



**Stage 3 Matters Statement for Stevenage Borough Council Local  
Plan Examination**

**Matter 15 – The Supply and Delivery of Housing Land**

**Statement of behalf of Miller Homes and Bellway Homes**

## **Stevenage Local Plan Examination**

### **Stage 3 Matters and Questions**

#### **Matter 15 – The Supply and Delivery of Housing Land**

***1. The majority of the proposed housing will be provided on a small number of large sites. Does the Council have a contingency Plan should one or all of these sites not deliver as expected?***

Site HO3 (North Stevenage) is identified as one of the Council's key large housing sites. It has been considered for release from the Green Belt for a significant number of years and has been part of the Council's wider development strategy since the early 2000's. The East of England RSS identified the provision of a sustainable urban extension to the north and west of Stevenage and in response to this SBC and NHDC began preparation of a draft masterplan to guide the expansion. The proposed urban extension was also included within the spatial strategy set out in the Core Strategy in 2010. The proposed allocation of this site has therefore been an important element of the Council's development strategy for an extensive number of years.

From a delivery perspective, the entire land allocation is controlled by Bellway Homes and Miller Homes under joint option agreements. Bellway and Miller are committed to delivering the site and the preparation of an outline planning application for up to 800 units is advanced. It is anticipated that the application will be submitted shortly. Bellway and Miller are confident that this site can be delivered in accordance with the land allocation and that delivery will take place in the early part of the Plan period.

***2. Policy HO1 of the Plan says that 2000 homes will be provided through allocated sites in the town centre. How has this figure been arrived at for these mixed used sites and how accurate is it?***

***3. Paragraph 47 (bullet point 4) of the National Planning Policy Framework says that Councils should illustrate the expected rate of market and affordable housing delivery through a housing trajectory for the plan period and set out a housing implementation strategy for the full range of housing describing how they will maintain delivery of a 5 year supply of housing land to meet their housing target. Have the Council done this? Should a housing trajectory be included in the Plan itself?***

***4. What are the potential sources of supply for new housing? What are the assumptions about the scale and timing of supply and rates of delivery from these sources? Are these realistic and supported by evidence?***

Site HO3 is identified as one of three strategic allocations within the emerging Local Plan and is therefore critical to housing delivery. There are active developers, being Bellway and Miller, seeking to bring forward residential development on the site and therefore demonstrating that the site is developable. As identified above, a planning application is being prepared for up to 800 units which is consistent with the emerging allocation for the site and the assumptions in the Council's Housing Technical Paper Update (December 2016). The draft Illustrative Framework for the site is included as **Appendix 1** and demonstrates that up to 800 units across a range of densities within the site is achievable. As such the assumptions regarding the scale of development is consistent with the proposals being developed by Bellway and Miller. It is also noteworthy that extensive pre-applications have been held with SBC regarding the emerging proposals and SBC has confirmed they are broadly acceptable.

The forthcoming submission of the planning application demonstrates that the assumptions regarding early delivery of this site by the Council are justified. The Technical Paper identifies that the release of Site HO3 from the Green Belt will deliver 650 homes between the period 2018 – 2022, without which the Council falls significantly short of meeting their five year housing land supply. This trajectory is consistent with that anticipated by the developers. With two developers active at the site it is anticipated that 150 homes per year could be delivered on site. This assumption is based on the developers' track record and experience of delivery of large residential developments across the country over a significant number of years. Bellway and Miller are due to submit the planning application shortly and anticipate beginning construction in 2018.

The assumptions made by the Council on scale, timing of supply and rates of delivery are entirely appropriate and consistent with the developers intentions for the site. As such it is realistic for the Council to assume that the majority of the supply from site HO3 would be delivered within the first five years of the Plan.

***5. The Council have adopted the 'Liverpool' method for dealing with their previous undersupply (spread over the Plan period, rather than the first 5 years). Is this the correct approach given the circumstances in Stevenage?***

***6. What are the implications of stepped delivery of housing (i.e. delivery of many of the planned new homes towards the end of the Plan period) on the supply and delivery of housing in the early years of the Plan?***

It is considered that the Council's approach to the delivery of housing during the Plan period has had regard to the specific constraints and opportunities associated with the identified housing sites and makes realistic assumptions on delivery throughout the Plan period.

Specifically in relation to Site HO3, the Council's housing trajectory assumes that 800 homes will be delivered in the early part of the Plan period, with 650 of those delivered during the first five years. It is set out that the entire housing supply on the site will be delivered by 2023. As set out above, Bellway and Miller are due to submit a planning application shortly and will be in a position to start on site in 2018 should permission be granted. Accordingly, the release of the site from the Green Belt ensures the site is deliverable and that it can make a significant contribution to housing delivery within the early years of the Plan period, assisting in the Council demonstrating a five year housing land supply.

Site HO3 makes up more than 10% of the housing supply for the Borough during the Plan period and has two committed and active developers who are in a position to bring this site forward; therefore HO3 will make a substantial contribution to the early delivery of housing in the Plan period.

***7. What impact will this have on the 5 year supply of deliverable housing land and the delivery of affordable housing?***

The Council has an identified 5 year housing land supply including the 20% buffer, when including the release of three sites from the Green Belt. It is clear that it is imperative for the Council to release these Green Belt sites in order to demonstrate a five year housing land supply.

Specifically in relation to Site HO3, 240 affordable units (30% affordable housing as set out in Policy HO7) will be delivered on site between 2018 and 2023. As such the release of this site from the Green Belt will not only make a significant contribution to the early delivery of 800 units, but 240 of these will be affordable.

***8. Would the Plan realistically provide for a five year supply on adoption (with the 20% buffer)? Will a five year supply be maintained?***

The Council has clearly set out their housing trajectory which identifies delivery of 2,741 units equating to 5.1 years housing land supply, in the first five years. Notably, Site HO3 is the largest contributor to the five year housing land supply and consequently the Council's success in housing delivery during the early part of the Plan period.

Bellway and Miller are two national house builders with a track record of delivery of large residential developments. Preparation of a planning application for up to 800 units is advanced and is due to be submitted shortly. There have been no technical constraints identified either by the developers through the various technical reports that have been prepared to support the planning application, or through pre-application discussions that have taken place with SBC Officers through the formal Planning Performance Agreement that is in place, to imply that the site cannot be brought forward for development in its entirety during the early part of the Plan period.

In light of the foregoing, given that there are two active developers the site is deliverable with 650 homes coming forward in the first five years of the Plan period. Whilst this equates to 24% of the total five year housing land supply, there is a clear commitment to early delivery from the developers through the imminent submission of the planning application and the extensive technical work that has been undertaken to date. Site HO3 will therefore make a clear and significant contribution to the five year housing land supply, as identified in the Council's housing trajectory and therefore it is considered the Council will have a realistic five year housing land supply on adoption.

***9. How has flexibility been provided in terms of the potential supply of housing land? Is this sufficient?***

The Borough is severely constrained and it is notable that the Council has taken a 'brownfield first' approach to identifying housing land supply. Despite this, the Council is unable to meet its Objectively Assessed Need (OAN) without the use of Greenfield and Green Belt sites as set out in their Housing and Green Belt Technical Papers. This approach is consistent with the Government's proposed amendments to national policy as set out in the 'Fixing our broken housing market' White Paper (7<sup>th</sup> February 2017), whereby Green Belt boundaries should only be amended where it can be demonstrated that all other reasonable options have been fully examined. The approach is also consistent with paragraph 83 of the NPPF in so much as authorities looking to review Green Belt boundaries should have regard to *their intended permanence in the long term, so that they should be capable of enduring beyond the plan period.*

The Council has assessed a number of scenarios within the Housing Technical Paper Update (December 2016), concluding that an 8% buffer i.e. an additional 636 housing units above the OAN, is appropriate to allow for changes in circumstances and flexibility in housing supply. This is supported. It is also notable that in all scenarios except for Scenario 2, development at North Stevenage is required to ensure the OAN is met as well as buffer ranging from 1% to 8%. Given the early delivery of this site, it is imperative that this site is released from the Green Belt and included in the housing supply, in order to allow the Plan to respond to changes in circumstances elsewhere within the Borough.

***10. Is there sufficient variety in terms of the location and type of site allocated?***

***11. In overall terms would the Plan realistically deliver the number of dwellings required over the plan period?***

As set out previously, the HO3 allocation will result in the early delivery of more than 10% of the Council's OAN. It is realistic that this site will begin to deliver units from 2018, including 30% of units

as affordable housing. As such this site will make a significant contribution to ensuring the Council will realistically deliver the dwellings required over the Plan period.

***12. Are the allocations based on a robust assessment of infrastructure requirements and their deliverability, including expected sources of funding?***

The Council has prepared an Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) which identifies and assesses the infrastructure needs of the Local Plan using a wide range of evidence base documents. This is considered to be a robust assessment of the infrastructure requirements of the Plan. The Council has prepared an Infrastructure Funding Strategy (IFS) which identifies expected sources of funding, including that from developer contributions.

Policy HO3 requires the provision of a primary school, community facilities including a GP surgery, a multi-use games area and green infrastructure to meet the needs of the development. These policy requirements are based on the findings of the IDP and IFS. These elements are included within the emerging proposals for North Stevenage and therefore are deliverable in conjunction with the residential development.

Pre-application discussions have also been held with Hertfordshire County Council in relation to the requirements for contributions to their services. It is anticipated that contributions will be provided towards secondary education, nursery education, childcare, library services and youth services. These requirements as identified by HCC are based on their standard evidenced based mechanism for calculating financial contributions towards infrastructure. It is anticipated that these contributions will be secured through a S106 Agreement in order to ensure the infrastructure requirements to meet the needs of the development are provided.

***13. Is the delivery of housing likely to be affected by delays in delivery of any infrastructure structure projects?***

The IDP, including updated Appendix 1 (January 2017) demonstrates that the delivery of Site HO3 is not dependent on the early delivery of infrastructure projects. Most notably in relation to allocation HO3, the A1(M)Smart Motorway scheme is due to open in 2020 and it is understood that the associated slip road improvements will be brought in as part of the Smart Motorway scheme. As such the Smart Motorway and associated junctions will be in place early in the delivery period of the development.

***14. Is it assumed that all sites, both commitments and allocations, will be developed during the Plan period? Are all these sites likely to be developed?***

As set out previously, a planning application for HO3 is due to be submitted shortly and the developers expect to begin construction in 2018, with the delivery of 50 units in 2018. The North

Stevenage site should be completed by 2023, ensuring that this site is developed during the Plan period.

***15. What account is taken of windfalls? What rate of windfall development is anticipated over the Plan period? Why has this rate been chosen?***

***16. What are the implications of the low rate of house building in recent years? Are there any signs that this will change? Is the housing trajectory realistic?***

The low rate of house building from 2007 was triggered on the supply-side by a fall in house prices rendering many development sites unviable, whilst on the demand-side, this was strongly influenced by difficulties in obtaining mortgages, in particular for first time buyers. The Government has introduced measures to address these points, for example through the Help to Buy initiative to stimulate demand and the ability to re-negotiate s106 agreements to assist in the viability of sites to accelerate supply. Most recently, the Government White Paper 'Fixing our broken housing market' published on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2017, seeks to introduce further measures to increase housing delivery.

In tandem with these initiatives, there has been a progressive recovery in the UK economy with the annual growth rate in GDP currently forecast at 2% to 2020. Both Bellway and Miller are intent on delivering the development as soon as possible, in particular as economic forecasts, Government policy initiatives and consumer demand are currently in such a favourable position.

***17. If sites are deleted from the Plan will others have to be found? If so is the Council putting forward any additional sites?***

***18. What are the main findings of the Viability Study? Has this work indicated that some types of site or uses are likely to be unviable? What are the implications? Is more work necessary?***

***19. How have site densities been determined? How rigid are these figures?***

***20. At what stage is an allocation considered to be implemented? Given this should any of the site allocations be taken out of the Plan?***

Allocation HO3 does not yet have planning permission and consequently no development has been implemented on the site. As such it would not be appropriate for this allocation to be removed from the Plan.

**Appendix 1: Illustrative Framework (DRAFT)**



- Site boundary
- North Hertfordshire boundary
- North Hertfordshire proposed allocation
- Public open space
- St. Nicholas' Meadows
- Proposed development blocks
- Proposed shared space/footpath
- Proposed carriageway
- Proposed high-density residential development
- Proposed medium-density residential development
- Proposed low-density residential development
- Proposed independent living
- Proposed primary school
- Proposed local centre
- MUGA/Equipped play area
- Existing public right of way
- Proposed footpath
- Proposed pedestrian route
- Proposed pedestrian site access
- Proposed vehicular site access
- Existing vegetation (hedgerows/trees)
- Proposed vegetation (copse/hedgerow)
- Proposed trees
- Attenuation features
- Existing 400kV Pylons
- Existing 132kV Pylons

**ES Figure 3.8**

## Land north of Stevenage

on behalf of Bellway Homes and Miller Homes

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drawing no.	SK21	drawing	Illustrative framework
revision	F	drawn by	JG
scale	1:5000	checked by	NT
		job no.	OXUD320426
		date	19 Dec 2016

