



**East Cambridgeshire Local Plan –
Single Issue Review**
Proposed Modifications Consultation

August 2023

On behalf of **L&Q Estates Limited and Hill Residential Limited**

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 This consultation response has been prepared by Stantec on behalf of L&Q Estates and Hill Residential in relation to the Proposed Modifications Consultation of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan – Single Issue Review (SIR), which runs from 21 July to 31 August 2023.
- 1.2 This representation follows our previous comments submitted to the Regulation 18 Issues and Options in December 2020, Regulation 18 Preferred Options in February 2022, Regulation 19 Proposed Submission in May 2022 and Matters Statements of Hearing 1 in November 2022 and Hearing 2 in March 2023.

2 Consultation Response to the Proposed Modifications of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan Local – Single Issue Review (SIR)

- 2.1 The Council's (ECDC) proposed modifications seek to update the housing requirement figure and timeframe in paragraph 3.2.5 (Level of housing growth) and Policy GROWTH1 of the Local Plan 2015. The housing requirement figure would be adjusted upwards from 575 dwellings per annum (dpa) to 600 dpa and the housing requirement period would be rebased from 2011-2031 to 2022-31. This follows on from the Inspector's letter of 24 May 2023, which suggested that such modifications were, on a pragmatic basis, required to meet the tests of soundness rather than the Council's fundamentally unsound 'hybrid' approach. ECDC suggests that It also adopts the minimum uplift that is required under the standard method as a means to address past under-delivery of 2,688 dwellings against the adopted requirement. This is despite the remaining Plan period being less than 15 years for which the standard method is expected to be applied in order to address any previous shortfall.
- 2.2 The extent of housing shortfall to date in the adopted Plan is acknowledged by the Inspector as being a "significant amount" (paragraph 6 of his letter 24 May 2023) and equivalent to over four years' worth of housing supply. We would argue that this represents a clear and compelling case for a more thorough review of the housing requirement figure, as required under PPG (paragraph: 031 Ref ID: 68-031-20190722), as it cannot be assumed that the standard method will address this huge shortfall – especially with the Plan period being substantially less than 15 years (now only 7.5 years). Furthermore, it would be fundamentally unsound to rely on a future 5 year review to address any shortfall at a later point when strategic policies need to be in place over a 15 year period from adoption (para. 22 of the NPPF) and accounting for the fact that strategic growth sites require long lead in times.
- 2.3 As demonstrated in our Housing Need Assessment submitted in response to Hearing 1, there are several reasons why unconstrained housing need exceeds the standard method minimum need which ECDC has adopted as the housing requirement for the purposes of the SIR. Affordable delivery has been 14% of delivery across all tenures over the past decade. Based on 14% delivery, overall housing need would have to be over 1,800 dpa to deliver the HEDNA's calculation of need (254 affordable dwellings per annum). The NPPF does not necessarily require that affordable housing need must be met in full, but this must be considered in the context of PPG which states that "An increase in the total housing figures included in the plan may need to be considered where it could help deliver the required number of affordable homes" (Paragraph:024 Reference ID: 2a-024-20190220).
- 2.4 PPG Paragraph 010 (ID 2a-010-20201216) advises how higher need will be looked upon favourably. We therefore consider that the decision not to explore other circumstances that may warrant an increase to the unconstrained assessment of need to conflict with PPG. Accordingly, ECDC should undertake a full assessment of unconstrained housing **need** as an entirely separate exercise from establishing a requirement, in line with PPG. There are clear reasons why unconstrained housing need exceeds the standard method minimum need and why the adoption of the standard method at 600dpa does not meet the tests of soundness.
- 2.5 There is also an implicit assumption in the proposed modifications - with the inclusion of the deliverable dwellings graph - that 600dpa is achievable. Whilst it is not the remit of the SIR to determine the robustness of the housing supply, there is a need to determine whether the revised housing requirement figure is achievable and therefore 'sound'. This has already been tested at appeal whereby the Inspector at Land to the North East of Broad Piece, Soham (ref. APP/V0510/W/21/3282449) found previous shortfalls in delivery against the plan requirements as indicative of allocations not meeting housing needs and giving rise to serious doubts over

the soundness of the locational strategy.

2.6 The Council's latest trajectory in the proposed modifications expects housing delivery to be consistently above 600dpa (and double this in 2023/24 i.e. now, amongst the current financial uncertainty) without any robust evidence of this having been tested against market conditions and whether the Plan's locational strategy is still fit for purpose. The housing requirement figure is therefore fundamentally unsound as there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate its deliverability over the plan period.

2.7 The proposed modifications also confuse the main construct of the Local Plan and its objectives, which is a point the Council has already acknowledged in its response to the Inspectors initial questions (Q6) (EX.LA03(A)) where it states:

*“Re-basing the start date of the Local Plan to, say 2022, when the LHN assessment figures are utilised would be incredibly confusing, and **would require widescale changes elsewhere in the Plan in order for the plan as a whole to ‘make sense’ and read coherently.** There appears no benefit in bringing the start date of the Plan forward. For example, it would not alter the forward looking housing requirement figure.”*

2.8 The employment, housing and retail growth strategies in the adopted Local Plan are all based over a 2011-2031 period to ensure that the right level of housing can help to support economic growth, meet local housing needs and facilitate the delivery of infrastructure. The proposed re-basing of the housing requirement figure to 2022-31 would stand in stark contrast to these timeframes – the implications of which have not been fully tested in the SIR's sustainability appraisal (SA). In fact, this option was not even considered as a reasonable alternative option, as the Council saw no benefits in doing so and consequently there is no evidence of the new modified approach having been fully tested through the SA process, contrary to paragraph 32 of the NPPF. This approach also fails to follow PPG (Paragraph:018 Reference ID: 11-018-20140306), which advises that SAs need to consider and compare all reasonable alternatives as the plan evolves and ensure that any revised proposals take into account the appraisal findings.

2.9 Whilst housing needs prior to 2022 are now 'historic', the overall growth strategies in the Local Plan are built on the premise of meeting 11,500 homes and 9,200 jobs and allocating sufficient land and infrastructure to meet this need in a sustainable way. The proposed modifications will result in a much lower housing requirement of c.9,000 homes rather than the 11,500 homes originally planned for. The housing requirement in the district has only gone up over time and affordability has generally worsened as evidenced in the median workplace-based affordability ratio, which increased from 7.92 in 2011 to 10.58 in 2022. It therefore makes no logical sense for the plan review process to result in a reduction in the housing requirement over the totality of the plan period. This also presents inconsistency with paragraph 61 of the NPPF as the standard method has not been applied over the Plan period (2011-31) and no exceptional circumstances have been put forward by the Council to justify an alternative approach.

Conclusion

2.10 **The proposed modifications do not meet the tests of soundness for the following reasons:**

- Policy GROWTH1 is a strategic policy and will not look ahead over the next 15 years from adoption of the Plan and is therefore **inconsistent** with paragraph 22 of the NPPF.
- The rebased housing requirement stands in stark contrast to the timeframes that underpin other key objectives and strategies of the adopted Plan such as employment retail and infrastructure needs. The SA has not assessed the implications of this change

on the wider objectives and strategies of the adopted Plan and, consequently, the proposed modifications are **inconsistent** with paragraph 32 of the NPPF.

- The adoption of the minimum standard method figure as the housing requirement figure will not address the previous significant shortfall in housing delivery, as the rebased Plan period will be substantially less than 15 years and is **inconsistent** with paragraph 22 of the NPPF. The resulting housing requirement figure for the Plan period 2011-31 will be substantially less than the adopted Plan and will be in conflict with paragraph 61 of the NPPF whereby the standard method has not been applied over the Plan period and no exceptional circumstances have been presented to justify an alternative approach.
- The Council has not fully considered the housing needs evidence that we and others have presented to the examination that points to a higher housing requirement figure. This is of particular concern with the affordable housing shortfall in the area. As a result, the SIR process has not fully considered the advice in PPG (Paragraph 024; Reference ID: 2a-024-20190220 and Paragraph 010; ID 2a-010-20201216) and is **not justified**.
- The modifications are **not effective**, as the indicative housing delivery figures over the remaining Plan period are overly optimistic compared to evidence of past delivery rates in the district. Additionally, the ability of the current locational strategy to meet the revised housing requirement figure, let alone the current adopted figure, is in serious doubt as evidenced in the Soham appeal case.