

Draft Stage 3 Matters, Issues and Questions

Introduction

As set out previously, the examination is taking place in three stages.

Stage 1 hearings covering the legal and strategic issues (the duty to co-operate; objectively assessed needs for housing and employment land and strategic highway matters) will take place in week commencing 16 January 2017. If I conclude 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), then the stage 2 hearings will commence.

Stage 2 will consider general matters and the development management policies and these hearings will take place in week commencing 20 February 2017 and **Stage 3 will then commence on 21 March 2017 and deal primarily with site allocations, highway matters not dealt with at stage one and any matters covered under stage 1 or 2 that need further examination. Since these matters, issues and questions are being issued prior to the completion of the stage 1 and 2 hearings, they could be subject to change.**

Matter 15 – The supply and delivery of housing land
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Issue

Whether the approach towards the supply and delivery of housing land is justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

Questions

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?
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?

Examination into Stevenage's Local 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?
7. What impact will this have on the 5 year supply of deliverable housing land and the delivery of affordable housing?
8. Would the Plan realistically provide for a five year supply on adoption (with the 20% buffer)? Will a five year supply be maintained?
9. How has flexibility been provided in terms of the potential supply of housing land? Is this sufficient?
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?
12. Are the allocations based on a robust assessment of infrastructure requirements and their deliverability, including expected sources of funding?
13. Is the delivery of housing likely to be affected by delays in delivery of any infrastructure structure projects?
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?
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?
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?

21. What is the threshold for the inclusion of sites? Is it based on the area of the site?
22. What are the targets for the provision of affordable? What has been achieved in recent years?
23. Is the type and size of housing provided/planned meeting/likely to meet the needs of the area?

Matter 16 – Housing site allocations

Issue

Whether the proposed housing site allocations are justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

Questions

1. Are the proposed housing site allocations appropriate and justified in the light of potential constraints, infrastructure requirements and adverse impacts?
2. Are the assumptions regarding the capacity of the sites justified, what is this based on?
3. What is the basis for proposing housing on areas of public open space and sites currently in recreational use? What is the situation regarding the adequacy of open space/recreational facilities in the areas concerned? How would the proposed housing sites affect this? Is the approach justified and is it consistent with the NPPF?
4. Are the detailed requirements for each of the allocations clear and justified? Have site constraints, development mix and viability considerations been adequately addressed? Are the boundaries and extent of the sites correctly defined?

Additional questions relating to specific sites

Urban Extensions

Policy HO2 – Stevenage West

1. Is the scale of this development appropriate?
2. Would it give rise to any highway safety issues or traffic congestion that could not be mitigated?
3. Is the required recreational open space sufficient to meet the needs of the development?

Policy HO3 – North of Stevenage

1. Is the development of this site dependent upon the allocation of adjacent land for housing in North Hertfordshire district?

Examination into Stevenage's Local Plan

2. Has the impact of the proposal on the character and appearance of the surrounding area been formally considered?
3. Would the proposal result in harm to heritage assets?
4. Do exceptional circumstances exist to justify the removal of the site from the Green Belt?
5. Would the increase in houses in this area generate the need for a new secondary school?
6. Would it give rise to any highway safety issues or traffic congestion that could not be mitigated?

Policy HO4 – South East Stevenage

1. Is the site in a sustainable location?
2. Do exceptional circumstances exist to justify the removal of the site from the Green Belt?
3. Has flood risk been fully considered? If so, are there any outstanding issues in this regard?
4. Has the impact of the proposal on the character and appearance of the surrounding area been formally considered?
5. Is the scale of development appropriate?
6. Have the environmental impacts of the development been assessed?
7. Is the proposal likely to affect the any protected species?

Other housing allocations

HO1/2 – Bragbury End sports ground car park

1. Has flood risk been fully considered? If so, are there any outstanding issues in this regard?
2. Would the proposal result in the unacceptable loss of trees?
3. Could the site accommodate development without harming nearby living conditions?

HO1/5 Ex-play centre, Scarborough Avenue

1. Will the proposal result in the loss of the play centre and park and if so is this justified?

HO1/6 Former Pin Green School playing field

1. Is the loss of the school playing field justified?
2. Will it be replaced elsewhere?

HO1/7 Fry Road day nursery

1. Would the proposal result in highway safety issues that could not be mitigated?
2. Would the proposal result in the loss of a green space and if so is it justified?

HO1/10 Land at Eliot Road

1. Has access to wastewater infrastructure been investigated and if so what were the findings?

HO1/11 Land west of North Road Rugby Club

1. Is the site needed for future hospital expansion?
2. Has flood risk been fully considered? If so, are there any outstanding issues in this regard?
3. Is the site boundary correctly drawn?
4. Are there electricity pylons within the site that could affect its development potential?

HO1/12 Marymead neighbourhood centre

1. Has the impact of the proposal on the character and appearance of the surrounding area been formally considered?

HO1/13 Scout Hut, Drakes Drive

1. Will the proposal result in the harmful loss of trees?

HO1/14 Shephall Centre and adjacent amenity land

1. Is the relocation of the community centre justified?

HO1/18 The Oval neighbourhood centre

1. Has access to wastewater infrastructure been investigated and if so what were the findings?
2. Is there sufficient infrastructure nearby to support the development?
3. Would the proposal result in highway safety issues that could not be mitigated?

4. Has flood risk been fully considered? If so, are there any outstanding issues in this regard?

Matter 17 – Gypsies and Travellers

Issue

Whether the approach towards the supply and delivery of gypsy and traveller pitches is justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

Questions

1. Does the Council's approach in relation to traveller sites generally conform with the expectations of Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (August 2015)? If not, why not?
2. Are the number of pitches being promoted through Policy HO12 in accordance with the recommendations of the Council's gypsy and traveller accommodation assessment?
3. It is widely accepted that caravan dwellers are more vulnerable at times of flood than those people living in bricks and mortar housing. The Council have acknowledged, in response to my initial questions, that there is a risk of surface water flooding in the southern and western sections of the site. How much of the site is affected and would this potentially reduce the number of pitches that could be provided here? If that is the case does a suitable alternative site need to be found?
4. Is the proposed site in a sustainable location?
5. Would the Plan realistically provide for a five year supply of gypsy and traveller pitches on adoption and will the supply be maintained for the Plan period?
6. Would the site dominate the nearest settled community?

Matter 18 – Employment and mixed use site allocations and protected employment sites

Issue

Whether the employment and mixed use site allocations and the protected employment sites are justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

Questions

1. Are the proposed employment and mixed use site allocations appropriate and justified in the light of potential constraints, infrastructure requirements and adverse impacts?
2. Does policy EC1 contain sufficient information in relation to the allocated sites?
3. What is the expected timescale for development, is this realistic?

Examination into Stevenage's Local Plan

4. What are the implications of the identified employment land needs not being met within the Borough's boundaries?
5. What are the implications of Welwyn Garden City refusing to assist with providing employment land to meet some of the unmet demand from Stevenage Borough?
6. Does this have implications for Central Bedfordshire and North Hertfordshire who have agreed to assist in this regard? Do they now need to contribute more than previously agreed and if so has this been discussed? How will this be secured and when?
7. Does this need to be reflected in the Plan?

Additional questions relating to specific sites

EC1/1 – GSK/Stevenage Bioscience Catalyst

1. Could the site accommodate more than the target provided in the Plan (50,000 sq m)?
2. Could the site accommodate a wider range of uses?

EC1/4 – Land west of North Road

1. Will this proposal limit the future expansion of Lister Hospital?
2. Has flood risk been fully considered? If so, are there any outstanding issues in this regard?
3. Would the proposal result in highway safety issues that could not be mitigated?
4. Is the proposal likely to affect any protected species?

EC1/7 – Land west of Junction 8

1. Do exceptional circumstances exist to justify the removal of the site from the Green Belt?
2. Would the proposal result in highway safety issues that could not be mitigated?
3. Has flood risk been fully considered? If so, are there any outstanding issues in this regard?
4. Is the proposal likely to affect any protected species?

EC2,3, & 4 – Gunnels Wood

1. Should non-employment uses be permitted in this area?
2. Would the second part of policy EC4 prejudice existing properties?

Matter 19 – Retailing and town centres

Issue

Whether the approach to retailing and town centres is justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

Questions

1. Is the evidence on retail provision up-to-date and robust? How do current retail proposals fit within the overall strategy for retail development?
2. Is the town centre boundary correctly defined?
3. What is the basis for the retail allocations?
4. Are they justified and effective?

Additional questions relating to specific sites/areas

TC2 – Southgate Park Major Opportunity Area

1. Does the policy need to be more prescriptive about what is expected to go into the public sector hub?

TC3 – Centre West Major Opportunity Area

1. Is the redevelopment of the leisure park justified?
2. Is the loss of car parking justified?

TC4 – Station Gateway Major Opportunity Area

1. Is the relocation of the bus station justified?
2. Are the railway station proposals justified?
3. Should a specific new site for a replacement theatre and a new sports centre be allocated in the Plan?

TC7 – Marshgate Major Opportunity Area

1. Should the policy make reference to youth facilities?

Matter 20 – Highway, transport and infrastructure matters

Issue

Whether the approach to highway, transport and infrastructure matter is justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

Questions

1. Are the parking standard standards set out in appendix B justified?
2. Is the closure of Lytton Way justified and has the effect on the surrounding road network been fully considered?
3. Will the town centre proposals lead to a net loss in car parking for visitors to the town centre? If so, has the impact of this been assessed?
4. Are the preferred vehicular access points to strategic development set out in policy IT1 justified?
5. Is there a conflict between policy IT2 and Wymondly Neighbourhood Plan?
6. Are the 'west of Stevenage safeguarded corridors' (policy IT2) in the Green Belt and if so what are the implications of this? Is the land being 'safeguarded' or 'allocated'?
7. In Policy IT3 is there a need to clarify what is meant by 'significant development'?
8. Should the Plan include a policy which secures electric charging points in connection with certain development?

Matter 21 – Delivery and Monitoring

Issue

Whether the approach to delivery and monitoring would be robust and effective

Questions

1. Overall, does the Plan deal adequately with uncertainty? Is sufficient consideration given to monitoring and triggers for review?
2. What are the intended mechanisms and timescales for monitoring the implementation and effectiveness of the policies and proposals in the Plan?
3. Is it sufficiently clear how the Plan will be monitored? If not, how could it be made clearer?