

East Cambridgeshire Local Plan – SIR – Examination Hearings

ECDC Opening Statement – 8 November 2022

First, a very warm welcome to everyone here today.

Inspector, whilst I can't promise you that this will be one of your most exciting examinations, and certainly not as interesting as the one you are undertaking at Bath and North East Somerset which is getting quite a following from planning practitioners, the proposed update to the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan is an important update, and I look forward to a healthy discussion on it over the next two days.

I will be leading the hearings on behalf of the Council, with assistance from my colleague, Harj Kumar, as and when necessary.

By way of background, I am the Council's strategic planning manager, and have been so (at least on a part time basis) since early 2015 which, as you'll recall, was when the current adopted plan was in its very final administrative stages towards adoption.

I've led on a number of Local Plan hearings over many years, and, as I think you might be aware, I'm involved in the more comprehensive hearing sessions starting next week in Central Lincolnshire; hence, my particular interest in your other examination.

So, why did I say at the start of my opening statement that this East Cambridgeshire plan update is an important one?

It's important, because the policy in question is out of date. We acknowledge it is out of date, and appeal Inspector's have agreed it is out of date.

It therefore needs updating, and that is what we have proposed.

I'm well aware of representations, which no doubt will be repeated today, saying a much fuller update of the Plan should have been done.

I agree that a fuller update **could** have been done. But the Council decided, based on the evidence, that it was not necessary. That decision is for the Council, and for the Council alone. I respect the views of others, with such views suggesting an alternative approach. But equally, such representors should respect the fact that it is up to the Council, and the Council alone, what path it chooses for updating its Plan. If that means just a single policy is proposed to be updated, then that means just a single policy is to be examined. Your guidance notes correctly make that clear.

The policy proposed to be updated is an important one.

It forms the basis for strategic planning in the area. Indeed, some argue, including Inspector Boniface in Feb 2022 (Appeal Ref: APP/V0510/W/21/3282449), that because GROWTH 1 is out of date, it follows other policies might well be out of date; and for Inspector Boniface he determined that because GROWTH 1 is out of date, GROWTH 2 and GROWTH 4 must also be out of date (or at least must be out of date in the market town of Soham).

But, the same logic would also dictate that, by bringing GROWTH 1 back up to date will also bring GROWTH 2 and GROWTH 4 up to date, provided that GROWTH 2 and GROWTH 4 remain consistent with an updated GROWTH 1. That would be a fair reading of Inspector Boniface's decision.

GROWTH 1 is also important for other reasons, none more so than it forms the basis for assessing national annual tests, such as Five Year Land Supply and Housing Delivery Tests.

I'm sure everyone in this room has spent a good deal of their life arguing one way or the other whether a Five Year Land Supply is demonstrated or not.

And one way of reducing such debate, and using such time for arguably better purposes, is for a local planning authority to have an up to date Housing Requirement clearly set out in its Plan.

That is what this Plan update proposes to do. Simple change, but effective.

So, this plan update may only be small in content, and these hearing sessions may only be short in length, but I do not underestimate the importance of the proposed change, and the importance to East Cambridgeshire of bringing up to date its housing requirement.

And so, finally, and briefly, I turn to the housing requirement figure proposed. Of course, we will discuss this in detail, but in short, the Council's position is clear.

It has followed national policy.

It has accurately updated the need.

It has not seen any 'exceptional circumstances' requiring it to deviate from the national standard method.

It has established an updated housing requirement.

It has presented the updated requirement clearly, for the benefit of future decision makers.

And it has demonstrated an extremely healthy supply of homes to meet that updated requirement, both in the plan period, and beyond the plan period – about 16 years' worth.

In fact, the supply identified is of such a scale it will lead to a dwelling stock growth rate in East Cambridgeshire well in excess of 2% a year, almost double the 1.2% growth rate required nationally to hit the 300,000 home target government has set. We not just meeting our fair share; we're almost doubling it.

We are a pro-growth district, and this remains a pro-growth plan.

So, in the Council's view, the submitted plan is a small, but sensible and effective update, for the benefit of decision makers. And after listening to contributions today and tomorrow, the Council hopes you will agree likewise.

Thank you

[Richard Kay, Strategic Planning Manager, ECDC]