

Examination of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan (2016-2036)

Representor ID 1058141

Matter 5 – Infrastructure & community facilities provision and developer contributions

Matter 14- Proposed site allocations: SOH.H9

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1. Introduction

This Statement has been produced by Cheffins Planning on behalf of a consortium of landowners which owns a potential residential development site in the district of East Cambridgeshire. The landowning consortium has responded to the draft Local Plan consultation in November 2017 and the Submission Plan consultation and wishes to add to those representations via this Hearing. It should be noted that there is no available response by the Council to any local plan representations that have been duly made. The views of the Local Planning Authority, in response, are therefore unknown at present.

2. Inspector's Questions

This Statement is concerned with four matters listed by the Inspector as Questions 2, 4, 6 and 60:

- 2 Is there appropriate certainty, and evidence that adequate levels of school, health, transport, flood water related, green, social and other infrastructure provision will be provided in a timely fashion and at appropriate suitably located accessible locations, so as to support the delivery of the growth proposed within the Local Plan?
- 4 Overall, what mechanisms will be in place to ensure essential/critical infrastructure will be provided and delivered in a timely fashion? How will other organisations be involved in delivering infrastructure and what commitments to delivery/funding and on-going maintenance are in place?
- 6 Are policies LP17 and LP18 worded in such a way so as to be effective, accurate, consistent with national policy and realistic? What is the significance, if any, of the rural nature of the district to the delivery of both policies?
- 60 Whether the proposed site allocations for the Main Settlements of Ely, Littleport and Soham are justified, effective and consistent with national policy?

3. Critique of the Submission Local Plan : Site Soham7 & SOH.H9

- 3.1 The Submission Plan allocates some 10.3ha of land south of Cherrytree Lane, West of Orchard Row, Soham for new residential development (Site Soham7). The land is allocated for some 200 dwellings and the policy also makes reference (vague reference in our view) to the provision, or *consideration*, of a new primary school on the site.
- 3.2 Generally, the Adopted Local Plan sets out clear proposals for new school facilities under Policy GROWTH 3: Infrastructure requirements (pg 29). It is helpful that such planned provision was set out in the Adopted Plan. In contrast the Submission Plan does not contain such detail and it would be helpful if this was included so as to provide certainty to all parties as to where and if possible to define when, such facilities are required. There are no land use allocations for schools in the Submission Plan, only policy references.
- 3.3 Policy GROWTH 3 is intended to be replaced by draft Policy LP16: Infrastructure to Support Growth. This is a more general policy which sets out an approach to infrastructure provision rather than identifying specific infrastructure needs.
- 3.4 From the Submission Plan, Infrastructure Investment Plan and CIL documents we have noted the following:
 - The Infrastructure Investment Plan (Nov 2017) sets out the need for expansion of 13 existing primary schools, four new primary schools and two locations where further provision is slightly unclear (Sutton & Littleport) over the plan period;
 - New primary schools at Ely, Kennett and Littleport would be sought through specific major housing allocations/permissions (IIP);
 - A new primary school at Witchford was associated with Strategic Development Site WFD.M1 (IIP) NB – this site is no longer proposed in the Submission Plan;
 - Provision at Soham is through expansion of three existing primary schools (IIP);

- The current CIL Regulation 123 list (as at 31/8/18) identifies just two education projects – ‘Strategic – Littleport Schools’ & ‘Major – Children’s Centre (serving North Ely)’; and
- Draft Local Plan Policy SOH.H9 indicates a need for a new primary school on the allocated land (Submission Plan).

It therefore appears that there are a number of inconsistencies across these sources, there is much less detail in the Submission Plan than the adopted Plan and there are few specific education proposals for new schools. Moreover, the above evidence base does not appear to justify the intent to provide a new school on this site in Soham. Is it actually needed or not and if it is, where is the evidence? The Soham Evidence Report (PS.EVR.SOH) contains no justification for the possible school proposals at Site Soham7.

4 Landowner’s Position

4.1 Although supportive of the site allocation in principle, the landowners object to the details as currently presented in draft Policy Soham 9 and associated Site Soham7 in relation to possible school provision on this site as follows:

- In respect of education matters the Plan is vague and it is unclear how an owner/applicant is to ‘consider provision of a primary school and potentially other education facilities’? This is surely a matter for the Education Authority to consider and it should be concluded via this local plan process in order to provide certainty to all parties;
- Likewise, the Plan provides no detail of what is meant by ‘other education facilities’ and this provides no useful guidance as to how the site might be developed;
- Prior to consideration of a new primary school on this site – further thought should be given to expansion of existing primary schools elsewhere in the town e.g. The Shade which appears to have room for further expansion. This is precisely what the IIP says;
- Even if a school is needed, and it appears there is no evidence to justify that, there is no indication as to the likely timing for such provision;
- It is entirely unclear as to how this site has been selected. What assessment of possible school locations has been undertaken and how was this site chosen?
- It is clearly the case that a site with capacity for development of 200 dwellings does not result in the need for a new primary school. The need for a new primary school typically requires of the order of 1,000 new dwellings. It is therefore unreasonable and inequitable to require this particular site to provide an entire primary school site when it only generates the need for approximately 20% of a primary school capacity;
- In the light of the above comment, if a primary school is to be located on this site then a mechanism needs to be defined which compensates the landowners for the ‘surplus’ provision of 80% of a primary school site. Again, the Local Plan should provide a mechanism for achieving a degree of financial equalisation across all Soham residential sites for such school site provision, if a further primary school site is necessary. This goes to the heart of Inspector’s Question 4; and
- If the primary school site is not provided on-site then the residential development capacity figure will be higher than 200 and the Plan should acknowledge this point. This is pertinent in the light of the lack of 5 year housing land supply and the Inspectors initial findings regarding total housing provision in the Submission Plan. A typical primary school site comprises up to 2ha and this area could potentially support up to an additional 60 dwellings. That is significant in housing and commercial terms.

4.2 In relation to the physical development of the site Soham7 (Question 60):

- We are unsure how the site dwelling capacity figure of 200 has been derived. For a site of over 10ha then we would normally expect a greater level of dwellings and the figure should be increased accordingly or the Plan should explain how the figure of 200 has been derived. This issue is presumably dependant on whether or not a primary school is provided on the site ? and
- With reference to Soham7 Part c, in many cases Green Lanes are not in any parties' specific ownership and therefore the ability of applicants to improve Green Lanes may be highly limited. Such lanes are also subject to the access rights of many other third parties and so improvements may well not be possible unless the Highway Authority is able to undertake such improvement schemes under its statutory powers. The Submission Policy wording needs amending in this regard.

5. Conclusions

5.1 In the light of the above it is considered that:

- I. There is a lack of certainty as to whether this particular school site (at Site Soham7) is required or not (Question 2);
- II. The evidence base does not support the provision of a school site on this site and so the draft policy is not justified nor is it realistic (Question 6); and
- III. There is no mechanism to ensure any kind of equalisation across Soham residential development sites for school site provision and therefore the approach is unsound.

We have therefore concluded that:

- This housing allocation site is supported, it is clearly deliverable and there is current interest from a national housebuilder. The concept of a primary school site seems very uncertain and it is unclear whether this is an appropriate location;
- We do not consider there is any evidence justifying school provision on this site and therefore the site capacity should be increased to 260 dwellings. In current circumstances, it must be preferable to increase housing numbers rather than continue with an uncertain concept for a school site; and
- Ultimately, if a school site is actually required, then some form of equalisation mechanism is needed. This should be set out in the Local Plan so all residential site owners are aware of the implications for their respective development sites.

6. Recommendations to the Inspector

We recommend that the Inspector requests the District Council to reconsider the wording of Policy SOH.H9 and to address the above points concerning school site provision. Our preference would be that the reference to a possible new school site is deleted.