



HEARING STATEMENT

Examination of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan – Single Issue Review

On behalf of:
Castlemore Homes

In respect of:
Matter 2: Provision for Housing (continued)

Date:
March 2023

Document Reference:
GA/DJ/01322/S0003

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Hearing Statement has been prepared on behalf of our client Castlemore Homes in respect of **Matter 2: Provision for Housing (continued)** of the Inspector’s Further Matters, Issues and Questions for the Examination of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan – Single Issue Review published on 17 February 2023. This Statement is intended to assist the Inspector’s consideration of the soundness of the Plan and will form the basis of our points for discussion at the examination hearing sessions.

2.0 Issue: Are the proposed amendments to Policy GROWTH1 and the explanatory text of the Plan positively prepared, clear, justified and consistent with national policy and will they be effective?

Housing requirement

Q.1 The Council suggest that the housing requirement for the Plan set out in Policy GROWTH1 would be based on the minimum local housing need calculated using the standard method, to cover the period 2022 to 2031. Would the resulting housing requirement of 600 dwellings per annum derived from the minimum local housing need be sound?

- 2.1 No. For a start, the application of the standard method is based on the principle that plans look ahead over a minimum of 15 years (see response to question 2). The housing requirement is therefore unsound as it would not be applied for a minimum of 15 years.
- 2.2 We also consider that the housing requirement would be unsound as it does not include an uplift for affordable housing delivery. We note the Inspector’s conclusion at paragraph 26 of his letter to the Council dated 14th December 2022 (i.e. that increasing the housing requirement figure to increase affordable housing delivery would not be deliverable and therefore not effective) but this conclusion was reached with respect to increasing the housing requirement for the whole plan period (2011-2031) including under provision and not with respect to increasing it just for the rebased period (2022-2031) that ignores past under provision. If the Inspector finds that the rebased period is sound (contrary to our position set out below) then we consider that the need for an affordable housing uplift must be reconsidered. The current proposal put forward by the Council is to rebase their housing requirement for the remaining 9 years of the plan period such that the housing requirement would be 5,400 dwellings against which the Council identify a supply of 7,371 [see Modification Ref: 7A]. An increase in the rebased housing requirement is therefore clearly deliverable.

- 2.3 As set out in our previous Hearing Statement [Ref: EX.HS06.R21], there is substantive evidence to demonstrate that there should be an adjustment to the minimum housing requirement to help deliver affordable housing as per the advice in the PPG (Paragraph: 024 Reference ID: 2a-024-20190220). The Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA, 2013) identifies a need for 176 net affordable dwellings per annum (dpa), against which just 479 were delivered during the first 10 years of the plan period (i.e. just 27% of the 1,760 requirement for 10 years). By contrast total housing delivery met 52% of total housing need during this period (3,018 dwellings from a housing requirement of 5,750). This demonstrates a need for an increase in market housing delivery to help deliver required affordable homes. Furthermore, as set out in ECDC's response to the Inspector's initial questions (EX.LA03, Q7), the latest SHMA (2021) identifies an increased need for 254 affordable dwellings per annum. In accordance with the PPG (ID: 2a-024), an increase in total housing figures is therefore justified to help deliver the required number of affordable homes.
- 2.4 The Council forecasts that it can deliver 7,371 dwellings during the rebased period. This level of delivery would ensure an increase in affordable housing delivery, but this increase can only be relied upon if it forms part of the housing requirement as without this there is no mechanism for other sites to come forward if allocated/committed sites fail to deliver (i.e. the Council's 5 year supply would be based on the lower housing requirement). Should the Inspector find the rebased plan period sound, we therefore consider that the housing requirement for this period should be 7,371 dwellings. This figure is deliverable and therefore effective.

Strategic Policy

Q.2 It is suggested that Policy GROWTH1, in respect of the delivery of housing, should be amended so that it would cover the period 2022 to 2031. Would the amended Policy be justified, positively prepared, effective and consistent with national policy? If not, how should the proposed Policy be amended to make it sound?

- 2.5 We consider that the amended policy would be unsound as it would not be justified, positively prepared nor consistent with national policy.
- 2.6 The NPPF clearly states that it must be read as a whole [paragraph 3]. Strategic policies should therefore be both informed by a local housing need assessment [paragraph 61] and look ahead over a minimum 15 year period [paragraph 22]. To amend a strategic policy so that it complies with one requirement of national policy whilst ignoring another requirement is clearly inappropriate and therefore unjustified and inconsistent with national policy.

- 2.7 More fundamentally, the Councils approach is not positively prepared. The Council's Examination Topic Paper (Ref: EX.LA11) claims that the Council's approach is sound as it would "put in place a plan-led system for East Cambridgeshire". This couldn't be further from the truth as the Council has sought every opportunity over the last few years to avoid producing a positive plan to meet the district's needs.
- 2.8 The East Cambridgeshire Local Plan (2015) was considered by the Council to require updating almost as soon as it was adopted (primarily due to its housing allocations being undeliverable) and a new Local Plan was submitted for examination in February 2018 to resolve these issues. This new Local Plan was then withdrawn from examination in February 2019 to avoid it being found unsound as the Council were unwilling to accept the Inspector's suggested modifications. The Council's decision in this regard was influenced by the new NPPF and the introduction of the standard methodology. This meant that they only had to wait a year before their adopted plan was 5 years old at which point they could calculate their 5 year supply against their local housing need (i.e. removing the requirement to consider past under provision which would have prevented them from being able to demonstrate of a 5 year supply for years to come). This situation provided ample opportunity for the Council to prepare a full review of their Local Plan to ensure a deliverable supply of housing to meet local needs, but instead they took the decision to seek to avoid making any difficult strategic decisions on future development by putting forward a Single Issue Review that would allow the failed 2015 Local Plan to remain up to date despite its clear failure to meet the district's needs. The Single Issue Review would not put in place a plan led system, it would prop-up a failed plan and allow the Council to continue to ignore the need for positive strategic planning. This is not a sound approach.
- 2.9 The only way to make the proposed policy sound would be to undertake a full review of the Local Plan to cover a minimum 15 year period.

Delivery shortfall in the adopted plan period to date

Q.3 There is a shortfall in the delivery of housing in the current plan period to April 2022 of 2,688 dwellings against the adopted requirement. The Planning Practice Guidance is clear that the standard method (for calculating minimum local housing need) identifies the minimum uplift that will be required and therefore it is not a requirement to specifically address under-delivery separately, as the affordability adjustment is applied to take account of past under-delivery. The Council's suggestion to rebase housing need to 2022 and for the housing requirement in Policy GROWTH1 to be amended so that it covers the period 2022 to 2031, rather than commencing in 2011, would address the existing shortfall to April 2022. Would this be sound?

- 2.10 No. NPPF paragraph 23 states that "*Strategic policies should provide a clear strategy for bringing sufficient land forward, and at a sufficient rate, to address objectively assessed needs over the plan period*". The proposed amendment would rebase the housing requirement to 2022, but the overall plan period would remain unchanged. The only way to amend the plan period would be to undertake a full review of the plan to include other development requirements (e.g. employment/retail growth). Rebasing the housing requirement to 2022 would not address the housing requirement for the plan period (i.e. 2011-2031). It is a fundamentally unsound approach that it not consistent with national policy.

Main Modifications

Q.4 The Council has suggested an updated schedule of Main Modifications (EX.LA11).

Are the suggested Main Modifications necessary for soundness?

- 2.11 No. The proposed main modifications are not sound as they are not positive, justified or consistent with national policy.