has submitted an outline planning application to NHDC (ref: 16/02014/1) for 660 new homes covering Site EL3.
- 1.1.4 The application documents can be viewed on the Council's website via the following link: <http://pa.north-herts.gov.uk/online-applications/>.
- 1.1.5 Bloor Homes and The Crown Estate have actively participated in the preparation of Local Plans for both North Hertfordshire and Luton for a number of years. Consistently, the development proposals for a strategic urban extension to the east of Luton have been favourably considered in assessments of how best to accommodate the future development needs of Luton, for which it is accepted that these cannot be met entirely within Luton's own administrative boundary.
- 1.1.6 For development to be considered sustainable, it should, where possible, be met close to where the need arises. Land to the east of Luton has been identified within the evidence base as falling within the Luton Housing Market Area (HMA) and therefore, it is right that the Green Belt is amended in this area to accommodate development to help meet Luton's needs.
- 1.1.7 Bloor Homes and The Crown Estate, therefore, welcome and support the removal of the land east of Luton from the Green Belt in order to allocate it for development and our comments to the questions posed by the Inspector are thus set within this context.

2.0 Responses to Inspector's Questions

2.1 Issue 7.1(a)

2.1.1 Paragraph 83 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that *'Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of the Local Plan'*.

2.1.2 The Local Plan proposes to remove land to the east of Luton from the Green Belt in order to allocate it for development. Exceptional circumstances exist to warrant the release of this land due to the level of Luton's housing need that cannot be met within its own administrative boundary and must therefore, be met within neighbouring authority areas.

2.1.3 The principle that an authority's unmet housing need comprises 'exceptional circumstances' for the release of Green Belt land is set out in Issue 4 of the Inspector's report to the Coventry City Council Local Plan (dated 13th October 2017)¹. The situation whereby Coventry's unmet housing need must be delivered through Green Belt release and within neighbouring authority areas within the wider Housing Market Area (HMA) is similar to the position in Luton and the surrounding authorities that fall within the Luton HMA.

2.1.4 The recently examined Luton Local Plan identified an objectively assessed housing need for Luton of 17,800 new dwellings and 31,800 dwellings within the Luton Housing Market Area (HMA) between 2011 and 2031. The Luton HMA includes the administrative area of Luton, a significant part of Central Bedfordshire and additional areas within North Hertfordshire and Aylesbury Vale. The extent of the Luton HMA within North Hertfordshire is shown in Figure 3 of the Local Plan (LP1) and is entirely within the Green Belt.

2.1.5 The Luton Local Plan identifies capacity for 8,500 new dwellings within its boundary, which leaves an unmet housing need of 9,300 that must be delivered within neighbouring authority areas. Policy SP2 of the Luton Local Plan (as modified by the Luton Local Plan Inspector) states that:

'Luton Borough Council will continue to work with neighbouring and nearby local authorities to help ensure delivery of the Borough's unmet needs in other local authority areas under the 'duty to cooperate'. Luton BC will continue to work with its neighbouring authorities to help ensure the needs of the Luton HMA are met within the HMA. This work is to be informed by the Joint Growth Options Study including 'Areas of Search' for growth of Luton to the North, South, East and West.'

2.1.6 The proposed allocation sites EL1, EL2 and EL3 were discussed at the Luton Local Plan examination and accepted by that Inspector to be appropriate and deliverable. Paragraph 140 of the Inspector's report into the Luton Local Plan²

¹ http://www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/download/4845/coventry_local_plan_inspectors_report

²

<https://www.luton.gov.uk/Environment/Planning/Regional%20and%20local%20planning/Pages/Local%20Plan%202011%20-%202031.aspx>

acknowledges the proposed contribution of 1,950 new homes in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan towards meeting Luton's housing need.

- 2.1.7 The Inspector's report also acknowledged the lack of certainty from Central Bedfordshire and Aylesbury Vale in terms of their contributions. The July 2017 consultation on the draft Central Bedfordshire Local Plan³ stated in Table 7.2 that 7,400 dwellings would be delivered within Central Bedfordshire to help meet Luton's needs. Should this target remain in the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan, it would still leave a shortfall of 1,900 dwellings to be met elsewhere within the Luton HMA.
- 2.1.8 It should be noted that the level of housing to be delivered in Central Bedfordshire to help meet Luton's need could be affected by the potential introduction of the new standard methodology for calculating housing need. The consultation document by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) titled '*Planning for the right homes in the right places: consultation proposals*' stated that the level of housing need under the standard methodology would be 2,553 dwellings per year, which is significantly higher than the current target of 1,600 per year which is included in the draft Central Bedfordshire Local Plan⁴.
- 2.1.9 In addition, one of the potential housing allocations within Central Bedfordshire is located to the west of Luton. The location of this allocation falls within the Caddington and Slip End Neighbourhood Plan area and a Neighbourhood Plan has now been submitted to Central Bedfordshire Council⁵. The Neighbourhood Plan does not include for strategic-scale residential development in this area and could therefore, also affect capacity within Central Bedfordshire for the delivery of new housing to contribute to Luton's unmet need.
- 2.1.10 Given this uncertainty, it is important that Central Bedfordshire is not relied upon to deliver Luton's unmet housing need in its entirety and that North Hertfordshire is also expected to contribute. This approach would also appropriately reflect the geographic extent of the Luton HMA and associated travel to work patterns between North Hertfordshire and Luton.
- 2.1.11 MOU8 includes a Memorandum of Understanding between NHDC and Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) that confirms agreement between the parties that NHDC can contribute 1,950 dwellings towards Luton's unmet need and that '*the allocations to the east of Luton (EL1, 2 and 3) are the appropriate scale and extent to ensure NHDC has maximised its contribution to the unmet need arising from Luton.*'
- 2.1.12 The Luton Local Plan Inspector states in Paragraph 144 of his report that '*in order to be positively prepared, neighbouring plans will need to be based on a strategy which seeks to meet unmet requirements from Luton, where it is reasonable to do so and consistent with achieving sustainable development.*' Therefore, in conclusion, exceptional circumstances exist to warrant the release

³ <http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/planning/policy/local-plan/local-plan.aspx>

⁴ Note that footnote 2 of the consultation data table includes an adopted figure of 718 homes per year, but that this refers to the Mid Bedfordshire Plan. The figure is actually taken from the Central Bedfordshire (North) Core Strategy (Nov 2009) which covers the former Mid Bedfordshire area.

⁵ <http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/planning/policy/neighbourhood-planning/caddington-slip-end.aspx>

of land East of Luton from the Green Belt in order to help meet Luton's unmet housing need.

2.2 Issue 7.1(b)

- 2.2.1 There is a direct relationship between the exceptional circumstances described in *Section 2.1* and the proposed spatial strategy and distribution of new housing set out in the Local Plan.
- 2.2.2 Policy SP2 states that *'The majority of the District's development will be located within or adjoining the following towns: ... Luton'*.
- 2.2.3 The purpose of allocating land adjacent to Luton for development is to help meet Luton's unmet housing need and therefore, it is important that this land is located as close to Luton as possible as this is where the need arises.
- 2.2.4 In identifying suitable land for development, it should be noted that all of the land within North Hertfordshire that is within the Luton HMA is currently designated as Green Belt. Suitable locations for development to the east of Luton within the Luton HMA are further restricted by the presence of Putteridge Bury Historic Park and Garden and the aircraft noise zones associated with London Luton Airport⁶.
- 2.2.5 Taking these constraints into account, the proposed locations for Green Belt release in order to help meet Luton's housing need are considered the most appropriate as they are adjacent to Luton, within the Luton HMA and are not constrained by Putteridge Bury and the London Luton Airport aircraft noise zones.

2.3 Issue 7.1(c)

- 2.3.1 Capacity within the administrative area of Luton for meeting its housing need was tested through the preparation and examination of its Local Plan. The Luton Local Plan Inspector accepted that Luton had capacity to deliver 8,500 new homes and that this left a shortfall of 9,300 to be met within neighbouring authority areas.

2.4 Issue 7.1(d)

- 2.4.1 There is no suitable non-Green Belt rural land to help meet Luton's need as the entirety of the Luton HMA located within North Hertfordshire is currently designated as Green Belt.
- 2.4.2 To deliver new homes to meet Luton's need without releasing land from the Green Belt would require new sites to be located outside the HMA, a considerable distance from Luton, which is where the need is generated. This approach would lead to an unsustainable pattern of development and require significant development around villages currently outside the Green Belt, contrary to the proposed Spatial Strategy.

⁶ See Figures 4.2 to 4.4 of HOU8.

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- 2.4.3 It should also be noted that land to the east of the current Green Belt boundary is proposed for inclusion within the Green Belt as part of this Local Plan, as shown on the Proposals Map.

2.5 Conclusion

- 2.5.1 Bloor Homes and The Crown Estate support the proposed removal from the Green Belt of land within the Luton HMA to the east of Luton in order to help meet Luton's housing need.
- 2.5.2 There is no suitable alternative land currently outside of the Green Belt and its contribution is limited to restricting the expansion of Luton into the countryside.
- 2.5.3 The Green Belt boundary was defined prior to the publication of the NPPF and the 'duty to cooperate' and needs to be amended to ensure that Luton's housing need can be met in a sustainable location close to where the need is generated.