

LUTON COUNCIL HEARING STATEMENT

Matter 22 – The supply of land for housing

Policy SP8 of the Local Plan sets out the housing requirement for the period 2011 to 2031. It commits to the delivery of 14,000 new homes to meet the needs of North Hertfordshire and 1,950 new homes to meet unmet housing needs arising from Luton – being a housing requirement of 15,950 in total. The Council has now provided a note which updates its estimates about the overall housing trajectory – the amount of new housing likely to be delivered for each year of the plan period – and the five year supply of land for housing. From the Council’s updated estimates about when housing sites are now likely to deliver new homes, and its calculations of the level and timing of delivery against the overall and five year requirements, it appears that:

- *the overall housing requirement in Policy SP8 cannot now be met for the period 2011 to 2031; and*
- *the Council will not be able to demonstrate a five year housing land supply when measured against draft Policy IMR1 (a policy which was put forward by the Council through a main modification, MM372)*

The Council’s note sets out the way in which it considers these issues can best be resolved.

The overall supply of land for housing

22.1 To ensure that the overall housing requirement in Policy SP8 can be delivered, the Council proposes a main modification to reduce that requirement to 14,000 dwellings, to align it with the level of housing the Council considers deliverable from sources previously identified (i.e. sites proposed for allocation in the Local Plan, windfall sites etc). This is coupled with a commitment to an early review of the Local Plan. In arriving at this position, the Council has considered a number of alternative options, which are set out in its aforementioned note.

a) Is reducing the overall housing requirement, and undertaking an early review of the Local Plan, the most appropriate way forward? If not, why not?

Luton Council’s Response:

1. Luton Council (LBC) is supportive of North Hertfordshire District Council’s (NHDC) proposed main modification to reduce the overall housing requirement to 14,000 dwellings, to align it with the level of housing NHDC considers deliverable from sources previously identified (i.e. sites proposed for allocation in the Local Plan, windfall sites, etc).
2. LBC notes that, as set out in the Updated Five year Housing Land Supply Paper [ED178], NHDC has considered a number of alternative options. LBC considers that NHDC’s proposed way forward is realistic and, where possible, accelerates delivery whilst ensuring the plan-led approach is maintained.

3. LBC is also supportive of a commitment to an early review of the Local Plan. LBC considers that this enables NHDC to progress implementation of the development planned in the submitted North Hertfordshire Local Plan as soon as possible and not be delayed by the process of identifying additional sites now. An early review of the Local Plan would also enable alignment with the next round of Local Plans to be prepared in the Luton Housing Market Area, i.e. Luton, Aylesbury Vale and Central Bedfordshire, and consideration of how best to meet the housing needs across the area.
4. In the light of the fact that there is now an urgent and pressing need to meet Luton’s identified unmet housing needs, LBC considers it is particularly important for the North Hertfordshire Local Plan to be progressed and adopted as soon as possible to enable the East of Luton sites, allocated in the Local Plan to contribute to meeting Luton’s housing needs, to come forward.
5. At the time of writing this Hearing Statement the more detailed Appendix A to ED178 requested by the Inspector from NHDC has not yet been published, consequently it is not possible for LBC to comment on the latest anticipated start date and completion rates from the East of Luton allocations. However, if the East of Luton sites could not be delivered in their entirety within the Plan period, i.e. by 2031, then this may have implications for meeting Luton’s unmet housing needs depending on the scale of the shortfall in delivery from the East of Luton and whether those dwellings were anticipated to meet Luton or North Hertfordshire’s needs.

b) Is the selection of additional land for housing from previously identified sources the most appropriate way forward? If so, why?

Luton Council’s Response:

6. See Luton Council’s response to Question 22.1 a) above.

c) Is the identification and selection of additional land for housing the most appropriate way forward? If so, why?

Luton Council’s Response:

7. The identification and selection of additional land for housing is likely to result in significant delay to the North Hertfordshire Local Plan. As noted in response to Question 22.1 a) above, there is an urgent and pressing need to meet Luton’s identified unmet housing needs as soon as possible.

d) Are there any other possible options that would be more appropriate? If so, what are they and why would they be more appropriate than the path suggested by the Council?

Luton Council's Response:

8. See Luton Council's response to Question 22.1 a) above.

The five year housing land supply

22.2 The Council's note sets out a number of different approaches to calculating the five year supply of land for housing – three based on the 15,950 housing requirement in Policy SP8 as submitted, and three based on the 14,000 dwelling requirement now proposed. By the Council's calculations, only one of these approaches – a 'three-stepped approach' based on an overall housing requirement of 14,000 dwellings and using the 'Liverpool method' (spreading the shortfall in delivery since 2011 evenly across the remainder of the plan period to 2031) – would enable the demonstration of a five year housing land supply for each of the next five years. From my reading of the note, the Council's position (in short summary) is that this 'three-stepped approach', combined with the commitment to an early review of the Local Plan, is the most appropriate method for setting the five year housing land requirement, because it is the only option achievable without significant further delay to the examination.

a) Are the Council's calculations correct/ accurate?

b) All of the approaches used by the Council assume that the buffer required by paragraph 47 of the NPPF should be 20% - that is to say, that there has been a record of persistent under-delivery of housing in the District. Has there been, such that the 20% buffer is the most appropriate?

c) Is the 'three-stepped approach' proposed by the Council the most appropriate method for setting the five year housing land requirement? If not, why not?

d) Is one of the other approaches to setting the five year housing land requirement explored in the Council's note, or another approach entirely, more appropriate? If so, why, and:

(i) what should the Council do to ensure that it can demonstrate a five year supply of land for housing under this approach?

(ii) what would taking this approach mean for the progress of the Local Plan examination?

(iii) if taking this approach would lead to a significant further delay to the Local Plan examination – which, for example, may be the result if new housing sites would be needed – would that have a consequential impact on the amount of new land that would need to be allocated for housing?

I ask the Council to provide a short paper that addresses question 22.2 b) above by providing a clear update in relation to housing delivery. I also ask for a paper that sets out the sources of supply assumed – that is to say, to add greater detail to Appendix A of the note provided – which shows on a year-by-year basis the supply from each of the proposed housing allocations and other sources such as windfall sites over the whole plan period. In addition to a table illustrating this, I would also find a bar chart to be most helpful. It would assist to know whether or not the housing delivery from proposed allocations has been agreed with site promoters/developers. Finally, I ask that either this table or a separate one illustrates the anticipated delivery of homes and the infrastructure necessary to support the housing development concerned – in short, an update of the table previously requested and submitted to the examination.

Luton Council's Response:

9. Luton Council (LBC) is supportive of North Hertfordshire District Council's (NHDC) proposed 'three-stepped approach' to setting the five year housing land requirement, combined with the commitment to an early review of the Local Plan. LBC considers that NHDC's proposed way forward is realistic and, where possible, accelerates delivery whilst ensuring the plan-led approach is maintained. It is important to progress the Local Plan to adoption as there is an urgent and pressing need to meet Luton's identified unmet housing needs as soon as possible.