

**Statement in Response to the
Inspector's Matters and Issues
for Examination:**

**Matter 9 Economic
Development**

Eversley Storage®

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CHARTERED TOWN PLANNERS

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 On behalf of our client, Greenfords Ltd [®], trading as Eversley Storage [®], we set out additional representations in response to the Inspector's Matter 9 which sets out a list of issues to be considered further for the Examination into the Hart District Local Plan. We are only replying to those questions which are of relevance to our client's site and have, as requested, kept our responses concise and relevant.
- 1.2 Our client owns the Eversley Storage [®] site on Brickhouse Hill, Fleet Road, Eversley, RG27 0PY, which is a long established and successful storage business, employing local people. As well as the existing site, our client also owns additional land (which wraps around the existing site), which is included within the area proposed for allocation under Policy ED2: Employment-land.
- 1.3 We confirm that we currently wish to attend the Examination hearing session on Matter 9.



2 RESPONSE TO MATTER 9

POLICY ED1

- 2.1 **Question 9.3.** Is Policy ED1 positively prepared and are each of its criteria justified?
- 2.2 **Question 9.4.** Is criterion d) justified, insofar that it requires an ‘overriding’ need to be demonstrated?
- 2.3 **Question 9.5.** To be effective, should Policy ED1 at criteria a) refer to the Policies Map?

RESPONSE TO MATTERS RAISED ON POLICY ED1

- 2.4 Firstly, we consider that policy ED1 is positively prepared to some extent in that it does support the provision of employment in some cases. We are particularly supportive of criterion a) which sets out a positive approach to employment proposals within Locally Important Employment Sites. This is particularly relevant to our client’s site which is proposed to be allocated as a Locally Important Employment Site. This allocation gives greater certainty to our client as to what will be acceptable within the boundaries of his site, therefore giving more certainty to enable the long-term plans of the business. The policy is consistent with paragraph 19 of the 2012 NPPF which sets out that the planning system should do “...everything it can to support sustainable economic growth”.
- 2.5 We note that as the Local Plan is being prepared under the transitional arrangements, it has to show conformity with national policy as set out within the National Planning Policy Framework of 2012, rather than the updated NPPF of 2018. Both versions of the NPPF are clear about the need for planning policies to support business development by providing a clear and positive policy environment.
- 2.6 Paragraph 21 of the 2012 NPPF seeks to ensure a positive environment for investment in business which is not “...over-burdened by the combined requirements of planning policy expectations”. National Policy as set out in the 2018 NPPF has remained consistent in this regard. Paragraph 80 of the NPPF 2018 sets out that “Planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt”. Paragraph 82 of the 2018 NPPF goes on to set out that “Planning policies and decisions should recognise and address the specific locational requirements of different sectors”, going on to specifically refer to storage and distribution operations.



- 2.7 We have assessed that criterion d) of the policy is overly restrictive. This cross refers to both Policy ED3 (The Rural Economy) and Policy NBE1 (Development in the Countryside). There is no need to cross refer to other policies in this way as the Local Plan should be read as a whole. Additionally, the need to demonstrate an ‘overriding’ need for the development is more restrictive than national policy set out within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- 2.8 The NPPF (2012 - paragraph 28) sets out a positive approach to ‘sustainable new development’ in rural areas to promote a strong rural economy continuing that local plans should “support the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business and enterprise in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings”. There is no requirement to demonstrate an ‘overriding need’ for the development, therefore the policy is seeking to add an overly prescriptive requirement which goes beyond that required by national policy. This proposed criterion therefore represents an element of unsoundness as it is not justified nor consistent with national policy.
- 2.9 In response to the Inspector’s question 9.5, we agree that ED1, criteria a) should cross refer to the Policies Map which delineates the boundaries of strategic and locally important employment sites. This would add spatial clarity to the policy and give more certainty to applicants and development control officers about what should be permitted and where.



POLICY ED2

- 2.10 **Question 9.7:** Is the approach of Policy ED2 to safeguarding Local Employment Sites justified and consistent with national policy?
- 2.11 **Question 9.8:** Are criteria a) to d) in Policy ED2 justified and consistent with national policy?
- 2.12 **Question 9.9:** Is each employment site and its boundary set out within Policy ED2 justified and based on robust evidence?
- 2.13 **Question 9.10:** To be effective, should Policy ED2 refer to the Policies Map?
- 2.14 **Question 9.11:** Is a 6-month marketing period set out within Paragraph 224 justified?

RESPONSE TO MATTERS RAISED ON POLICY ED2

- 2.15 Yes, the general approach of policy ED2 to safeguarding local employment sites is justified and consistent both with national policy and with the Council's own evidence base. The policy is in conformity with the NPPF from 2012 which has, as one of the key strands, building a strong competitive economy, and supporting economic growth through the planning system. Paragraph 28 of the NPPF (2012) states that local plans should "support the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business and enterprise in rural areas". This wording is also included in the 2018 NPPF paragraph 83 (a).
- 2.16 Allocating locally important employment areas is a response to the forecast needs of the local economy of the District over the period 2014-2032 which are identified within the Employment Land Review (ELR) 2016, as well as the ongoing pressure for office to residential conversion. The ELR looked at the Functional Economic Area (FEA) for Hart/Rushmoor/Surrey Heath as a whole, identifying the likely needs of the local economy over this period, specifically for the B class sectors.
- 2.17 The NPPF and its supporting Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) is clear that Plans should assess future needs and opportunities for their area through the preparation of an evidence base, and then seek to address the issues raised through draft policies. The ELR provides the detailed evidence to justify the policy. The policy is therefore sound in this regard as it is responding to the evidence base by setting out a clear policy direction for the location of employment land across the plan period.



- 2.18 We consider that criterion a) to c) are justified and consistent with national policy. They give an element of flexibility within the Locally Important Employment Areas which is in accordance with national policy in the NPPF from 2012 (para 22) which states that planning policies should avoid the long-term protection of sites, review land allocations regularly and treat applications for alternative uses on their merits. We have concerns regarding criterion d), criteria a) to c) cover the appropriate economic matters to be considered through any planning application. Criterion d) is unclear in its intent and looks as if it is seeking to cover matters which would be better explored through the usual weighing up of a planning application.
- 2.19 In response to the Inspector's question 9.9, we support that the full extent of our client's site, Eversley Storage[®] including the 2.04 hectares of expansion land, is now correctly delineated on the Proposals Map, which will enable the business to continue to expand. As set out within our responses to both the Regulation 18 Local Plan during 2017 and the Regulation 19 Local Plan during 2018, the business has been operating for thirty years and historic occupancy rates for the site exceed the South East and UK averages for the type of business. Importantly, their occupancy rates also exceed the optimal occupancy rates and therefore expansion of the business is important to avoid instances in which the company has to turn away new business, which has regularly occurred. This clearly impacts on both the business but also on Hart's economy, available business activity ultimately being lost to alternative facilities located outside of Hart. The allocation of the full extent of the site will allow the business to expand appropriately and avoid instances of the company losing new business to competitors.
- 2.20 Our response to the Regulation 19 version of the Local Plan Review, sets out the support that our client's site gives to micro firms which employ fewer than ten people. Micro firms make up a high proportion of our client's customer base, meaning that Eversley Storage[®] helps to support and enable local economic diversity.
- 2.21 We agree (question 9.10) that in order to be effective, policy ED2 should cross-refer to the Policies Map, the role of which is to illustrate geographically the application of relevant policies. We also agree that a 6-month marketing period is justified as the evidence summarised in the Employment Sites Topic Paper sets out that the employment land position is relatively tight across the District, taking the Plan period as a whole. The marketing is therefore necessary to demonstrate that there is no longer a demand for a site. We consider that 6-months of marketing is not an overly prescriptive requirement.



2.22 Whilst the Inspector does not ask a specific question about paragraph 218 of the Local Plan, which refers to the potential to remove permitted development rights, the Inspector does ask a question about the current status of the Article 4 Direction (question 9.2). We have previously expressed concern over this matter as we do not consider that the proposed Article 4 Direction is a justified or effective approach in terms of the tests of soundness. It also conflicts with the principles of national policy as the NPPF (2012) paragraph 22 discourages the long-term protection of sites allocated for employment use where there is no reasonable prospect of a site being used for that purpose. This matter should therefore be more appropriately left to market signals, as set out earlier in the policy (criterion b).



POLICY ED3

- 2.23 **Question 9.13:** Is Policy ED3 and each of its criteria justified and consistent with national policy?
- 2.24 **Question 9.14:** Is the wording of Policy ED3, particularly the use of 'or' after some of the criteria, effective? Are some of the criteria meant to be read in combination?

RESPONSE TO MATTERS RAISED ON POLICY ED3

- 2.25 Whilst we are supportive, in general, of a specific policy to support the rural economy, we have, through our previous representations to the Plan, raised concerns regarding some of the criterion, which we have assessed as unnecessary. Whilst we do not have any particular issues with the proposed wording of criterion a) to e), there is a degree of repetition with other policies in the Plan. Specifically, criterion b) repeats criterion b) of policy NBE1 (Development in the Countryside).
- 2.26 Our main concern relates to criterion i) to iv). These are completely unnecessary as they are covered by other policies of the Plan. The Local Plan should be read as a whole and should be focused and concise. These criteria are repetitive and should therefore be deleted.
- 2.27 We also strongly object to paragraph 234 which refers to the need for on-site residential accommodation to address the requirements of policy NBE1. We have responded to this issue in full in our statement to Matter 12, however, it is worth addressing in this section as well. The Eversley Storage ® site is supported by the provision of a residential flat which provides on-site accommodation for the site security personnel. This is to ensure the security and safe operation of the business. Rural businesses can be particularly vulnerable to theft due to their remote location. In these cases, it can be wholly necessary to have a worker on site at all times to provide security for the business.