



THE HOME BUILDERS FEDERATION

Date: 24th September 2015

Consultee ID: 755911

Matter: 3

CHESHIRE EAST LOCAL PLAN STRATEGY EXAMINATION **RESUMED HEARINGS**

Matter 3 – Green Belt, Safeguarded Land and New Green Gaps Policy

1. The HBF would like to submit the following further comments in respect of Matter 3.

The Council has undertaken an update of the Green Belt Assessment, proposing a new Strategic Green Gaps Policy and reassessing the amount of Safeguarded Land (200ha). Key issue: Do the revised assessments of Green Belt and Safeguarded Land fully assess the contribution that Green Belt sites make to the Green Belt in a consistent, objective and comprehensive manner, identifying the exceptional circumstances needed to justify the release of Green Belt land, and fully justify the proposal for a new Strategic Green Gaps Policy in the south of the Borough, in line with national policy and fully addressing the Inspector's concerns set out in his Interim Views, particularly in terms of: Green Belt Assessment Update (Arup/CEC) (PS/E034/a); Safeguarded Land Technical Annex (PS/E031a.5); New Green Belt and Green Gap Policy Technical Annex; (PS/E031a.6)

a. Updated Green Belt Assessment

i. Overall approach, methodology, justification and conclusions, including the contribution that sites make to the five purposes of the Green Belt and the exceptional circumstances needed to justify releasing Green Belt land;

2. The HBF agrees with the Council that exceptional circumstances for Green Belt release are justified by the evidence. The HBF is, however, concerned that the study does not represent an objective Green Belt review. Rather it is a review and update to the Council's previous study which the inspector found to be flawed within his interim conclusions. This point is clarified within section 1.1, second paragraph where the study (ref: PS E034a) notes;

'this assessment is an update to the Green Belt Assessment 2013; as such it builds upon and incorporates aspects of the work carried out in 2013'.

Given that the inspector found the original study to be flawed we have concerns this study is simply building upon these flaws and carrying them forward.

3. Whilst the HBF does not wish to comment upon the merits of individual parcels inconsistencies remain in the identification of parcels and how the study update has dealt with changes to site categorisation. For example despite some sites being re-categorised not all had been revisited (see section 4.3, PS E034a) thus meaning different conclusions may be drawn. Furthermore the final two paragraphs of section 1.1 (PS E034a) identify that Cheshire East has been responsible for reviewing and refining Green Belt parcels whilst Arup has only carried out advice upon the methodology for the update and assessments upon parcels which are either new or subject to revised boundaries. The HBF is therefore concerned that the study is not a rigorous re-assessment of parcels in order to properly define parcels which share the same character and purpose. The outcome is a likely continuation of previous flaws meaning that parcels which would otherwise score poorly against the assessment criteria are masked by the performance of a wider area. In addition the Green Belt parcels appear, in some cases, to be based upon sites rather than parcels of land.
4. A further criticism of the work is that consultation has not taken place with landowners, developers and residents. The benefit of such a consultation would have been that additional information on other issues such as landscape could have been provided. This would have better assisted the identification of specific parcels and assess their significance.

ii. Amount, extent, location, justification and spatial distribution of land to be released from the Green Belt, including the impact on the wider Green Belt beyond Cheshire East;

5. The extent of Green Belt releases will inevitably need to be increased to accommodate the increased housing requirement.

iii. Implications of the revised Green Belt Assessment for the submitted Local Plan Strategy (Policy PG3) in terms of the release of Green Belt sites;

6. The HBF has no further comments at this stage.

iv. Consideration of alternatives to releasing the proposed amount of land from the Green Belt, including alternative locations, strategic options and spatial distribution of proposed development;

7. The HBF has no further comments at this stage.

v. Engagement and consultation with neighbouring local authorities and other stakeholders and interested parties about the updated Green Belt assessment.

8. The HBF consider this a matter for the Council to address. It is, however, worth noting that we attended the stakeholder workshops held on 4th August

2015. Whilst these workshops were useful in informing participants upon the evidence base it appears the Council has placed little weight upon the views expressed at the sessions.

b. Safeguarded Land

i. Overall approach, methodology and conclusions of the revised assessment, including justification for the proposed amount of Safeguard Land;

9. The NPPF, paragraph 85, identifies that where necessary Local Plans should provide safeguarded land to meet longer term development needs stretching *'well beyond the plan period'* and that local authorities should satisfy themselves that Green Belt boundaries *'will not need to be altered at the end of the development plan period'*. The Council's technical annex on safeguarded land (PS E031a.5) clearly demonstrates that to ensure that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the plan period safeguarded land is required. The HBF agrees with this assessment.
10. Given that the NPPF, paragraph 157, advocates a 15 year time horizon for Local Plans it would appear appropriate to ensure that the Green Belt boundaries are capable of enduring until at least 2045, a point noted within paragraphs 3.6 and 7.1 of the technical annex.
11. Paragraph 6.6 of the technical annex identifies that it is;

'...only appropriate to safeguard land in the North Cheshire Green Belt to allow for potential future needs arising from within that northern area of the Borough. In other words, it will not be appropriate to designate safeguarded within the area covered by the North Cheshire Green Belt to allow for potential future needs arising in other areas of the Borough'
12. Whilst the HBF generally agree with this point this is on the proviso that sufficient deliverable land, outside of the Green Belt within the south of Cheshire East can be identified to meet the needs of the area until 2045. The technical annex is not clear on this point. Presuming the Council can confirm this point the amount of land required to be safeguarded in the north will be dependent upon the final objectively assessed housing needs and employment needs of the area as well as the spatial distribution, both of which are still of considerable contention.
13. Notwithstanding this issue the report determines the amount of safeguarded land required by first identifying other potential sources which include;
 - Over-provision of housing land during the current plan period – the Council acknowledge (paragraph 7.8) that this is likely to be modest;
 - Urban Potential Study Findings – suggesting up to 1,958 dwellings could be brought forward, again this is modest and has very little certainty as many of the identified sites are occupied (paragraph 7.9);
 - Windfalls / Completions on Non-Allocated Sites – The HBF agrees with paragraph 7.13 that these cannot be simply added to the other sources

as all sites beyond the plan period would technically be windfalls and there is likely to be double counting;

- Cheshire East SHLAA – this identifies a maximum capacity of 2,489 units, however many of these sites are not considered suitable and as such it would not be appropriate to include such sites in any future calculation;
- Brownfield Local Development Orders – the HBF agrees this may create a source of supply post 2030 but the size and scope is still unknown; and
- Other sources – the suggested sources largely replicate others noted above such as recycling of land within the urban area which is likely to be captured within the urban potential study, SHLAA and windfalls. The channelling of development outside the outer Green Belt boundary may be an option, however, if as suggested this is allied to HS2 this may be aligned with a higher growth scenario than currently envisaged within the current plan.

14. The HBF therefore conclude that there is limited scope to reduce the overall need for safeguarded land from the full 15 years, never mind the lower 10 years suggested by the Arup study. To ensure that the Green Belt boundaries do not need to be altered at the end of this plan period it is therefore recommended that at least 10 years of housing and employment land are accounted for.

15. To identify the final amount of safeguarded land required the study applies a range of density assumptions. These are 30dph, 35dph and 40dph, it is unclear if these are based upon net or gross site area. The technical annex indicates a number of reasons why it may be appropriate to increase densities on safeguarded land sites. Whilst the HBF recognises that a modest increase in density may be possible this must be weighted against the need to protect the character and setting of localities. Given that safeguarded land is likely to be on the edge of settlements it is unlikely that a significant increase in density upon such sites would be appropriate.

16. The technical annex finally concludes, in paragraph 9.8, that 200ha of safeguarded land would be appropriate. Utilising the Council's calculations this would provide sufficient safeguarded land for;

- 8 years across all density assumptions;
- 9 years at a density of 35dph or 40dph; and
- 10 years at a density of 40dph.

17. Due to the reasons provided above the HBF consider a requirement in excess of 250ha would be more appropriate. This would provide at least 10 years of additional developable land beyond the plan period at a density of 30dph or above. Whilst the Council may consider such a requirement to be an over-allocation of safeguarded land the HBF consider this a prudent approach as it would provide certainty that the Green Belt boundary would not need to be altered beyond the plan period and if there was excess safeguarded land this need not be released and could be retained as such within subsequent plans.

ii. Implications of the revised assessment of Safeguarded Land for the submitted Local Plan Strategy (Policy PG4), including the extent, spatial distribution, density, time period and criteria for designating Safeguarded Land;

18. The HBF has no further comments at this stage.

iii. Engagement and consultation with neighbouring local authorities and other stakeholders and interested parties about the amount, extent and location of Safeguarded Land.

19. I refer to our previous comments within paragraph 6 above.

c. New Strategic Green Gaps Policy

i. Justification for abandoning the proposal for a new Green Belt around and between Crewe and Nantwich in the south of Cheshire East, and proposing a new Strategic Green Gaps Policy, in terms of its effectiveness, function and purpose;

20. The HBF supports the abandonment of the proposal for a new Green Belt around and between Crewe and Nantwich. Within our previous examination hearing statements (matter 6) we outlined our objections to the proposed new Green Belt and why we considered that its introduction was unsound. It is considered that these objections remain valid, to aid brevity they are not repeated here. In addition a number of recent appeal decisions and a High Court Judgement (Case No: CO/4217/2014) clearly indicate that existing policies cannot be considered insufficient and as such exceptional circumstances do not exist.

21. The proposed Green Gaps policy provides a more pragmatic solution, which essentially is a 'like for like' replacement of existing policy NE4 Green Gaps.

ii. Implications of the new Strategic Green Gaps policy for the submitted Local Plan Strategy (Policy PG3/PG4a), including the nature, extent and spatial distribution of Strategic Green Gaps, their broad location and designation of detailed boundaries, including more localised Local Green Gaps in subsequent plans;

22. The Local Plan Strategy intends to set out the broad locations for the Green Gaps, document PS E031a.6, with detailed boundaries to be set within the subsequent allocations plan. Whilst the HBF does not have any specific comments upon the broad locations at this stage it is important that the detailed boundaries are not drawn so tightly as to effectively constrain development within the southern settlements. This is particularly important given the intended role of Crewe and Nantwich within the plan strategy. The HBF would therefore like to see a commitment to leaving a development buffer, which extends beyond the plan period, within the Local Plan Strategy. This will not only provide long-term certainty and continuity but also flexibility should the plan fail to meet its needs over the full plan period.

iii. Engagement and consultation with neighbouring local authorities and other stakeholders and interested parties about the new Strategic Green Gaps Policy.

23. I refer to our previous comments within paragraph 6 above.

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