

HEARING STATEMENT

North Hertfordshire Local Plan Examination

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We have considered the Matters and Issues document, prepared by the Inspector in relation to North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 ('the Plan'), and consider it appropriate to respond to Matter 11 - The housing allocations and the settlement boundaries: the Category A Villages - on behalf of our client, F and P Property Management Limited. Our response is concerned principally with the Matter as it relates to housing allocations in Pirton.

Issue 11.54 - Though a Category A Village, no housing allocations are proposed for Pirton. Why? What is the approach taken here and what is the justification for it?

The Plan sets a target of 15,950 homes over its planned period, of which 8,000 are allocated on six Strategic Housing Sites across the district. Policy SP2 states that the majority of the district's development will be within or adjoining six towns, which include those where land is allocated for housing. Within and around the 23 Category A villages in the district (the second highest tier in the hierarchy), there are no housing allocations. This would appear to go against the grain of Policy SP2, which states that general development will also be allowed within the defined settlement boundaries of the Category A villages. In this respect, the Plan does not make allowance for any growth in Category A villages during the plan period.

Policy SP1 states that the local authority will "ensure the long-term vitality of the District's villages by supporting growth which provides opportunities for existing and new residents and sustains key facilities". Paragraph 4.11 affirms this: "it is important to allow growth of the villages in order to allow those communities to continue to function." Despite this there are no allocations to allow for growth in villages, reinforcing the previous point. There is a limited supply of brownfield land in Pirton and as such the Plan should allocate land on the edges of the settlement boundaries to ensure the future function of the village. The lack of allocations in Pirton is neither justified in policy nor sustainable in terms of future growth.

The absence of housing allocations within Pirton is unsustainable and does not accord with national policy. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states in paragraph 47 that local planning authorities should "boost significantly the supply of housing" and sets out guidance for ways in which this is to be accomplished, one of which is the identification of key sites which a critical to the delivery of the housing strategy. Such sites should be identified at Pirton to ensure that it is able to grow in a planned way during the Plan period.

Issue 11.55 - Is the proposed settlement boundary: a) consistent with the methodology for identifying the settlement boundaries? b) Appropriate and justified?

The methodology for identifying the settlement boundaries is not consistent across neither the district nor Category A villages. Some villages, such as Gravely, have had their boundaries drawn to accommodate future growth, whereas others such as Pirton have not.

It would appear that there has been no consistent methodology for identifying settlement boundaries in Category A villages, and as such that which has been used to establish Pirton's is not consistent with the Plan. Much of the undeveloped land within Pirton's boundary is protected on heritage grounds.

Pirton's boundary, like other category A villages, cannot accommodate sufficient housing development within its settlement boundary. The majority of its future residential development will therefore have to take place on greenfield sites in the countryside. The settlement boundaries will have to be reviewed in order to allow this development within the boundaries of the settlement.

The settlement boundary of Pirton is tightly drawn around existing development and its expansion includes only committed sites. There is little scope for future growth in the village, and sites previously earmarked for development within and outside the boundary have been affected by heritage issues which has stopped development getting off the ground. It is therefore neither appropriate nor justified, and as such any future growth

will have to be accommodated on land currently outside the settlement boundary. It is therefore vital that the emerging local plan allows for this, allocating the best sites on the edge of Pirton in the interest of proper planning and to discourage inappropriate and unplanned development.

Pirton's settlement boundary should therefore be reviewed as part of the Plan's preparation in order to ensure that the village is able to properly accommodate future development needs.

Land adjacent to Pirton Recreation Ground

One of our client's sites is located on the edge of Pirton's identified settlement boundary, outside of the green belt, and measures 1.22ha. To the south is the Recreation Ground, and land to the north of the site has been granted outline permission for a substantial extension to the village. This, alongside the recreation ground, will establish the eastern border of the village approximately flush with our client's site. The allocation of land of housing at our client's site would not risk extending the village any further eastwards, instead it would represent an infill of the current irregular boundary.

An architect, instructed to provide a feasibility study for the site, has found that the site may accommodate between 20 and 40 dwellings. This figure should be seen as indicative; a final, exact figure will be established following more detailed assessment.

The Local Plan states that, according to the 2011 census, there are 521 dwellings within Pirton and as such the size of development that would be proposed on our client's site would befit the local context without an unsustainable expansion of the village. It should be supported as a positive scheme providing a suitable and sustainable quantity of housing during the Plan period. Accordingly, there should be a revision of Pirton's settlement boundary, and the allocation of the site within the Plan to positively prepare for, and take account of, the future growth of Pirton. The land adjacent to Pirton Recreation Ground represents the most sustainable site for future growth in the village, and should be allocated accordingly.

Further, the site's proximity to the recreation grounds offers a number of opportunities on top of it the most sustainable option for development, for example development on the site could enable planning obligations that would improve the surrounding village e.g. Local Car Park.

Land to the north of Shillington Road

The second of our client's sites lies just outside Pirton's settlement boundary to the north, albeit the boundary runs to the south of the site. The site is approximately 0.22ha and is rectangular in shape, comprising of open, vacant and unused land. As with our client's larger site, the site is not subject to any planning related constraints - for example, it does not lie in the Pirton Conservation Area, nor in or adjacent to the Chiltern AONB or Green Belt.

The quantum of development, approximately eight dwellings, which could be accommodated on site, is appropriate to the overall size of Pirton. The development of the site would not cause an unacceptable spread of growth into open countryside, rather it would provide needed housing in a sustainable and deliverable location. Development to the north of our Client's site along Burge End Lane and Wrights Farm allows for a clear buffer between the village and its rural surroundings and as such, development should be seen as a small sustainable infill on vacant unused land.

Summary

Both of our client's sites in Pirton are currently unused and vacant, and offer little to the settlement or the District. Additionally, the land adjacent to Pirton Recreation Ground is, at least in part, previously developed land. By allocating these sites for housing, the local authority would be ensuring that they could contribute towards meeting the district's substantial housing need, and supporting the future growth of Pirton in a planned and sustainable manner.

Pirton's historic and heritage significance impacts greatly on the derivability of homes, applications for housing development have been halted due to archaeological findings i.e. scheduled monuments and as such development sites such as our clients are even more valuable.

As such the outdated boundary of Pirton needs updating to accommodate sufficient sustainable housing growth. Currently the boundary allows no opportunity for future development and as such is currently restricting sustainable development. Therefore, the current local plan is inconsistent with national policy (NPPF).

In the context of the above commentary, my client's sites can accommodate approximately 40-50 dwellings, thereby meeting future growth in Pirton in a manner that is sustainable and respectful of the scale of the village.