



Hart District Local Plan: Strategy and Sites

Matter 12 The Environment: Response to Questions

Hallam Land Management Limited

25 October 2018

Introduction

Urban Wilderness Ltd (UW) has been appointed by Hallam Land Management Ltd (HLM) to provide representation with regard to the potential site allocation of land to the north of Deptford Lane, North Warnborough, providing answers to the Inspector's questions, as set out below.

12.5 Is Policy NBE2 justified and consistent with national policy?

1. Paragraph 158 of the NPPF, March 2012, states that *"Each local planning authority should ensure that the Local Plan is based on adequate, up-to-date and relevant evidence about the economic, social and environmental characteristics and prospects of the area"*. Policy NBE2 is not derived from 'adequate' and 'relevant evidence' regarding the 'environmental characteristics and prospects of the area' and is therefore not consistent with national policy.
2. A local gap was previously proposed between North Warnborough and Greywell within a consultation version of the Odiham and North Warnborough Neighbourhood Plan, thereby extending an existing gap designation between North Warnborough and Odiham. The Independent Examiner assessing the Neighbourhood Plan concluded that. *"Taking account of all the information I conclude that there is insufficient evidence or other information presented in the Plan to justify the designation of an additional Local Gap. At the same time, there is no evidence presented on the extent to which Policies RUR2 and 3 of the Local Plan are insufficient to control development outside the identified settlement boundaries"*. Accordingly the made Neighbourhood Plan does not include such a designation. It is incumbent on the Council to bring forward new and additional evidence therefore to justify this "second attempt".
3. RUR2 and RUR3 are current Saved Policies associated with the Hart Local Plan (1996-2006), providing control for development in the open countryside. RUR2 states that *"development in the open countryside, outside the defined settlement boundaries, will not be permitted unless the local planning authority is satisfied that it is specifically provided for by other policies in the local plan, and that it does not have a significant detrimental effect on the character and setting of the countryside by virtue of its siting, size and prominence in the landscape"*. Policy RUR2 offers further detail on what would constitute an acceptable development including that *"The countryside is protected and maintained through the retention, creation or enhancement of features of nature conservation or landscape importance"*.
4. Policy NBE1 from the emerging Local Plan also deals with Development in the Countryside. The introduction to the policy sets out an intention *"to maintain the existing open nature of the countryside, protect and enhance rural landscape character, prevent the coalescence of settlements and resist the encroachment of inappropriate development into rural areas. The countryside is therefore subject to a more restrictive policy approach, recognising its intrinsic character and beauty. There should be good reasons to site new development in the countryside and development will not be permitted that would be better situated in an urban location or which contributes little to the benefit of the countryside, or where the benefits to the countryside are greatly outweighed by the harm"*. The policy itself describes a limited

range of development proposals that would be supported within the countryside. Therefore, it is clear that the emerging policy would, similar to RUR2 and RUR3, afford control for development in the open countryside, as the Examiner recorded within the original judgement in respect of the Neighbourhood Plan proposal.

5. Despite the comments of the Inspector, the Submission Version of the draft Hart Local Plan included policy NBE2, allocating Gaps between Settlements, and the allocation remains. No new, adequate, or relevant evidence has been presented to justify this policy.
6. The Topic Paper: Gaps between Settlements, sits within the Local Plan examination library and makes up part of the evidence base for the emerging Hart District Local Plan. The document specifically attempts to set out justification for Policy NBE2, as a policy intended to prevent coalescence between settlements.
7. Paragraph 17 of the paper proposes a need for Gaps, stating that *“there is a risk through further development, the separate identity of settlements could be lost through physical or visual coalescence”*. This issue was identified in the Hart Landscape Character Assessment, 1997, which noted that *“Coalescence of settlements and the development of continuous urban sprawl is a real threat in some areas and separation needs to be maintained through the maintenance of important countryside ‘gaps’”*.
8. Appendix 14 provides an ‘*Assessment of the potential North Warnborough to Greywell Gap*’, in part summarising an assessment prepared by Adams Hendry Consulting Limited, which leads to conclusions made by the Local Authority.
9. The assessment is paraphrased and states *“Only a small section of the site adjoins the settlement boundary and development of the site would result in a significant extension of North Warnborough towards Greywell. Although it would be subject to the detailed layout, it is considered that development of the site would erode the existing gap and could give rise to settlement coalescence”*.
10. This assessment leads the Local Authority to conclude that, *“A new Local Gap between North Warnborough and Greywell is justified. Both settlements have their own character and identity and north of Deptford Lane, are separated by a single open field in agricultural use. The field is the subject of development pressures, being promoted for housing through the SHLAA, albeit the promoters submissions indicate that some open land would be retained to prevent the physical coalescence of settlements. Given this pressure for development, and the open nature of the field north of Deptford Lane, it is considered that a Gap designation is necessary”*.

Extract of Figure 1, taken from the Topic Paper, showing the proposed extent of the North Warnborough/ Greywell Gap in the Hart Local Plan



11. In criticism of the assessment and subsequent conclusion, it is first worth noting that within *“The Adams Hendry Site Assessment Methodology Report”*, dated June 2017, it is stated that *“the high-level assessments were entirely desk-based”*.
12. Within the section ‘Landscape’ there is a summary assessment which states, *“Due to the openness and flat topography of the site, long distance views are likely to be possible from places along Deptford Road and Tunnel Lane, and possibly further afield. There is potential for development of the site to result in visual impact on the surrounding uses and consideration will need to be given to measures that will reduce this impact”*.
13. Within the section ‘Summary of Opportunities’, the site is described as having *“the potential for a significant level of residential development”*. The section *“Focus of further assessment, should the site be shortlisted by the Council”*, includes the statement, *“The ability for the proposal to address the potential visual impact of the development will also need to be investigated”*.
14. These statements assert the potential of the site to accommodate development, whilst also, more importantly reinforcing the fact that only a desk based study has been completed on behalf of the council to inform their policy decision. The visual influence of the site and its relationship with its

surroundings, including the settlements of Greywell and North Warnborough have clearly not been established by the assessment. A verdict on the necessity of a gap between settlements, to prevent their “*physical or visual coalescence*” cannot be reasonably justified from such a review. Furthermore, the assessment itself did not recommend designating the site as a gap.

15. The conclusion derived from the assessment that a new Local Gap between North Warnborough and Greywell is required, is not borne from “*adequate*” evidence. The assessment noted that development of the site “*could give rise to settlement coalescence*” (our emphasis), but should an application come forward, it would be possible to control development through other policies, including, NBE1 Development in the Countryside, and NBE3 Landscape. NBE1, as described earlier seeks to “*to maintain the existing open nature of the countryside, protect and enhance rural landscape character, prevent the coalescence of settlements and resist the encroachment of inappropriate development into rural areas*”, whilst adherence to NBE3 would ensure that development would only be supported where there would be no adverse impact to “*particular qualities identified within the relevant landscape character assessments and relevant guidance*”, and the “*visual amenity and the scenic quality of the landscape*”. To determine the impact of a proposed development upon these elements, a submission would be judged with regard to a Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment, in accordance with convention and industry guidance, without the need for a separate gap policy.
16. In our view, policy NBE1 and NBE3 provide a suitably robust protection to the identity of the two settlements. Further policy relating specifically to gap is unwarranted; adding no benefit, whilst placing further restriction on land that could reasonably come forward for development, subject to the terms of NBE1 and NBE3.

12.6 Is Policy NBE2 effective, insofar, that the boundaries of the gaps are indicative? How would a planning application be considered against them if they are only considered to be indicative?

17. In our professional opinion Policy NBE2 and the designation of a local gap is superfluous to other policies proposed for the control of development in the countryside, namely NBE1 and NBE3. The answer set out to question 12.5 justifies the removal of the gap policy in this context, as it is neither justified or warranted.

12.7 Is the reliance on a subsequent development plan document or neighbourhood plans to identify the precise boundaries of the gaps justified?

18. The gap is superfluous to other policies proposed for controlling development in the countryside, namely NBE1 and NBE3. The answer set out to question 12.5 justifies the removal of the gap policy in this context, as it is neither justified or warranted.

12.8 Is each of the identified gaps and its indicative boundary justified?

19. In our view each of the gaps identified and their indicative boundaries are not justified. As discussed within the response to question 12.5, the principle for a gap is not compelling, given that there are other policies proposed that would effectively control future development in accordance with the objectives of policy NBE2; namely policies NBE1 and NBE3.
20. Furthermore, the Warnborough to Greywell Gap is founded on evidence that is not “*adequate*” and therefore does not accord with national policy. As described, the assessment prepared by Adams Hendry Consulting Limited, informing the proposed policy and allocation, was limited to a desk based study. The study did not establish the visual influence of the site nor its relationship with its surroundings,

including the settlements of Greywell and North Warnborough, nor did it preclude development as unacceptable. The assessment therefore could not provide an acceptable knowledge base to advise whether such an allocation would be desirable, nor an informed definition to its boundaries, should an allocation be determined as theoretically beneficial. There is no evidence within the topic paper to define a gap requirement in this location or the extent shown by the indicative boundary.

21. Urban Wilderness visited the site and its context on the 18th October 2018, to appraise the interrelationship between the two. The site for which our client has an interest forms part of a larger buffer between the two settlements, which also includes grassland and scattered trees, the heavily vegetated Basingstoke Canal and farmland defined by mature hedgerows and specimen trees. Cumulatively, these areas provided a significant and clear separation between concentrations of urban form and ensured limited views between Greywell and North Warnborough.

Photo taken from south east of site, with view towards Greywell



Photo taken from north east of site, with view towards Greywell



22. It is certain that undeveloped land between the settlements is necessary to maintain the distinctive identity of each, however, it is clear that even a substantially reduced corridor of green space could be achieved without prejudicing this objective, owing to scale of existing development, the distance between the villages and the intervening vegetation and topography across the area. It is worth noting that the gap to the south of North Warnborough performs the function of maintaining physical and visual separation to Odiham, whilst being considerably smaller than the gap proposed between North Warnborough and Greywell. To determine the appropriate size and configuration of any buffer between settlements, it would be necessary to have regard to the nature of the intervening land and the intervisibility between

settlements, i.e. their physical and perceived separation, together with consideration for the character of any potential development.

23. In conclusion, we do not deem the currently proposed gap allocation to be warranted, as any application could be judged on its merits in accordance with the proposed countryside and landscape policies (NBE1 and NBE3), which similarly seek to protect the countryside and to prevent coalescence.
24. Notwithstanding this point, the definition for the proposed allocation does not appear commensurate to the scale of the settlements for which it is providing separation, especially given the characteristics of the intervening landscape. In our view an appropriate landscape buffer could be observed in order to maintain the integrity and individual identity of the neighbouring settlements whilst enabling the delivery of housing of an appropriate scale and mix to come forward in order to meet identified housing need.

12.9 Is the methodology used in the Topic Paper to consider the gaps robust?

25. No the methodology used within the Topic Paper is not considered robust. As described within the answer to question 12.5, the assessment prepared by Adams Hendry Consulting Limited, used to inform both the principle of the gap policy and the allocation of its indicative boundaries, was solely desk based and does not in our view provide adequate information on which to make these decisions. The visual influence of the site and its relationship with its surroundings, including the settlements of Greywell and North Warnborough was not clearly established by the assessment and therefore a verdict on the necessity of a gap between settlements and/or the configuration of a gap, to prevent their *“physical or visual coalescence”* cannot be reasonably justified from such a review.

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