

Luton Local Plan Examination

Stage 2

Bedford Borough Council Hearing Statement in respect of Matter 7

August 2016

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Where and how the Luton's need should be met and the role of the GOS in providing guidance on this issue. (Questions 79-81)

In respect of the issue of where and how Luton's unmet need will be met, the Council welcomes the preparation of the GOS and the fact that it is now moving forward. The Council's pre submission rep (rep 1) stated that

“The pre submission draft should not prejudice the outcome of the Growth Options Study in relation to the housing capacity of Luton Borough. The submission version of the plan should therefore either await the outcome of the Growth Options Study or provide sufficient flexibility to enable the currently stated capacity of 6,700 dwellings to be adjusted to reflect its findings”.

It is understood that the study is due to conclude in October of this year. If therefore (as seems highly likely) Main Modifications are to be proposed to the plan, there will be an opportunity for the modifications to incorporate the findings of the GOS alongside the Inspector's recommendations on the issue of jobs/homes balance. If agreed a process of this kind has the potential to meet the Council's objection.

The need for an early review of the plan (Question 84)

Whilst Question 84 asks whether there should be an early review of the Plan to address any implications of the GOS the Council's view is that changes to the plan as a consequence of the GOS should not await a review, rather they should be incorporated into the plan in the course of the Main Modifications process primarily by enabling a robust estimate of the housing capacity of Luton to be included in the plan. The precise details of how need which cannot be provided for in Luton Borough will be met should be a matter for individual plans but the GOS outputs should enable the Luton Plan to clarify whether there is any expectation that any of Luton's need should be met in Bedford Borough. Bedford Borough will then be able to plan accordingly without itself having to commit to an early review of its emerging Local Plan 2035 in order to consider the need or appropriateness to make provision for any element of Luton's growth.

Scope and content of the Growth options Study (Matter 7 in general)

Bedford Borough Council has sought to cooperate with Luton and the other GOS steering group members throughout the preparation of the GOS. The Council is part of a wider reference group for the study. In principle the Council is content that this is an appropriate way for it to engage in the preparation of the study.

As a member of the wider reference group the Council was invited to comment on the methodology for the GOS. The comments which the Council made and the response from the study consultants which was received on 11th August are enclosed as appendix A.

The Council commented that

“Given the importance of delivering a balance of homes and jobs through the spatial strategy, the spatial options should include the assessment of existing employment sites and unimplemented employment allocations which could provide additional housing capacity”

The consultants responded

“For Central Bedfordshire, this will be undertaken through the Employment Land Review. It is considered that this is more likely to be an issue for consideration in the northern part of Central Bedfordshire”.

In practice therefore this response leaves the Council with an outstanding concern that the scope of the GOS excludes consideration of options relating to how housing capacity could be increased within Luton should a rebalancing of homes and jobs provision be required. This makes it all the more important that the Luton Local Plan process robustly examines this issue at this stage.

Appendix A

| Response to Reference Group comments on Luton HMA Growth Options Study methodology | | | |
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| Authorit | Section of method | Reference Group comment (July 2016) | Response (August 2016) |
| Milton Keynes | Appendix 1 | On a point of detail, in Appendix 1 (primary and secondary constraints to development), in relation to soil quality, the notes state that Grade 3a agricultural land would be a primary constraint, but Grades 1 and 2 agricultural land appear in the secondary constraints column. This would appear to be an inconsistency. | Grades 1-3 now treated as secondary constraint, as agreed at 26 May 2016 progress meeting. |
| Milton Keynes | Site assessment framework | You have mentioned the separate Green Belt Study. Do I take it that the methodology for this study has already been agreed? Otherwise, it would be interesting to see this document. | The Green Belt Methodology was circulated to neighbouring authorities for information ahead of the progress meetings held at Jordan's Mill in May 2016. To be re sent to MK |
| St Albans | Assumed density standards | 30 dph for "Extension to existing settlement" seems unduly low and does not appear to be making the best use of land...30dph is at the bottom end of the 30-50 dph range set out in the Urban Design Compendium / HCA literature and often used as a guideline. We are using 40dph as the mid-range figure for our Broad Locations. | The benchmarks in the method statement are only a starting point from which to assess density on a location-by-location basis. Taking into account the cited guidance, existing density standards in Central Bedfordshire and Luton, and the rural character of most of the study area, the benchmark net density for new settlements and extensions to existing settlements has been increased |
| Stevenage | Study aim | Have any of the commissioning authorities Luton Borough Council, Central Bedfordshire Council, Aylesbury Vale District Council and North Hertfordshire District Council been asked to consider meeting housing need arising from London? If so, how does the study propose to address this? | The Luton HMA Growth Options study focuses on supply, i.e. it identifies and assesses options with realistic capacity to help meet housing need rather than setting out a spatial strategy to meet a particular demand/need figure. In addition: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - none of the Commissioning authorities have been asked to deliver any un-met need arising from London; it is envisaged that this would be for future reviews of the respective local plans to consider, should the issue arise - existing migration patterns are reflected in the |

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| Bedford | Para 1.5 | <p>Para 1.5 states that there will be an update of the Luton and CBC SHMA in May 2016 giving revised figures for the period 2015 – 2035. Are these figures available and have they been published?</p> <p>The methodology should set out what is the intended time period for this study. Is the base date 2011 or 2015? What is the end date? Is it 2031 or 2035? If the study is to be a tool for assessing the capacity of the HMA it is important that the study makes clear the base date from which known sites and are being counted. If the study is to be a tool for estimating delivery on potential sites/locations it must make clear the period for which these completions are being forecast. If the study needs to remain flexible and enable assessment based on different start and end</p> | A joint SHMA update will be commissioned by CBC and LBC to roll forward the SHMA to cover the period up to 2035. No findings have yet been reported or published. The Luton HMA Growth Options study will assess capacity during 2015-2035. |
| Bedford | Para 1.6 | Para 1.6 states that these spatial options will be assessed. Para 1.44 describe it as a more “qualitative assessment”. What does this mean and what sort of assessment framework will be used for this? | Main focus of the assessment is the locations; no assessment framework will be used for assessment for grouping of these into spatial options; assessment of spatial options will be a discussion, drawing on the findings for the component |
| Bedford | N/A - Project brief | <p>The project brief states (para 2 and 3) that the purpose of the study is to identify growth locations within the Luton Housing Market Area to meet needs as identified in the Luton CBC SHMA.... In the event that the HMA needs cannot be accommodated within the Luton HMA, a further stage may be required to consider and recommend suitable options for meeting the HMA shortfall.</p> <p>It appears that that there has been a subtle but possibly significant shift in the task outlined in the brief and the task that the methodology describes. It is very important for neighbouring LPAs to understand whether the capacity of the Luton HMA can be accommodated within its boundaries (and by extension whether a further stage 2 study is going to be required). The Steering group meeting notes state “Study aim: Discussion over whether the housing capacity to be addressed by the Growth Options Study should be specified in the study aim. Concluded that this was not necessary - the study will identify and assess new (not „banked“ – see below) housing capacity within Luton HMA. Clear distinction required between this study which is to consider growth options for the Luton housing market area and the formal local plan process which each local authority will need to follow to spatially allocate land.” Whilst it is entirely accepted that there must be a distinction between the evidence base and the plan making process it is essential for the plan making process to move forward that the evidence base provides data and information to enables this assessment to be made – thus the need for the study to set out data in a way which at the very least illustrates the position in relation to the possible plan</p> | The purpose of the Study is to identify potential locations for large scale housing growth within the Luton HMA and then to consider/assess how much housing can realistically be delivered based upon availability, deliverability and suitability. |

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| Bedford | N/A - Project brief | <p>The project brief states that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the joint Green belt study will feed into the growth Options Study (project brief para 6) • It will be important for this study to consider FEMA work in terms of the interdependencies of jobs and housing targets including possible requirements for further housing uplift to support planned jobs in the area (project brief para 12) • Central Bedfordshire will commission a separate urban capacity study for the Luton urban area <p>It is not clear how this work will be integrated into the study methodology and this should be made clear. For example in relation to banked sites (para 1.11) there will be a need to consider whether land which either has planning permission for employment development or is allocated for this use could be better used to provide housing capacity. This should be made clear in the methodology.</p> | <p>The study method assumes as a starting point that all banked sites are part of the baseline, i.e. will be used for their allocated / permitted use. The separate Urban Capacity Study will consider if existing employment sites within Luton, Dunstable & Houghton Regis could accommodate housing instead of their allocated employment use. In relation to sites within Dunstable & Houghton Regis, CBC will consider the outcomes of the Urban Capacity Study and will revise the baseline if it is considered that banked sites that do not already have permission, could deliver more housing.</p> |
| Bedford | Paras 1.16-1.17 | <p>It is not clear how the potential capacity of the known sites will be "captured" Para 1.10 refers to the sites from SHLAAs and call for sites. How many sites of less than 100 dwellings have come forward through the call for sites and what is their potential capacity?</p> <p>There is a danger that the study will be skewed towards larger sites only. Whilst it is understood that for financial reasons the terms of the commission must define the amount of site specific work to be undertaken a spatial strategy should encompass sites of all types and the study should have a robust approach to assessing capacity from all sources not just larger sites.</p> | Luton HMA Growth Options study is not intended to define the spatial strategy, only to inform it |
| Bedford | Para 1.24 | <p>It is noted that the intention is to work with the LAs on a location by location basis to agree density</p> <p>I agree however with the comment from Chris Briggs at St Albans that further consideration should be given to the assumed densities. In addition it would be helpful if the report contained sensitivity testing of the densities applied showing the impact of the use of a</p> | See response to St Albans comment above. |

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| Bedford | Para 1.25 | <p>Table 1.4 refers to assessment of potential harm to green belt purposes.</p> <p>I would be grateful for further clarification of this part of the process. Kim Wilson emailed Josh Allen at LUC about related matters on 25 May but did not receive a reply. I would be grateful for your response.</p> <p>N.B. 25th May comment from Kim Wilson on Green Belt study method statement: <i>"In addition we would like to see further explanation of the statements in paragraphs 5.13 and 5.14 of the Method Statement, in particular why it would be premature to review smaller settlements in the Green Belt before the definition of the spatial strategy and the methodology that will be used to determine whether settlements should be washed over or inset.</i></p> <p><i>Although not necessarily a matter for you as consultants, we would like to receive further explanation of the relationship between the Green Belt Study and the Luton Housing Market Area Growth</i></p> | <p>The Luton HMA Growth Options Study will present sustainability, viability and deliverability assessment findings as well as summarising the findings of the Green Belt study for the land parcels within which assessment locations fall. It will be for the Local Plan to determine whether the exceptional circumstances required for Green Belt release exist and to consider the trade-offs likely to be involved in releasing particular locations from the Green Belt for development.</p> |
| Bedford | Para 1.40 | <p>Five spatial options are proposed to be tested.</p> <p>Given the importance of delivering a balance of homes and jobs through the spatial strategy, the spatial options should include the assessment of existing employment sites and unimplemented employment allocations which could provide additional housing capacity.</p> | <p>For Central Bedfordshire, this will be undertaken through the Employment Land Review. It is considered that this is more likely to be an issue for consideration in the northern part of Central Bedfordshire.</p> |
| Bedford | Para 1.40 | <p>Para 1.40 states that the locations are then to be assessed for inclusion in each spatial option.</p> <p>Is there a risk that in identifying only larger sites/ locations the study will remain very high level and will not be able to inform the judgement about whether the HMA capacity can be met.</p> | <p>The study scope is limited to assessing the capacity than can realistically be delivered from the assessed locations; it is not intended to provide a comprehensive picture of the capacity of all possible sites within the HMA</p> |
| Dacorum | Para 1.5 | <p>We agree with Bedford's comments on paragraph 1.5 about the time period for the study. NPPF paragraph 157 states that local plans should preferably have a 15- year time horizon. By the time the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan is in place, the remaining period to 2031 will be considerably less than 15 years. There is also a need to consider the need for safeguarded land for longer- term needs well beyond the plan period (see NPPF paragraph 85).</p> <p>It would seem appropriate for the study to reflect the period of the Luton and Central Bedfordshire SHMA Update i.e. 2015-2035 and also bear in mind the potential need for safeguarding land for longer-term needs.</p> | <p>Method statement now states that the study will assess capacity during 2015-2035.</p> <p>The need for safeguarded land is a matter for the Local Plan, informed by the Growth Options study, Green Belt study, and other evidence such as the updated SHMA and SHLAA.</p> |

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| Dacorum | Para 1.10-1.11 | <p>Dacorum has previously expressed concern that total job growth proposed by Luton (in their Pre-submission Local Plan) and Central Beds (in the now withdrawn Development Strategy) was too high in relation to housing growth, and that there appeared scope for some existing or proposed employment land to be reallocated for housing.</p> <p>Therefore, the Growth Options Study should consider the potential for housing on existing and proposed employment sites, taking account of the conclusions in the current Luton and Central Bedfordshire FEMA</p> | <p>For Central Bedfordshire, this will be undertaken through the Employment Land Review. It is considered that this is more likely to be an issue for consideration in the northern part of Central Bedfordshire.</p> |
| Dacorum | Para 1.23 | <p>We do not consider that it is appropriate to simply use the Council's existing dwelling capacity estimates for individual sites in all cases. In particular, the pattern of development in and around Luton town centre appears to be changing, with a trend towards higher densities. As a result, there may be a case to increase the estimates for some sites.</p> <p>One site where a significant increase in the dwelling estimate is probably justified is Napier Park (former Vauxhall Motors site in Kimpton Road, Luton). There is a current planning application for mixed development including 685 homes on the Napier Gateway site (part of Napier Park), to the north of Luton Airport Parkway station:</p> <p>https://planning.luton.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=07217XKG07D00</p> <p>The outline permission for Napier Park proposed over 600 homes, but no housing at Napier Gateway. If the current application is approved, it will therefore increase the number of homes permitted at Napier Park to over 1,300. The scheme includes an 18 storey apartment block, which is interesting as quite recently LBC officers were saying that high rise flats weren't</p> | <p>Previous assessments will only be used as guide. Dwelling capacity will be assessed on a location-by- location basis in discussion with the client group.</p> |
| Dacorum | Para 1.40 | <p>The only urban intensification theme proposed for testing is „urban intensification around transport hubs“. We suggest that this theme should simply be called „urban intensification“, as there may be a case for urban intensification elsewhere than around transport hubs. For example, when employment sites are redeveloped for housing. Also, it is not clear whether Dunstable town centre is regarded as a transport hub, given that it has no railway station. Either way, we consider that it should be regarded as a possible location for urban</p> | <p>Suggestion noted. Thematic spatial options will be agreed by the Steering Group later in the study.</p> |

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| Dacorum | Para 1.42 | We are not convinced by Luton's decision not to include a windfall allowance in the Luton Local Plan. In practice, there is likely to be a significant amount of windfall development in Luton over the period to 2035. We recognise that land values in Luton are relatively low, but there has been a large increase in house building close to Luton town centre over the last year or two. Many of these developments have been high density. If land values increase significantly, this could lead to a surge in high density windfall proposals, although we recognise that future trends are difficult to quantify. We also recognise the limitations on windfall allowances in the NPPF and PPG. | This is a matter for the Luton Local Plan not the Growth Options study. |
| Dacorum | Appendix 1 | Under „Soil quality“, grade 3 agricultural land should be regarded as a secondary constraint (as per column 3 in the table), not a primary constraint (as stated in column 4) | Grades 1-3 now treated as secondary constraint, as agreed at 26 May |
| Dacorum | Appendix 3 | In view of our comments on paragraph 1.5, we consider that the references to „2031“ in this appendix should be changed to „2035“. | The study will assess capacity during 2015-2035. |