



**Representations to the St Albans City and District Local Plan 2020-2036
Examination
Matter 8 – The Supply and Delivery of Housing Land**

Hill Residential Ltd (1158064)

12 December 2019

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O'ROURKE**



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Issue / revision	Prepared by	EB
Reference	Signature	EB
This document is issued for	Date	12 December 2019
[] Information [] Approval	Checked by	GB
[] Comment [X] Submission	Signature	GB
Comments	Date	12 December 2019
	Authorised by	TH
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8.0 Matter 8 – The Supply and Delivery of Housing Land

- 1.1 On behalf of Hill Residential Ltd (Hill) the following information is provided in regard to Matter 8 – The Supply and Delivery of Housing Land.
- 1.2 Hill has an option over 1.5 ha of land owned by the Lawes Agricultural Trust (LAT) at Townsend Lane Harpenden, within the Rothamsted estate. Hill has fully engaged with the St Albans City and District Council's (SADC) draft Local Plan (DLP) process and submitted representations to previous consultations, including the Call for Sites, Regulation 18 and Regulation 19 draft iterations of the DLP. Representations have also been made previously to the Harpenden Neighbourhood Plan.
- 1.3 The site (1.5ha) has the potential to deliver approximately 50 new homes with access off Townsend Lane. The development of this site would not extend the settlement westwards beyond its existing extremity so will not impact upon the purposes of the Green Belt in this location with respect to sprawl or the merging of neighbouring towns. The land does not contribute to preserving the setting and special character of historic towns. Given the level of demand and need for new homes in the area, the land does not need to remain in the Green Belt in order to assist in urban regeneration.
- 1.4 The previous representation to all the aforementioned consultations includes technical appendices, which should be read in conjunction with the Regulation 19 Consultation representation submitted in October 2018 as well as this Hearing Statement.

Main issue

- 1.5 Whether the Plan has been positively prepared and whether it is justified, effective and consistent with national planning policy in relation to the overall approach to the Green Belt.

1. What is the estimated total supply of new housing in the Plan period and how does this compare with the Planned level of provision?

- 1.6 It is considered that there has been a consistent under delivery and the 20% buffer should be applied. The Vision states that the DLP covers the statutory period of 15 years between 2020/21 – 2035/36. Whilst the NPPF requires (at paragraph 22) a 15-year time horizon, the planning practice guidance requires that the first year of the Plan must be the current year (Paragraph 2a-006-20180913). The approach of the DLP simply loses three years (2017/18 and 2018/19 and 2019/20) of housing need. The Plan period should be adjusted to 2018 to 2037 to comply with the planning guidance.

2. What is the estimated total supply in the Plan period from:

- a) Existing Planning permissions?
- b) Other commitments e.g. sites subject to S106 agreements?
- c) Proposed site allocations?
- d) Other sources?

- 1.7 No comment.

3. Can the Council please provide a graph to show the housing trajectory and also a clearer, simpler table than that in appendix 2 of the Plan.

1.8 No comment.

4. Is the housing trajectory realistic?

- 1.9 On review of Appendix 2: Housing Trajectory, SADC relies upon sites subject to pre-application discussions (291 new homes) as well as 'Council Owned Sites' (260 new homes) to deliver 551 new homes over the Plan period. The use of sites currently within the pre-application process and SADC owned sites are not justified sources of supply given that there is no robust evidence to suggest that the sites are available or will be successful in delivering housing.
- 1.10 In addition, the windfall allowance accounts for the delivery of 1,670 new homes within the Plan period. The inclusion of a number of sites is evident within the SHLAA (2009), however this document predates the NPPF (2019) and can therefore not provide up-to-date or relevant evidence to support SADC's assumptions. Therefore, in line with paragraph 70 of the NPPF and the requirement for compelling evidence, the windfall allowance of 1,670 new homes should be removed from SADC's trajectory.
- 1.11 The Plan clearly relies on windfalls to achieve its housing needs, including within the early part of the Plan period. The windfall allowance is not justified and appears to include considerable double counting. In the past, sites coming forward in the form of office conversions, garages sites, SHLAA sites would all have formed part of the windfall element. To separate those out and still include a windfall element appears to be double counting.
- 1.12 In terms of potential windfall sites, policies L7, L12, L20, L22 and L26 all prevent sites in uses such as employment, retail, community /leisure uses, rages/parking and green spaces from being developed. As such it is difficult to see where any windfalls will come from.
- 1.13 It is unclear how the "unanticipated delay factor" results in more homes being delivered from 2023/24.
- 1.14 There is further reliance on the optimisation of urban sites to deliver 880 new homes over the Plan period, however towards the middle and later part of the Plan period. As with the 'Council Owned Sites', there is currently no robust or up-to-date evidence to suggest that these sites are available to deliver the SHLAA (2009) capacities, without consideration of the optimisations of these capacities assumed by this optimistic source of delivery.
- 1.15 Notwithstanding the assumptions above, the SADC is also relying too heavily on the large strategic sites to meet its significant housing needs without the use of small and medium scale sites to provide housing towards the beginning and middle part of the Plan period. Annex 1 sets out the time line of various strategic scale projects delivered in recent years in the East of England, demonstrating how long it takes to deliver new homes.
- 1.16 From experience, a lead-in period of two years, on the grant of planning permission and a build out rate of 50 new homes a year (per housebuilder on site) are

considered to be reasonable assumptions to apply across strategic sites with planning permission. The inclusion of up to 180 new homes per year on a number of the broad locations seems optimistic with little evidence of how many housebuilders will be active on the sites in order to fulfil such ambitious targets. These broad locations with over optimistic trajectories include:

- East Hemel Hempstead (north): Policy S6i,
- East Hemel Hempstead (south): Policy S6iii and
- Park Street Garden Village: Policy S6xi.

- 1.17 In order to relieve pressure on the Broad Locations delivering housing towards the latter part of the Plan period, and to help meet the housing need in the immediate years, SADC should look to sustainably located small and medium sites to meet the initial housing need. The use of small to medium scale sites, released from the Green Belt, sustainably located on the edge of settlements, will allow SADC to have greater resilience and depth in its resources to meet its housing requirements, and also contribute towards meeting the extensive and consistent under delivery of housing over previous years and will remove the need to rely on overly optimistic sources of housing delivery.
- 1.18 For the number of reasons set out above, the housing trajectory is not considered to be justified, consistent with national policy or realistic and should not be found sound.

5. The majority of the proposed housing will be provided on a small number of large sites. Does the Council have a contingency Plan should one or all of these sites not deliver as expected?

- 1.19 SADC is too reliant on large strategic sites with little opportunity to provide homes towards the early part of the Plan period on readily available, sustainably located, small and medium sized sites. The over reliance on large sites is a high risk strategy. Failure to achieve the ambitious timetables set out on any of the sites will have catastrophic effect on the strategy and the delivery of desperately needed market and affordable homes.
- 1.20 Whilst it is acknowledged that the Broad Locations identified for development within the Green Belt could provide a large quantity of the SADC's housing need, such large sites will take many years to Plan and deliver and may not provide housing until the later part of the Plan period. The reliance on such large sites (500 – 10,500 units) is constricting SADC's ability to meet its housing need within the early part of the Plan period. Given the intense housing pressure in the area, and the fact that there is housing need to be met now, that is not considered to be an appropriate response. People in housing need should not have to wait until the late 2020s to have their needs met. As such, more should be done to ensure that more manageable and deliverable sites are allocated to help deliver housing within the earlier part of the Plan period to assist the larger strategic sites to meet the housing need in full, throughout each year of the 15-year period. That can only be secured through a detailed, fine grain review of Green Belt boundaries.
- 1.21 It is appropriate to develop homes at the most sustainable locations such as small and medium sites that will ensure that the character of the existing settlements are protected and the 5 purposes of the Green Belt are maintained and protected, as referenced below from paragraph 134 of the NPPF.

6. Has there been persistent under delivery of housing? In terms of a buffer for a five year supply of housing sites, should this be 5% or 20% in relation to para 73 of the NPPF?

- 1.22 It is considered that there has been a consistent under delivery and the 20% buffer should be applied. The Vision states that the DLP covers the statutory period of 15 years between 2020/21 – 2035/36. Whilst the NPPF requires (at paragraph 22) a 15-year time horizon, the planning practice guidance requires that the first year of the Plan must be the current year (Paragraph 2a-006-20180913). The approach of the DLP simply loses three years (2017/18 and 2018/19 and 2019/20) of housing need. The Plan period should be adjusted to 2018 to 2037 to take account of the planning guidance. In addition, given that the Standard Methodology identifies housing need from 2016, two years of under delivery from these years should be added to the housing requirement.
- 1.23 When considering the SADC's response to the Inspectors' question 8 from 17 April 2019, and on review of the current 5-year period, there is a clear shortfall over the next 5 years against SADC's Objectively Assessed Need (OAN) of 639 new homes per annum, and an extensive shortfall against the Government's Standardised Methodology, which defines an OAN of 913 new homes per annum. Table 1 below sets out the anticipated shortfall over the current 5-year period.

Table 1: Anticipated Shortfall over current 5-year period.

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2021/21	2021/22
SCDC's trajectory*	432	426	428	544	541
OAN (SHMA update 2016)	639	639	639	639	639
Shortfall against SHMA	-207	-213	-211	-95	-98
Gov. Standardised OAN (2018)	913	913	913	913	913
Shortfall against Gov. OAN	-481	-487	-485	-369	-372

*as defined by Appendix 2 of the DLP

- 1.24 As identified above, the shortfall against the SHMA update (2016) is anticipated to be 824 new homes. This shortfall increases significantly to 2,194 when assessed against the Government's Standardised Methodology. SADC should seek to take a proactive approach to meeting its housing needs in full and to ensure that the extensive shortfall is dealt with in full to limit SADC's exposure to legal challenges when tested at a Local Plan Examination or indeed at an appeal scenario. This would be consistent with the Planning Practice Guidance (Paragraph: 010 Reference ID: 2a-010- 20190220) referenced within the Inspectors' question 8 (17 April 2019).
- 1.25 The DLP proposes the use of differing housing targets to meet the need towards the later part of the Plan period. However, the allocation of small and medium sized

sustainably located Green Belt sites would ensure the anticipated shortfalls outlined in table 1 are reduced significantly.

- 1.26 The extent of the anticipated shortfall, highlighted by table 1 above, the DLP should adopt a 20% buffer to ensure it can be found consistent with paragraph 73 of the NPPF and can consequently be found sound.

7. What are the implications of stepped delivery of housing on the supply and delivery of housing?

- 1.27 St Albans is the least affordable place to live in the East of England. Medium quartile house prices stood at £540,000 in 2018, whilst the ratio of house prices to income stood at 16.81 to 1, ranking 14th most unaffordable lower tier local authority area out of 348 in England & Wales. Lower quartile house prices stood at £390,000, whilst the ratio of house prices to incomes stood at 17.68 to 1, 13th most unaffordable lower tier local authority area in England & Wales.
- 1.28 The effect of the stepped housing trajectory would be to worsen affordability even further as housing delivery will not keep pace with demand and needed market housing will not be delivered, increasing house prices. As a consequence more people will fall into need of affordable housing. In addition, not enough affordable housing will be delivered to meet needs. A subsequent knock on effect of these will be people will be forced to move to places where house prices are lower, in turn impacting on people in those areas by pushing up demand and hence house prices. There will also be an increase in travel as people will commute back to their places of work. Given the limited nature of public transport in the area, a significant proportion of that increased commuting will be car-borne, adding to congestion and the carbon emissions. Not meeting housing need early in the Plan will have negative economic, social and environmental impacts.
- 1.29 Not only is it considered unsound to neglect the fundamental housing need within the early part of the Plan period, but the pressure on the Broad Locations to deliver is very high. Especially in the absence of any planning applications at the sites or any guarantee that the sites are suitable, available, developable or deliverable.
- 1.30 Notwithstanding the above, the late delivery of homes within the Plan period will also have an effect on the affordability of new homes within SADC. The reliance on such large, strategic developments subjects SADC's housing land supply to an increased level of risk. Such large sites can face complex issues, which can delay delivery. Outside of the 8 broad locations, there are only 40 new homes allocated within the Plan. This places great pressure on the broad locations to not only deliver housing, but also deliver housing within the Plan period.
- 1.31 It is considered that a stepped approach will not be effective and neglects the inherent need for new homes in the early Plan period and is therefore considered unsound.

8. What impact will this have on the 5 year supply of deliverable housing land and the delivery of affordable housing?

- 1.32 Patently, the delivery of affordable housing will be delayed and needs won't be met within the 5 year housing supply, by virtue of the unrealistic housing trajectory (see response to question 4 above) and reliance on large strategic sites, which are not

expected to deliver homes until the latter part of the Plan period. Presently, there is no evidence to identify the committed affordable housing established through the housing trajectory nor can the quantity of affordable housing, to be delivered through the large strategic sites, be confirmed at this early stage in their delivery.

- 1.33 Whilst a specific affordable housing need figure is not included within the DLP, the Authority's Monitoring Report (AMR) 2018 submitted as part of this Local Plan Examination (examination document reference: AMR001) identifies the 40% target and confirms that this target has not been met for the 2017 – 2018 monitoring period, at policy topic 7. Like the persistent unmet housing need, this unmet affordable housing need should be addressed at the earliest opportunity.
- 1.34 Therefore, the unrealistic housing trajectory (as currently drafted) will greatly impact SADC's ability to meet the affordable housing target within the 5 year period. This confirms the unrealistic trajectory and unsound housing supply strategy included within the DLP.

9. On the basis of the Plan as submitted, is it realistic that it would provide for:

- a) *A supply of specific deliverable sites to meet the housing requirement for five years from the point of adoption?*
- b) *A supply of specific, developable sites or broad locations for growth for years 6-10 from the point of adoption?*

If you contend that the Plan would not provide for either (a) or (b) above (or both) could it be appropriately modified to address this?

- 1.35 The Plan is not meeting housing needs from the outset. Whilst higher housing delivery is proposed later in the Plan period, the strategy places significant emphasis on a few locations delivering. If one of those sites fails to deliver, or is delayed, there will be significant effects on the supply of new homes – both market and affordable.
- 1.36 The Plan could be modified to provide for more sites early in the Plan period. That would require a finer grain review of the Green Belt to identify small/medium scale sites which could be released without significant harm to the Green Belt.

10. In overall terms would the Plan realistically deliver the number of dwellings required over the Plan period?

- 1.37 It is considered highly unlikely that the Plan would realistically deliver the housing requirement over the Plan period. There is no flexibility within the Plan should any of the broad locations not deliver in accordance with the trajectory. Given the double counting and the lack of clarity regarding windfalls, there is also likely to be under delivery in relation to that source of supply.

11. How have site densities been determined? How rigid are these figures?

- 1.38 While draft Policy L1 is supported, the requirement for Broad Locations to provide an average net density of 40 new homes per hectare is questioned. Whilst we consider that density is not a good measure of design quality, specifying a density of 40 dph across such major schemes is likely to result in a highly urbanised environment.

- 1.39 This policy is not considered to be based on any adequate or up-to-date evidence therefore cannot be found to be justified and therefore the DLP cannot be found sound through the Local Plan examination process.

12.What are the targets for the provision of affordable housing? What has been achieved in recent years?

- 1.40 There is no specific affordable housing need figure identified by the DLP. However, the AMR 2018 submitted as part of this Local Plan Examination (examination document reference: AMR001) identifies the 40% target.
- 1.41 On review of the last 4 monitored years and as evidenced in the table below, SADC has consistently failed to meet its affordable housing target in recent years.

Table 2: Under delivery of affordable housing

	Total annual housing completions	Affordable housing completion	% of affordable (target 40%)
2017/2018	493	106	22
2016/2017	340	59	17
2015/2016	396	97	24
2014/2015	313	70	22

13. Is the type and size of housing provided/Planned meeting/likely to meet the needs of the area?

- 1.42 No comment.

14. Is there sufficient variety in terms of the location and type of sites allocated?

- 1.43 As detailed within the above comments and in line with the statements submitted for matters 3 (question 7 and 8) and 4, it is not considered that there will be sufficient variety of sites within the Plan to provide necessary flexibility in supply required by paragraphs 11, 68 and 72 of the NPPF.
- 1.44 This is therefore considered to be an unjustified approach and confirms the DLP cannot be found sound.

Word count: 2,833

Annex 1: achieved planning timelines for strategic schemes										
Site	Local Planning Authority	Lead Developer	Date of Adopted Local Plan	Homes	Submission of application	Committee resolution	Decision notice issued	start on site	occupation of first homes	Submission to first occupations
Darwin Green	Cambridge City	David Wilson Homes	2006	1593	Dec-07	Jul-10	Dec-13	Aug-17	Dec-18	11 years
North West Cambridge	Cambridge City & South Cambs	Cambridge University	2009	3000	Sep-11	Aug-12	Feb-13	late 13	Jul-17	5.10 years
Clay Farm, Cambridge	Cambridge	Countryside	2006	2300	Jul-07	May-08	Aug-10	Oct-11	Mar-13	5.75 years
Trumpington Meadows	Cambridge City & South Cambs	Grosvenor/ Barratt	2006/7	1200	Dec-07	Jun-08	Oct-09	Nov-11	Dec-12	5 years
Northstowe	South Cambs	Gallagher	2007	1500	Dec-07	Oct-12	Apr-14	Apr-15	May-17	9.5 years
North West Bury St Edmunds	St Edmundsbury	Countryside	2010	1070	Jul-13	Jan-14	Oct-14	Apr-16	June-2018	5 years
South east Bury St Edmunds	St Edmundsbury	Pigeon	2010	1200	Dec-15	Jan-17	not yet issued	Tbc	Tbc	In excess of 6 years
North East Haverhill	St Edmundsbury	Hallam	2010	2500	Oct-15	tbc	August 2018	Tbc	Tbc	In excess of six years
North West Haverhill	St Edmundsbury	NWH consortium	2006	1150	Sep-09	Feb-14	Mar-15	Tbc	Tbc	In excess of 10 years