

**North Hertfordshire Local Plan
Further Examination Hearings**

Matter 22

Tuesday 29th September 2020

**Statement by Jed Griffiths MA DipTP FRTPI
On Behalf of CPRE Hertfordshire**

September 2020

Introduction

1. This statement has been prepared by Jed Griffiths MA DipTP FRTPI on behalf of the Campaign to Protect Rural England, Hertfordshire (CPREH). It has been compiled in response to an invitation by the Examination Inspector to submit material on the matters to be considered at the further hearing sessions to be held in September/October 2020. This statement addresses the issues and questions raised by the Inspector under Matter22 – the supply of land for housing.
2. Earlier representations were made by CPREH on this matter in a paper which was submitted to the examination in advance of the hearing sessions which had been scheduled in March 2020, but which were postponed. Where appropriate, references will be made to that document and to previous representations made by CPREH during the course of the examination. The main purpose of this paper, however, is to focus on the issues and questions raised by the Inspector (in ED194) in the light of changing circumstances, particularly the publication of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) 2018-based projections of population and households.

The Overall Supply of Land for Housing

Q22.1 (a) Is reducing the overall housing requirement to 13,000, and undertaking an early review of the Local Plan, the most appropriate way forward? If not, why not?

3. In his introduction to Matter 22, the Inspector refers to paper ED191B, which updates the Council's estimates about the overall housing trajectory and the five-year supply of land for housing. From his interpretation of the document, the Inspector concludes that the overall housing requirement set out in Policy SP8 cannot be met and that the Council will not be able to demonstrate a five-year land supply when measured against draft Policy IMR1. This conclusion is similar to that expressed by the Inspector in his review of paper ED178, in which the Council set out its response to the ONS 2016-based projection. The Inspector's view is noted, but CPREH believe that the overall housing requirement should be reduced much further, for the reasons summarised below in this paper and in its statement on Matter 21.
4. As explained in the CPREH response to Matter 21, the evidence from the ONS 2018-based household projections and the need to take account of paragraph 14 of the 2012 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) fully justifies the setting of a lower housing requirement figure. The ways in which this could be done are also discussed below in answer to the Inspector's questions.

5. Details of the Council's updated housing monitoring and a revised housing trajectory are set out in paper ED191B and its appendices. The revised trajectory shows a potential delivery of 14,656 dwellings over the plan period 2011-2031. In paragraph 24 of ED191B, this is compared to the overall housing requirement of 13,000 dwellings over the plan period. The Council considers that the difference between the two figures would provide a "buffer" of 13%, which is justified in paragraph 27.
6. In the CPREH statement on Matter 21, the effect of the ONS 2018-based projections on the housing requirement for Luton is discussed. If the primary ONS projection is accepted as the basis for calculating the housing requirement, it would be considerably lower. As CPREH has argued the allocations to cater for the "unmet need", to the east of Luton, would no longer be needed. Despite the Statement of Common Ground which has been agreed between the three local authorities, CPREH would ask the Inspector to consider the withdrawal of the 1,400 dwellings from the North Hertfordshire Local Plan. This would reduce the housing requirement for North Hertfordshire to a maximum of 11,600 dwellings.
7. It is presumed that the Council remains committed to an early review of the Local Plan, which in any event would be required in five years from adoption. As stated in its earlier paper, CPREH supports that approach, as it would reduce the pressures on the Green Belt and the countryside. It would also provide a degree of stability, set against a range of uncertainties surrounding the plan-making process.
8. The uncertainties have been compounded by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which are acknowledged by the Council in paragraph 2 of ED191B. In paragraph 7 of its earlier paper on Matter 22, CPREH outlined a series of matters which would need to be addressed by the then newly-elected government which would affect planning policy at the national local level. Since then, the government has published its White Paper which proposes wholesale changes to the planning system. It is likely, therefore that any review of the Local Plan will take place under a markedly different policy framework.

Q22.1 (b) If the housing requirement should be modified to 13,000 dwellings, should the supply of housing sites in the Local Plan also be reduced? If so, how?

9. If the housing requirement in the Local Plan is reduced, then CPREH advocates that the supply of housing sites should also be reduced, in order to protect the Green Belt. As stated above in paragraph 6, CPREH believes that the housing requirement should be 11,600 dwellings, and should not include the 1,400 dwellings to cater for the unmet housing needs of Luton Borough. In selecting the other sites for removal from the Local Plan, priority should be given to those allocations which have the most significantly harmful effect on the Green Belt, such as sites GA1 and GA2.

Q22.1 (c) Is a “buffer” of around 13% an appropriate approach? If not, why not?

10. The Council’s justification for the 13% “buffer” is explained in paragraph 27 of ED191B. It is argued that this is a robust approach, and would provide flexibility and greater certainty that the housing requirement would be met. It is also claimed that the buffer would enable the Council to demonstrate a five-year land supply throughout the plan period. In the following paragraphs, there is reference to the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic and the uncertainties this may cause for the construction industry and the delivery of housing. The Council believe that constraining allocations too close to the housing requirement would result in a failure to maintain a five-year housing supply and Housing Delivery Test requirements. As explained above and in the statement on Matter 21, CPREH also recognise the current uncertainties, but do not accept the Council’s case for an inflated housing supply figure. On the contrary, based on a reduced OAN, there is a need for a cautious approach to housing supply and delivery, coupled to an early review of the Local Plan. This would avoid the unnecessary release of many Green Belt sites in the “high harm” category and would also stimulate the market for development and investment within existing settlements.

Q22.1 (d) If there is a “buffer” of around 13%, do the exceptional circumstances for the “release” of land from the Green Belt for housing development exist?

11. From the above, it is the firm view of CPREH that there is no need for the 13% “buffer”. It follows, therefore, that there are no exceptional circumstances for the release of land from the Green Belt for housing development.

The Five-Year Housing Land Supply

Q22.2 (a) Are the Council's calculations correct/accurate?

12. The correctness or accuracy of the Council's calculations is not the key issue. As explained above in this statement and in the CPREH response to Matter 21, it is the underlying assumptions for the OAN and the conclusions which are questionable. The calculation of housing land supply should be based on a much lower housing requirement.

Q22.2 (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?

13. From the information set out in paper ED191B, the Council clearly believes that there has been a persistent record of under-delivery of housing in North Hertfordshire District since the base year 2011. CPREH has previously commented on this issue in its representations under Matter 3, and remains of the view that the Council has not demonstrated a continuously acute or intense housing need. A 20% buffer is therefore not appropriate. We would re-iterate that the housing target should be dependent on the housing requirement figure. As we have argued in the paper on Matter 21, this should be a much lower figure than in the submitted Local Plan, and should be based on the ONS 2018-based household projections.

Q22.2 (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?

Q22.2 (d) Is one of the other approaches to setting the five-year housing land requirement explored in ED191B, or other approach entirely, more appropriate? If so, why?

14. The above two questions are linked. The "three-stepped" approach proposed by the Council in ED191B is coupled to a commitment for an early review of the Local Plan. The principle of this approach is broadly supported by CPREH, although the dwellings requirement in the second and third steps would need to be adjusted in accordance with the lower OAN advocated by CPREH in its Matter 21 submissions.

15. As stated in the earlier CPREH paper on Matter 22 (paragraphs 13-16), the Council's overall approach to achieving the five-year land supply must be supplemented by a more rigorous drive to the optimisation of urban capacity and policy measures so as to increase urban density. Examples of this process in Hertfordshire and elsewhere were described in the above paper. CPREH have also argued that the "windfall" estimates assumed by the Council are too low. It is disappointing to see that these issues have not been addressed in ED191A and ED191B.

Jed Griffiths MA DipTP FRTPI

Hertford

16th September 2020