

Home Builders Federation

Matters 2

GREATER NORWICH LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION

Matter 2 Vision, objectives, and the spatial strategy

Issue 1 Have the vision, objectives and growth strategy for Greater Norwich been positively prepared, are they justified and consistent with national policy and can they be realistically achieved? Does the Plan set out a clear spatial strategy? Has the spatial strategy and overall distribution of development been positively prepared, is it justified by a robust and credible evidence base and is it consistent with national policy?

6. Is it clear which policies in the Plan are strategic, and which are non-strategic?

The Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP) makes no distinction as to which policies are strategic and which are non-strategic as required by national policy. It would appear each of the seven policies are all strategic as the Greater Norwich Development Partnership (GNDP) have included each of these under the heading of the strategy. However, within each of these policies there are both strategic elements as well as development management requirements that would probably be considered to be non-strategic. The GNLP should make the distinction as to which aspects of each policy are strategic and which relate to development management in order to be consistent with national policy.

Issue 2 Housing Growth

1. Is the identified need of around 40,550 new homes as set out in Policy 1, soundly based and does it accord with national planning policy and guidance?

The level of need identified by the GNDP using the standard method is 2,027 dwellings per annum which, on the basis of the plan period results in a need of 40,551 new homes. This is based on the standard method using a base ten-year period of 2019 to 2029 and an affordability ratio from 2019. The GNDP recognises that the local housing needs assessment should be based on the most up to date evidence. On the basis of the most recently published evidence the GNDP's Topic Paper on policy 1 (Ref D3.1) outlines that using a 2021 to 2031 ten-year base period and the 2020 affordability ratio results in a minimum need of 1,972. However, in order to maintain consistency between plans and to reflect the Government's aspirations to boost housing supply the GNDP have decided to retain its housing requirement of 40,551 homes.



Including a housing requirement in the local plan that is above the minimum number of homes required to meet housing needs is in line with the objective of national policy of “*significantly boosting*” housing supply. However, Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) also recognises at paragraph 2a-010 there will be circumstances where needs will be higher than those arrived at using the standard method. This paragraph does not seem to have been considered by the GNDP in relation to Greater Norwich City Deal, which was agreed with Government in 2013, and the level of housing growth that this committed the GNDP to delivering between 2008 and 2026. The HBF considers the housing requirement should be higher than either of the minimum assessments outlined above in order to take account of the City Deal and ensure the GNDP deliver against its commitments.

Paragraph 18 of the GNLP notes that the growth requirements of the City Deal will be met through the GNLP. As set out in our representations the growth deal committed the Greater Norwich area to delivering not only the 37,000 homes between 2008 and 2026, as set out in their Core Strategy, but also a further 3,000 homes in addition to this target¹. Between 2008/09 and the start of this plan in 2018/19 total delivery, as set out in the GNDP’s monitoring reports, across the Greater Norwich area was 15,086² new homes. This leaves 24,914 new homes to be delivered between 2018/19 and 2025/26 in order to meet the number of homes required as part of the growth deal - significantly higher than the proposed minimum requirement of 16,212 homes obtained using the standard method

In terms of housing supply the latest delivery trajectory in D3.2B estimates that 21,859 homes will be built between 2018/19 and 2025/26 – circa 3,000 homes short of what is required to meet the growth deal. Ideally such a shortfall would be addressed prior to 2026. However, if the shortfall were to be addressed across the remaining plan period total need for the GNLP would be 49,238³. It would appear that the GNDP has the potential supply to meet this shortfall in the remaining plan period with the latest trajectory indicating the potential supply across the Greater Norwich area of over 50,000 new homes. However, whilst supply indicates that the level of development in the City Deal could be addressed no consideration appears to have been given as to whether the growth deal indicates that the GNDP should set a housing requirement above the minimum established using the standard method.

As outlined above the growth deal established that the Councils in the Greater Norwich area would, in return for £440m, deliver the 37,000 homes set out in the Core Strategy as well as unlock an additional 3,000 homes. The HBF consider it necessary that where there are agreements such as this to support the delivery of new homes that these agreements are continued across local plans and are reflected in the minimum number of homes that the GNDP are required to deliver. Such considerations are clearly the intention of Government with paragraph 2a-010 indicating that it is appropriate for

¹ Page 11 of the Greater Norwich City Deal, attached at Appendix 1 of this statement.

² Paragraph 3.24 of 2019/20 AMR indicates 20,326 new homes delivered between 2008/09 and 2019/20. On the basis that the most recent housing trajectory in D3.2 indicates delivery in 2018/19 and 2019/20 as 2,936 and 2,304 respectively.

³ Delivery required to meet the City Deal to 2025/25 of 24,914 added to minimum needs as set out in the GNLP for the remaining plan period of 24,324

Councils to consider where there are growth deals or funding to support new infrastructure that the higher growth requirements arising from such deal are reflected in the housing requirement. As such we consider the current housing requirement to be unsound as it does not take into account the Greater Norwich City Deal.

2. Is the settlement hierarchy set out in Policy 1 appropriate and consistent with the evidence?

No comment

3. Are all of the settlements listed in the correct level within the hierarchy?

No comment

4. Is the distribution of growth in line with the settlement hierarchy justified by the evidence?

No comment

5. To what extent does the distribution of housing sites across the settlement hierarchy reflect a policy down approach or one of site availability or previous commitments/allocations?

No comment

6. Is the identification of a supply buffer of 22% against the housing requirement justified?

Yes. Paragraph 60 of the NPPF establishes the minimum number of homes local planning authorities are required to plan for. In order to ensure this minimum requirement is delivered it is essential that there is sufficient flexibility in the land supply to take account of the fact that some sites will not come forward as expected and deliver fewer homes over the plan period. In addition to being consistent with national policy it also shows that the plan is deliverable over the plan period and as such must be considered to be effective. It is notable that the Joint Core Strategy for the Greater Norwich Area considered it possible to deliver 25,878 dwelling between 2008 and 2020, however during this period the 2019/20 AMR states at paragraph 3.4 that only 20,326 new homes were delivered – 21% lower than expected. This gives an indication as to the level of buffer required to ensure needs are met in full.

Indeed, other plans have been found sound with similar or higher levels of headroom to take account of potential delays in delivering strategic sites and ensure that the housing requirement could be met in full. For example, the Guildford Local Plan was found sound with a 36% buffer between the housing requirement housing land supply. It should also be noted that this degree of headroom was considered by the inspector examining the Guildford Local Plan as contributing to the exceptional circumstances required to justify amendments to Green Belt boundary. Whilst Green Belt is not an

issue for the GNLP it does show that even where constraints are significant a substantial headroom in land supply is considered a sound approach to plan making.

As such the HBF considers the principle of a 22% buffer between the housing requirement and housing supply to be sound as it provides the necessary flexibility to ensure the plan is effective in meeting minimum local housing needs. Indeed if, as we suggest above, the housing requirement were to be increased to reflect the City Deal it would be necessary for the GNLP to ensure that at least a 20% buffer between needs and supply is retained.

7. Is the figure of 1,200 homes assigned to the South Norfolk Village Clusters Housing Site Allocations Local Plan justified?

No comment

Home Builders Federation

Matters 4

GREATER NORWICH LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION

Matter 4 Sustainable Communities and the environment.

Issue 1 Is Policy 2 justified, effective and consistent with national policy?

1. *Is Policy 2 clearly written and unambiguous, so that it is evident how a decision maker should react to development proposals?*

No comment

2. *Is the term 'as appropriate' sufficiently clear as to what kind and scale of development proposals Policy 2 would apply to? P62 of the Plan indicates that the policy would apply to minor developments. Is all this minor development? If not, which ones would it apply to?*

No comment

3. *Does Policy 2 apply to all applications or only those that fall within the thresholds identified within sections i-iv of the Policy?*

For GNDP

4. *Are the indicative minimum residential densities of 25 per hectare in the Plan area and 40 per hectare in Norwich justified and deliverable? Are they supported by the requirements on individual site allocations? Is it effective to describe minimum net densities as 'indicative' and does this imply that they are optional?*

It is necessary for there to be flexibility with regard to the application of densities given that national policy sets out that whilst local plans should seek to make the most efficient use of land there will be circumstances where it is not possible to achieve the densities set out in policy. Therefore, to some extent they should be indicative and in decision making subject, as set out in paragraph 124 of the NPPF, to a range of other factors such as the character of the surrounding area, market conditions, viability, and the capacity of local infrastructure.

5. *Is it clear what purposes Strategic Gaps are intended to serve and how development proposals within them will be assessed?*

No comment

6. Is the proposed modification to Table 8 (in response to comments made by Natural England) justified? In order to be effective, should this be moved to the policy wording itself?

No comment

7. Is it justified to require housing development to meet the higher optional standard for water efficiency, and non-residential development to meet the BREEAM “Very Good” water efficiency standard, or any equivalent successor?

No comment.

8. Is it justified for Policy 2 to refer to a future optional water efficiency standard when any such standard, and the conditions for its adoption, are currently unknown?

The HBF recognises that in a water stressed area that the lower optional technical standard for water efficiency is justified. However, given that current policy requires the introduction of this standard to be evidence based there is a strong possibility that the adoption of a future higher standard within a local plan would also require further justification and an amendment to the local plan. Standards may change outside of the planning system through mandatory Building Regulations but as a developer would be required to use these standards no reference is necessary in the local plan to meeting future higher standards.

9. Is it justified for Policy 2 to require new development to provide a 19% reduction against Part L of the 2013 Building Regulations? The policy states that it will apply to “all new development” – is this justified?

Paragraph 6-012 of PPG outlines that local planning authorities can set higher energy performance standards but only up to the equivalent of part 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes. As is highlighted in PPG this is approximately 20% above current Building Regulations. However, this will be superseded by the latest part L Building Regulations which, when adopted in the summer of 2022, set out what would be a 31% improvement on current Building Regulations. As such it may be prudent to delete the 19% requirement in policy 2 in order to avoid confusion. It will also be necessary for the GNDP to consider the impact of delivering the higher standards of energy efficiency that will be introduced on development viability.

10. Is it justified for Policy 2 to require ‘appropriate’ non-housing development of more than 500 square metres to meet the BREEAM “Very Good” energy efficiency standard, or any equivalent successor? How will it be determined whether a proposal is ‘appropriate’ in this regard?

No comment

11. The explanatory text states that master planning using a community engagement process will be required on sites for more than 500 dwellings or 50,000 square metres. However, the policy wording does not refer to this requirement. The policy wording does however refer to master planning being encouraged on larger sites and particularly for proposed developments of 200 dwellings or 20,000 square metres plus. Should the policy be modified to address this inconsistency? Does the policy need to be made clearer in this regard to be effective?

The GNDP should set out any requirements in policy and not in the supporting text.

12. Is it clear what form any master planning and community engagement is expected to take? Has any such requirement been considered in the assumed lead-in times for the delivery of larger sites?

For GNDP.

13. Is the requirement for developments of more than 100 dwellings to be accompanied by a delivery statement justified and effective? How would this work in situations where planning permission is secured in outline, or with the intention of disposing the land to a developer?

No comment

14. Is Policy 2 and the Plan in general, consistent with the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework in respect of climate change?

No comment

15. Have all of the proposed requirements in Policy 2 been subject to viability testing?

No, the requirements for electric vehicle charging points have not been considered in the viability assessment. The HBF accept that electric vehicles will form a key part of the Government's strategy to reduce carbon emissions it is necessary for these to be properly considered with regard to their potential impact on the viability of new development. The GNDP needs to take account not only of the cost of installing charge points, generally considered to be around £1,000 per charge point, but also the potential infrastructure improvements to the local electricity network.

The HBF and its Members also have serious concerns about the capacity of the existing electricity network in the UK. The supply from the power grid is already constrained in many areas across the country. Major network reinforcement will be required across the electricity grid to facilitate the introduction of EVCPs and the move from gas to electric heating as proposed under the Future Homes Standard. These costs can be substantial and can drastically affect the viability of developments. If developers are funding the potential future reinforcement of the National Grid network at significant cost, this will have a significant impact on their businesses and potentially

jeopardise future housing delivery. Following the Government's announcement that all new homes with a parking space will be required to have a EVCP fitted from 2022 the details of this announcement are still to be set out in detail. However, the Government's proposal from its consultation in EVCPs in 2019 was to automatically cap charges to developers for upgrading local electricity networks at figure of £3,600 per charge point so clearly the costs could be significant and should be included in the viability assessment.

Issue 2 Is Policy 3 justified, effective, and consistent with national policy?

1. Does Policy 3 provide an appropriate policy framework for the conservation and enhancement of the areas built and natural environment? Is it consistent with national policy in this regard?

Whilst the requirement of all development to deliver a 10% net gain in biodiversity is consistent with the Environment Act 2021 there is no recognition in the plan that there is a two-year transition period from the Act receiving Royal Assent before this legal requirement comes into force. This should be recognised within the policy to ensure consistency with legislation. The 10% net gain in biodiversity does not appear to have been considered within the viability assessment. As we set out in our representations the Government's impact assessment of this policy indicated that the costs of meeting this requirement range from between £18,000 to £60,000 per ha and should be included within the viability assessment.

2. Is Policy 3 consistent with the HRA?

No comment

3. The supporting text refers to a contribution of £205 per new home made towards mitigation measures on protected sites. Policy 3 refers to this. Does this apply to all residential development across the Plan area including single dwellings? Is it justified and how would be it be implemented?

No comment

4. Map 8A sets out the Green Infrastructure Corridors in the Plan area. These are not reflected in Policy 3. How do these corridors relate to Policy 3? Should the policy include provision to preserve and enhance the Green Infrastructure Corridors?

No comment

Home Builders Federation

Matters 6

GREATER NORWICH LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION

Matter 6 Homes (Policy 5)

Issue 1 - is the policy for affordable housing justified, effective and consistent with the evidence and national policy?

1. Are the requirements for affordable housing set out in Policy 5 justified by the evidence?

Local Housing Needs Assessment published in June 2021 (Ref B22.3) identifies that based on the standard method there is estimated to be a need for an additional 10,360 affordable homes between 2018 and 2038 – roughly 26% of the GNDP assessment of local housing need. The HBF recognises that, as the GNDP outline in the topic paper on Policy 5 (D3.6), that not all development will deliver affordable housing and not all schemes will meet policy requirements in full. However, it is worth noting that the NPPF assumes that viability testing undertaken as part of the process of preparing the local plan will allow decision makers to assume that development that does come forward can meet all policy costs placed upon it by the GNDP with the aim of reducing negotiation with regard to affordable housing contributions. As such it must be assumed that the majority of development will meet the requirements in the local plan.

Therefore, if we examine document D3.2C it is possible to estimate the number of affordable homes likely to come forward if all commitments and allocations in the GNLP were to be policy compliant. Based on this evidence we estimate that if all schemes were policy compliant would deliver 12,210 affordable homes between 2020/21 and 2037/38. Given that affordable housing needs for the remaining plan period of 8,978 would mean that there would around 35% more affordable homes delivered than the identified affordable housing needs in Greater Norwich between 2020/21 and 2037/38. Whilst the HBF recognise that the local plan needs to ensure flexibility in supply and that some schemes will not deliver in full but a policy that delivers 35% more affordable homes than required even given the 20% flexibility in overall delivery, has not been justified. The GNDP needs to either provide further justification indicating the supply of affordable homes is expected to be more in line with assessed needs and overall housing supply or reduce the policy requirements.

2. Is the 33% requirement across the Plan area outside of Norwich City Centre justified by the evidence?

See response above.

3. Is the 28% requirement for Norwich City Centre justified by the evidence? What is the evidence which leads to this being a lower figure than that for the plan area?

See response above.

4. Policy 5 allows for a viability assessment to be submitted at decision-making stage for brownfield sites. Is this approach justified and consistent with national policy?

Paragraph 58 of the NPPF states that in whilst development is expected to comply with all policy requirements it recognises that there will be circumstances that through changing circumstances a development is made unviable by the planning obligations required by local planning policy. In such circumstances the NPPG places the onus on the developer to demonstrate whether those are applicable and leaves it a s matter for the decision maker having regard to the circumstances of that case. However, what is not consistent with regard to the GNDP approach is limiting this to brownfield sites. The NPPF places no such restriction and policy 5 should be amended to ensure that any site affected by changing circumstances can seek to have these considered at the decision-making stage.

5. Is the requirement for all housing development proposals to meet the Nationally Described Space Standard for internal space justified?

The HBF shares the GNDP's desire to see high quality homes delivered across the Greater Norwich area. However, the HBF also consider that space standards can, in some instances, have a negative impact upon affordability issues and reduce customer choice and as such there must be a robust justification to support their adoption. However, the HBF do not consider the evidence set out in Appendix B of the viability study to be sufficiently robust support the need for Nationally Described Space Standards (NDSS) to be implemented.

As the GNDP evidence notes footnote 49 of the NPPF and paragraph 56-020 of PPG both set out that the application of technical standards must only be applied where this can be justified both in terms of need and viability. However, we are concerned that the evidence examines just 245 of the 7,500 homes built between 2016 and 2019 in the Greater Norwich area. This in now way suggests that there is an endemic issue with regard to the size of new homes and no further evidence is provided to suggest that there are wider concerns within the market about the size of new homes being built. Without evidence that this is an endemic problem minimum space standards should not be adopted.

It must be remembered that decent housing is not necessarily dependent on size and the HBF consider it important that there is flexibility in local plans to deliver homes below the NDSS where this meets the need for such homes. For example, there may be a demand for small family sized homes that allow households to obtain a house

with the number of bedrooms required but where one room is slightly below the required standard. In such circumstances the ability to afford a smaller home with the correct number of bedrooms may offer a better quality of life than a larger home with fewer bedrooms.

The HBF would therefore recommend that there is insufficient justification to support the adoption of the Nationally Described Space Standards (NDSS). However, if the application of space standard is considered to be sound the HBF would recommend that some flexibility is set out in policy 5 to allow for circumstances where it may not be possible to meet space standards across a development.

6. Is the requirement for purpose-built student accommodation to provide the same percentages of affordable housing justified, practicable and deliverable and is it consistent with national policy?

No comment

7. Paragraph 281 of the Plan states that potentially the provision of affordable housing in relation to student accommodation could be in the form of a commuted sum and this is stated in the section of the policy under the heading 'Purpose Built Student Accommodation'. However, the section in the policy under the heading 'Affordable Housing' requires affordable housing on site other than in exceptional circumstances? Therefore, is the policy sufficiently clear as to be effective?

No comment

8. Is the requirement for specialist older people's accommodation, including care homes, to provide an affordable housing contribution justified and consistent with national policy? Have these requirements been subject to viability testing?

There does not appear to be any specific consideration as to the ability of specialist accommodation for older people, whether this is C2 or C3, to meet the requirements for affordable housing set out in policy 5. This type of development faces different challenges to standard residential development. For example, non-saleable floorspace such as communal areas and warden accommodation needing to be taken into account within the viability assessment. Therefore, in order to require development to provide affordable housing at the levels suggested in the GNLP an assessment as to the impact on the viability of such development must be undertaken. Without such an assessment the requirement should be deleted,

9. Is the requirement for 10% of the affordable housing to be for affordable home ownership justified? Is this requirement sufficiently clear for the policy to be effective?

Paragraph 65 of the NPPF requires 10% of all homes on major development to be affordable home ownership and, as such, paragraph 268 of the GNLP and the wording of Policy 5 are both inconsistent with national policy. The NPPF does also state that this should not be applied if it would exceed the total affordable housing required in the

area or significantly prejudice the ability to meet the identified affordable housing needs of specific groups, but no such evidence appears to have been provided and as such the policy is not sound and should be amended accordingly.

10. Are the respective affordable housing targets achievable and deliverable?

No comment

11. Does the policy sufficiently recognise the need for viability considerations? Has the impact of affordable housing requirements on the viability of schemes been robustly assessed?

As set out above the policy should not seek to restrict the type of scheme where viability considerations should be taken into account. National policy makes no such distinction with regard to considering development viability and the GNDP should not make such a distinction.

With regard to the robustness of the viability assessment as set out in our representations and elsewhere in our statement the HBF are concerned that some costs associated with the local plan have not been taken into account. The GNDP needs to ensure that the cumulative impacts of the costs placed on development through the local plan, either in terms of policies or infrastructure requirements, will not put development at risk. What is evident in the sensitivity analysis undertaken in viability assessment is that small changes in costs and returns will have a significant impact on the development viability of some typologies and indicates that all costs should have been considered in the first instance and the failure to do reduces the robustness of the viability assessment.

Issue 2 Accessible and Specialist Housing

1. Does the Plan make adequate provision for older person's accommodation?

THE HBF did not comment on whether there was adequate provision in order to meet the specific accommodation needs for older people local plans should where possible seek to allocate sufficient land in the right locations to meet identified needs. It is only through such allocations that the GNDP can be confident that the full range of housing needs of older people will be met. Therefore, where there are sites being promoted in sustainable and appropriate locations for such development the Council should seek to allocate those sites.

However, we recognise that sufficient developable land may not come forward as part of the process of preparing the local plan to meet needs in full. As such it is important to ensure that policies supporting the delivery of older people's accommodation provide an effective mechanism that gives a clear pathway to decision makers where there is a shortfall in the supply of such development. At present the policy provides support for such development but we would question its effectiveness moving forward as it does not set out in policy how much accommodation is required to meet needs

and how a decision maker should react where there is a shortfall. The HBF would therefore recommend that an annualised figure for the accommodation needs for older people is included in the policy alongside a presumption in favour of such development where there is a shortfall in provision against this figure.

2. What do 'supported' and 'encouraged' mean in respect of this part of the policy? Is the policy sufficiently clear as to be effective?

No comment

3. Is the requirement of at least 20% of homes on major housing development sites to conform to the Building Regulations M4 (2)(1) standard justified?

No comment

Issue 5 Self/Custom Build housing

1. Is the requirement for at least 5% of plots on sites of 40 dwellings or more to be self/custom build housing justified by the evidence and consistent with national policy? Has this requirement been subject to viability testing?

The GNDP Local Housing Needs Assessment (B22.3) provides some evidence as to demands for self-build and custom housebuilding plots within the Greater Norwich area. Notable this evidence states at paragraph 9.40 that between 2016 and 2020 sufficient applications were granted on self-build plots to meet the level of demand established through the self-build register. This would suggest that across the area sufficient self-build plots are coming forward to meet demands without resorting to a policy such as the one being proposed in policy 5 of the local plan. The most appropriate mechanism for self-build plots to be delivered across the Greater Norwich area on windfall sites and the GNDP should seek to encourage this more clearly in policy 7.5.

The HBF would therefore suggest that there is no justification that the 5% requirement is necessary to meet the demand for self-build plots. Even if demand was not being met no evidence has been provided as to how many such plots are needed across the plan period nor how many plots this policy would deliver. The HBF therefore considers the policy to be unjustified and as such should be deleted.

2. Is there evidence to indicate that this level of provision will be delivered?

As noted above there is no evidence is provided with regard to the level of provision of self builds plots through this or other policies in the local plan.

Mark Behrendt MRTPI
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