

11th September 2020

Simon Berkeley BA MA MRTPI
Inspector
C/O Louise St John Howe
PO Services
PO Box 10965,
Sudbury
Suffolk, CO10 3BF

Dear Mr Berkeley,

Examination of North Herts D C Local Plan 2011 -2031

On 19th February 2020 I made representation in writing for your review of Further MIQS concerning the above plan during the hearings planned to commence in March. I now record below my representations on the Updated Further MIQs for the September/October hearings.

I again choose to make my additional representations to you in writing rather than orally at the revised hearings. I would normally have attended the relevant hearing sessions on the matters applicable to my representations. **If possible** I would like to be included in those “virtual” hearings purely as a listener.

Basic additional common information for Matters 21 and 22

This first part of my statement applies to both Updated Further MIQs in both sections 21 and 22 and to avoid duplication I set these points out once and then refer to them in the specific sections below.

In my previous letter of 29th February I pointed out that Central Beds had allocated **North Houghton Regis** site, Policy SA5, towards Luton’s unmet needs and that this had a total capacity of 7,000 homes of which 4,800 was their estimate up to 2031. The remaining 2,200 would arise in the following years. The total capacity of 7,000 homes was divided over 2 sites with Site 1 having 5,150 permitted dwellings and site 2 having 1,850. Outline planning permission had been granted on both sites during 2014 -2015. At 31st December 2019 Reserved Matters permission had been granted on 1,547 dwellings on Site 2 but no Reserved Matters permissions had been granted on Site 1 (see Appendix “D” of my February letter). Construction was in progress and some completions had been made during 2019.

Central Beds Local Plans team provided me with a further email of progress up to 30th June 2020, see **Appendix “1”**, by which time Reserved Matters permissions had been granted on 462 dwellings of Site 1 and 1,846 of Site 2. Such Reserved Matters totals then amounted to 2,308 representing an increase of 761 in this 6 months during which the pandemic was at its’ highest level.

The developers have advertised their properties since 2019, see **Appendix “2”**, and many have been sold and occupied or reserved already.

A second site that had been allocated by Central Beds for Luton’s unmet needs was **North of Luton**, policy SA1, as recorded in **Appendix “3”**. This is the closest site to Luton extending the

current Luton boundary northwards. This is for 4,000 dwellings of which 2,000 are expected by 2031, another 2,000 in following years. A key requirement for this location is for a link road between the M1 at junction 11a and the A6. Luton Borough Council objected to this and requested permission for a Judicial Review. On 4th May 2020 this was refused, see **Appendix “4”**. A statement of Common Ground was agreed on 12th May 2020 between Highways England and Central Beds concerning the acceptability of the this link road, see **Appendix “5”**.

These two sites allocated by Central Beds for Luton’ unmet needs together produce 11,000 dwellings of which 6,800 are up to 2031 and 4,200 shortly thereafter. The pandemic has caused delays in housing developments and so you could certainly see these two sites meeting all of Luton’s unmet needs of 8,200 by 2033 and then contributing a further 2,800 for future years.

Incidentally I note that Luton has not included any windfall sites after 2024/5. Just including the 30 per year going forward for the following 6 years to 2031 would produce 150 more dwellings equivalent to North Herts DC additional contribution to the wider Luton HMA.

Matter 21 – the objective assessment of housing need (“The OAN”) and the housing requirement

21.1 -Firstly I disagree with the Council’s conclusion that the 1,100 reduction in Luton’s future dwellings does not represent a meaningful change in the housing situation. One must take into account that Luton BC has unmet needs and this 1,100 reduction of need represents 12% of that unmet need.

North Herts is **not** proposing to reduce its’ East of Luton development to 1,400. All they are stating is that the delivery of dwellings from East of Luton **up to 2031** will be 1,400 meaning that a further 700 will arise after that date. There is no assessment of whether that will be necessary. As mentioned above we already know that the two locations North Houghton Regis, which is already under construction, and North of Luton are planned to produce 4,200 more dwellings after 2031 and by 2033 will have supplied enough dwellings to meet Luton’s 8,200 stated unmet needs to 2031 also producing a further 2,800 for future years. In addition as recorded in my previous letter of 29th February there are other alternative sites that can fill that gap by 2031. Incidentally one of those sites, L23 Butterfield South, is clearly shown in **Appendix 6** as being in Luton BC’s own boundary so this should be developed first thus reducing Luton’s unmet needs by 330 to 7,870. You will also note in **Appendix 7** that L26, M1 Junction10, for 1,000 dwellings has **0%** effect on relatively strong or higher contribution to Green Belt.

In conclusion I contend that the revised OAN figure for North Herts has not been arrived at correctly by including a contribution of 1,400 from East of Luton to meet Luton’s unmet needs and 150 for North Herts. It should just be 11,450 (see 21.3 below).

21.2 I agree with North Herts that there has been a “meaningful change” in their housing situation.

21.3 I believe that the North Herts’ Local Plan should be adjusted to reflect the reduction in housing requirement and contend that (a) the 1,400 dwellings East of Luton should be omitted as explained in the basic additional common information section and in 21.1 above and (b) the additional 150 from this site supposedly for North Herts own needs. I attach **Appendix 8** showing the North Herts requirement as 11,450 excluding the 150, which should be the figure rather than the 11,600. The identified supply of 13,100 produces a 14% buffer.

21.4 For the purposes of North Herts Local Plan I am willing to accept, as per North Herts reply to you in paragraph 21 of ED191A, that it is outside the remit of your inspection of this Local Plan to re-examine Luton's OAN. However you sensibly and correctly asked Luton for their views on any change in their OAN and they duly responded. North Herts in paragraph 22 for ED191A then agreed that you should have regard to material changes in circumstances concerning Luton's unmet needs. Therefore I contend that a reduction of 1,100 dwellings, representing 12%, in Luton's unmet needs is material and should be taken into account. As recorded above I believe that Luton's unmet needs has been adequately met by Central Beds in just two sites, the larger of which is well under construction. If meeting Luton's whole unmet needs in these two sites were just to take two years longer then surely there are not any exceptional circumstances to warrant releasing land East of Luton that makes a significant contribution to the Green Belt.

21.5 -I do not know if Luton's OAN has been correctly determined but accept that if it has then because Luton has an unmet need then the reduction of 12% in that figure is a meaningful change.

21.6 I contend that the points made above should result in the deletion of the East of Luton site from the Local Plan. There are certainly better alternatives as shown above and in my previous letter of 19th February. I did not believe that East of Luton was justified when Luton's unmet needs totaled 9,300 and the 1,100 reduction re-emphasises that point. Developing the East of Luton site is a serious and unnecessary mistake and once any development takes place it cannot be reversed.

Matter 22 – the supply of land for housing

22.1(a) – I do not regard this proposal as the most appropriate way forward. I contend that the overall requirement should eliminate the East of Luton site reducing it to 11,450 (see **Appendix 8**). Then it is sensible for a “buffer” to be incorporated into the housing sites identified in the Local Plan. However such sites should not include East of Luton.

With regard to an early review of the Local Plan I think that is inevitable anyway. The earliest that this Local Plan can be adopted is 2021 and that is already 10 years into the period it covers, i.e. 2011-2031. No doubt NHDC would need to start their review of the next Local Plan 2031-2051 within the next 7 years anyway which surely is early enough.

22 1 (b) – I contend that the East of Luton proposal should be eliminated from the Local Plan. I think it sensible to leave the remaining supply of housing sites proposed in the Local Plan, excluding East of Luton, amounting to 13,100 as it provides a 14% “buffer”.

22.1 (c) – Providing the East of Luton site is eliminated North Herts DC's anticipated delivery of dwellings will still provide a sensible 14% “buffer”.

22.1 (d) – The exceptional circumstances required for the “release” of Green Belt land for the East of Luton development does certainly **not** exist. However as we have seen this year circumstances can change quickly in all parts of the UK and we do not know at this stage the lasting effect of Covid 19. Overall I would consider such effect to be more likely to reduce the requirement for new dwellings rather than increase it over the remaining years of this Local Plan.

Overall General conclusion

There is no need for North Herts to allow Luton to “urban sprawl” into the district and effectively consume the villages of Cockernhoe, Mangrove and Tea Green and develop on an area that makes a significant contribution to Green Belt. The rural communities of Cockernhoe, Mangrove and Tea Green, which incidentally can be backdated to the 10th century by a manuscript dated 980ad, and the Green Belt surrounding them should be retained. Cockernhoe and Mangrove are already included in Policy SP2 as a Category “A” village allowing sensible development to take place for the health of the village community.

Yours Sincerely

Roy Parker FCA