

UPDATED SCHEDULE OF FURTHER MATTERS, ISSUES AND QUESTIONS

AUGUST 2020

STATEMENT BY MICHAEL LOTT

These comments are restricted to the Inspector's Updated Schedule of Further Matters, Issues and Questions and more specifically to Matter 22.1 – the overall supply of land for housing. I have noted that question 22.1d) relates solely and explicitly to the effect of introducing a "buffer" on housing land supply on the existence or otherwise of exceptional circumstances and not on the wider question of exceptional circumstances.

The Council's intention is that the appropriate housing requirement to meet North Hertfordshire's needs is 11,500. This is a reduction of 2,300 on the 2014 based figure of 13,800 homes and a reduction of 1,400 dwellings on the 2016 based figure of 12,900 homes that was provided to the Examination in 2019. I understand that there were sound reasons to provide a small uplift of 100 homes relating to communal establishments. Of course, the actual uplift would be 155 on the figure of 11,445 dwellings which is cited in paragraph 10 of ED 191A.

However, we then come to the proposed buffer of 14% on the Council's own projected need figure of 11,600 – a buffer of 1650 homes. The Council states in ED 191B paragraph 25 that "there has never been a policy decision to pursue a buffer of any particular percentage or size". However, the Council acknowledges that the most recent figure was for a buffer of approximately 6%.

The increase in the buffer appears to be to allow all previously proposed housing allocations to be retained including those in the Green Belt, notwithstanding the reduction in the housing requirement in North Hertfordshire to 11,600.

The Inspector asks in 22.1b) of ED194 whether, if the housing requirement is reduced to 13,00 dwellings (11,600 for North Hertfordshire housing need and 1,400 to help address Luton's unmet housing need), should the supply of housing sites proposed in in the Local Plan also be reduced? If so, how.

My view on this is clear and straightforward. The supply of housing sites should be reduced and the clear priority for the sites that should be excluded are Green Belt sites.

The inspector also asks in 22.1 c) if a buffer of around 13% is an appropriate approach and if not why not?

My view on this is also clear. If the Council previously considered a buffer of 6% to be sufficient and, especially since the Council states that there has never been a policy decision to pursue a buffer of any particular percentage size, then there is no justification for the buffer to be changed, at this stage, from 6% to more than 13%.

This of course also leads to my answer to 22.1d) where the Inspector asks, "if there is a buffer of around 13%, do the exceptional circumstances required for the "release" of land from the Green Belt for housing development exist?" My answer to this is a clear and unequivocal "no."

The Council previously stated in paragraph 4 of its Paper B: Green Belt that "the evidence before the examination is clear that NHDC cannot meet its objectively identified development needs without development in the Green Belt". With the reduction in the housing requirement of 1,400 dwellings there are clearly no longer exceptional circumstances justifying the "release" of land from the Green Belt for housing development whether or not the "buffer" has been increased from 6% to 13%.

The burden of my submission has always related to HT2. This can serve as an excellent example of how the "buffer" of more than 13% can change the policy relating to housing sites.

HT2 falls solely within the Green Belt. In line with the Inspector's requirement, I will not rehearse my arguments on exceptional circumstances. I will instead draw his attention to the Council's proposed Housing Trajectory with a base date of 1 April 2020. The section of the Trajectory on proposed Local Plan sites gives the earliest dates as 2022-2023 and the latest dates as 2030-31.

The "buffer" proposed by the Council should mean that if permission is granted for development on this Green Belt site, one would envisage a date for developing this site as around about 2030 in the very unlikely event that it proves necessary in order to meet the reduced housing requirement. As it stands, the proposed commencement of development on this Green Belt site is 2022-2023, as early as any proposed site and no doubt far earlier than the proposed commencement date for many sites that are not in the Green Belt.

I am sure that, if the Inspector determines that the Green Belt site HT2 should be allowed to remain in the Local Plan, which of course I certainly hope he does not, that he will require the Council to significantly alter the proposed dates so that this development on the Green Belt can clearly be seen to comprise part of the "buffer" and only be activated in the most exceptional of circumstances.

Michael Lott

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