

Stevenage Local Plan Examination

Stage 1 Matters, Issues and Questions

Introduction

The examination will take place in three stages.

Stage 1 will cover the legal and strategic issues addressed below, primarily concerning the duty to co-operate and objectively assessed needs for housing and employment land and strategic infrastructure delivery.

If after the Stage 1 hearing sessions, I consider that in relation to these issues the Plan is likely to be capable of being found legally compliant and sound (having regard to the potential for me to recommend modifications), Stage 2 will then commence. Stage 2 will consider development management policies relating to the Plan. A further set of matters and issues will be issued for the stage 2 hearings.

Following on from stage 2 hearings will be stage 3 hearings dealing with site allocations and again a separate set of matters and issues will be issued for these hearings in due course.

Matter 1 – Legal Requirements and Overarching Matters

1. Overall, has the Plan been prepared in accordance with relevant legal requirements, including the 'Duty to Cooperate' imposed by Section 33A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended)? Has the duty to co-operate been met? What has been the nature of the co-operation and on what issues? How is the planning work of the various planning authorities co-ordinated?
2. Are the likely environmental, social and economic effects of the Plan adequately and accurately assessed in the Habitats Regulations Assessments and the Sustainability Appraisals (SAs)? Does the SA test the Plan against all reasonable alternatives?
3. Is the Plan compliant with:
 - (a) the Local Development Scheme?
 - (b) the Statement of Community Involvement?
 - (c) the 2004 Act and the 2012 Regulations?
4. Does the Plan provide effective outcomes in terms of cross boundary issues?

Matter 2 – Objectively Assessed Needs for Housing and Employment Land

1. Is the identified objectively-assessed need (OAN) for housing of 7,600 new dwellings, as set out in policy SP7, soundly based and supported by robust and credible evidence?

Examination into Stevenage's Local Plan

In particular:

- (a) Has account been taken of the 2014-based CLG Household Projections? If so what were the findings?
 - (b) Does the OAN appropriately consider the likelihood of past trends in migration and household formation continuing in the future?
 - (c) Has account been taken of migration to the borough from London and the assumptions made in the London Plan about outward migration? Should a 5 or 10 year migration rate be used?
 - (d) Have formation rates been suppressed by historic undersupply and issues of affordability?
 - (e) Does the OAN take appropriate account of 'market signals'?
 - (f) Is the OAN appropriately aligned with forecasts for jobs growth?
 - (g) Does the OAN take appropriate account of the need to ensure that the identified requirement for affordable housing is delivered?
 - (h) The regeneration of Stevenage is likely to attract people from outside the Borough to live there. Has this been taken account of?
 - i) In terms of second/vacant homes, why has the period of 2016-2036 been modelled and not 2016-2031 (the Plan period)? The percentage applied for this is also vague.
2. The soundness of proposals for the land allocations for housing set out in policy HO1 (and the case for 'omission sites') will be considered at Stage 3 of the Examination. However, on the basis of the Plan as submitted, is it realistic that they would provide for:
- (a) A supply of specific deliverable sites to meet the housing requirement for five years from the point of adoption?
 - (b) A supply of specific, developable sites or broad locations for growth for years 6-10 from the point of adoption?
- If you contend that the Plan would not provide for either (a) or (b) above (or both) could it be appropriately modified to address this?
3. Is the Plan clear as to the identified need for additional pitches for gypsies and travellers (policy HO12) and is the identified need soundly based and supported by robust and credible evidence?
4. The soundness of individual employment sites set out in policy EC1 will be considered at Stage 3 of the Examination. However, on the basis of the Plan as submitted, is policy SP3's aim of providing at least 140,000 m² of new B-class employment floorspace over the Plan period from allocated sites for employment development soundly based and supported by robust and credible evidence?

5. How many jobs would this equate to? Should the need be expressed in job numbers in the Plan also, including the shortfall?
6. On the basis of The East of England Forecasting Model the Council accepts in the Plan that it would be prudent to plan for at least 30ha of new employment land to meet locally derived needs over the Plan period? It is clear that this is not being met by the submitted Plan. If this is to be achieved in neighbouring local authority areas are they agreeable to this and if so where is the evidence to support this? Are they able to provide for their own needs also? What stage are their local plans at?
7. Has regard been had to the impact of the likely shortfall in jobs on unsustainable travel patterns?

Matter 3 – Strategic Transport

1. What responses have been received from Highways England in relation to the most recent transport modelling work (S-Paramics Model Forecasting Report – Aug 2016)?
2. The transport modelling report at paragraphs 1.1.25 and 1.1.26 identifies some significant congestion issues both in the 2021 model scenarios and the 2031 scenarios. Of particular concern is the 2031 model which shows a gridlock situation. Have the Council considered the mitigation measures necessary to prevent such a situation occurring?
3. Was this modelling based on the same timescales for delivery of individual projects as those set out in the Council's Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) [CD TI1]?
4. Have the costs of upgrading the strategic transport infrastructure that the modelling is predicated on and other likely infrastructure been identified in the IDP and has the necessary funding been secured? If not, why not and what are the implications for the delivery of the Plan?
5. The Council in their response to my initial questions indicated that funding is available to cover the costs of delivering critical and essential infrastructure. Is that still the case and if so can the Council provide an updated appendix 1 to the Council's IDP, so that it is clear how individual transport related projects will be funded, including the public transport projects.
6. The indicative delivery date in the IDP for A1(M) Junctions 7 and 8 slip roads work is shown as 2021 to 2031. Can a more precise date be provided? If these works are not carried out until 2031 will this have an effect on the ability to deliver the allocated sites?