

Examination of the Harborough Local Plan 2020-2041

Stage 2 Matters, Issues and Questions (MIQs)

Written Statement by Harborough District Council

MATTER 1: Procedural and legal requirements

Whether the Plan has met all relevant legal requirements, including in the 2004 Act (as amended) and the 2012 Regulations?

Matter 1, Issue 1: Sustainability Appraisal

The Council's response:

Matter 1, Issue 1, Question 1

Q1: The Council has carried out a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

Does the SA adequately assess whether the Plan's objectives are fully compatible with and actively contribute towards each of the sustainability objectives set out in the Sustainability Framework? Are the conclusions robust and justified by the evidence?

1. Yes. At the Regulation 18 (Issues and Options) stage of plan-making the SA Report [HDC20 [Issues and Options SA Report \(Jan 2024\)](#)] included an appraisal of the 10 emerging Local Plan objectives against each of the 14 SA objectives in the SA framework. This demonstrated that the effects of the Local Plan objectives were broadly positive and in most cases were either compatible with, or had no direct relationship with, the SA objectives. This reflects the positive and aspirational nature of Local Plan objectives. Some potential incompatibilities were identified between the Local Plan objectives relating to the delivery of housing and employment growth, and the environmental SA objectives in particular. However, this is typical considering the nature of the Local Plan and its purposes. At the Regulation 19 stage of plan-making, detailed policies had been developed and presented which sought to deliver the Local Plan objectives and the overarching Vision. Therefore, at this stage the SA Report [[S-NLP3](#)] focused on the appraisal of those detailed policies.

2. Recommendations were made throughout the SA process to minimise the potential adverse effects of development, including on the natural environment, thereby seeking to address (insofar as possible) the incompatibilities that were identified earlier in the SA process between the Local Plan objectives and the SA objectives.
3. The conclusions of the SA in this regard are considered to be robust and justified by the evidence, recognising that the appraisal of the Local Plan objectives was by nature a strategic one.

Matter 1, Issue 1, Question 2

Q2: How has the SA informed the development of the Plan, including housing and economic needs, delivery and any mitigation measures? How has it informed the selection of strategic options, the development of policies and the selection of sites, all of which aim to identify sustainable development outcomes for the District?

4. The SA has informed the development of the Local Plan and the selection of options throughout all stages of the process. In addition to complying with legal requirements, the approach that has been taken to the SA of the Local Plan is based on current best practice and the guidance on SA set out in the Government's online Planning Practice Guidance, which involves carrying out SA as an integral part of the plan-making process [Paragraph: 006 Reference ID: 11-006-20140306]. The SA has been carried out iteratively at each stage of plan-making, with the findings being taken into account by the Council alongside other factors to inform decision making.
5. The SA commenced early in the plan-making process, with the preparation of the SA Scoping Report in August 2023. Following this, the options being considered by the Council for the scale and distribution of housing and employment growth were provided to LUC and subject to SA, with the findings being presented to the Council in the form of an internal summary note in October 2023. At the same time, the reasonable alternative options for site allocations were also subject to SA by LUC and the findings provided to the Council. This enabled the SA findings for these sets of options to be taken into account by the Council at an early stage as the Issues and Options document was prepared. The SA of the strategic and site options was later presented publicly in the [Issues and Options SA Report \(Jan 2024\)](#) [HDC20] and was repeated in the final SA Report [[S-NLP3](#)].

6. The SA Report for the Issues and Options was relatively high level, reflecting the content of the consultation at that time. Where appropriate, recommendations were made to the Council, for example highlighting where mitigation would be required if certain site options were to be taken forward for allocation.
7. Further work was then undertaken by the Council on the strategic options, and a set of three refined housing distribution options was developed, as detailed in Chapter 5 of the final SA Report [\[S-NLP3\]](#). These were appraised on the basis of the medium scale of growth, which the Council had by this time identified as the preferred option. While the SA had found that the low growth option had fewer significant negative effects than the medium growth option, particularly in relation to the environmental SA objectives, it would not provide the level of housing required, including to contribute to meeting Leicester's unmet need. The medium growth option performed better in the SA than the high growth option, which had likely significant negative effects across many of the SA objectives due to the impacts of higher growth on the natural environment in particular.
8. The SA findings for the refined growth options were again made available to the Council, prior to the Proposed Submission Draft (Regulation 19) Local Plan being finalised, so that the SA could inform the Council's decision-making. The SA concluded that Refined Option 3 performed most positively overall against the SA objectives and this option was taken forward in Policy DS01 in the Proposed Submission Draft Local Plan.
9. Once the Council had prepared the Proposed Submission Draft Local Plan, the policies and site allocations included in it were subject to SA with the findings being presented in an updated SA report which was subject to consultation alongside the Local Plan. A number of recommendations were made to the Council in a draft version of the SA Report, for amendments or improvements that could be made to Local Plan policies in order to improve their sustainability effects. These recommendations were detailed in Chapter 7 of the final SA report, along with the Council's response to each, providing an audit trail of how recommendations made in the SA have shaped the Local Plan policies.
10. Throughout Chapter 7 of the final SA Report, information is provided against the appraisal of relevant policies regarding which option has been taken forward into the policy and why, with reference to the SA findings where relevant. Appendix E in the SA Report provides an audit trail of the site options, setting out the Council's reasons for selecting or rejecting each one.

Some reasons relate to issues considered through the SA while others relate to other planning matters. This is reasonable, as it is not the role of the SA alone to determine which sites should be allocated in the Local Plan.

11. Therefore, the SA has informed the development of the Local Plan throughout its preparation and has directly informed the selection of options and the development of Local Plan policies.

Matter 1, Issue 1, Question 3

Q3: What is the robust justification for the selection of the medium level of growth scenario against which the refined housing distribution options were tested? Should they have been tested against all three growth scenarios?

12. The Council selected the medium growth scenario on the basis that this option would provide land to accommodate 14,715 homes over the plan period. Initial Option A: Low growth and Initial Option C: High growth were discounted based on local housing need assumptions calculated using the standard method; assumptions around Leicester's unmet needs and the difficulties in planning for this; assumptions in relation to housing supply buffers; and existing housing completions and commitments.
13. When considering what scale(s) of growth should be taken forward into the refined options the following were taken into account:
- The Housing and Economic Needs Assessment (2022) (HENA) [[HSG-NLP2](#)]
 - The Housing Distribution Paper (2022) [[HSG-NLP3](#)]
 - The Leicester & Leicestershire Statement of Common Ground (2024) (L&L SoCG) [[SCG-NLP3](#)]
 - Sustainability Appraisal
 - Issues and Options (Regulation 18) Consultation Responses
 - National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
 - National Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)
14. The Development Strategy Paper [[PRE-NLP4](#)] 'The Scale of Housing Growth' section pages 13-17 sets out the justification for the medium scale of growth in more detail.
15. The Medium level of growth was taken forward for consideration through the Refined Options. Although the Medium scale of growth had more positive impacts on social objectives in the SA, it does have more negative impacts

across all 6 of the Initial Spatial Options compared to Low growth. This is to be expected as the environmental impact is likely to be higher for a larger scale of growth. The NPPF is clear that in addition to the local housing need figure, any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas should also be considered in establishing the amount of housing to be planned for. This medium level of growth makes provision for a proportion of Leicester's unmet need based on evidence (including the HENA, Housing Distribution Paper and the L&L SoCG). The affordability adjustment within the standard method represents a significant uplift to the household projections which should deal with the needs of concealed/overcrowded households and contribute to boosting both the delivery of market and affordable housing. The Medium scale of growth also includes a significant uplift above the standard method for Leicester's unmet housing need which will also help boost the delivery of homes (market and affordable) across the district. Option B – Medium Growth was therefore considered to be justified, consistent with NPPF/PPG, and was taken forward into the Refined Options.

16. In light of the Issues and Options Consultation (Regulation 18) all assumptions relating to the medium scale of growth (Initial Option B) were reviewed and refined. These refinements and their justification are covered in the Development Strategy Paper [[PRE-NLP4](#)] and resulted in Refined Option B: Medium Growth (providing land to accommodate 14,175 homes) being selected as the preferred scale of growth and taken forward as the basis for the refined housing distribution options. In summary the Refined Option B: Medium growth uses a figure of 534 homes per year, contributes to Leicester's unmet housing need to 2036, and applies a 15% buffer, this is justified by evidence and is reasonable.
17. Plan-making and the SA are iterative processes, and it is reasonable and proportionate to test the refined housing distribution options against the medium growth scenario, which had by that point emerged as the preferred option.

Matter 1, Issue 1, Question 4

Q4: What is the robust evidence to justify the economic growth and spatial distribution options?

18. The economic growth and spatial distribution options were based on the Leicester and Leicestershire HENA [[HSG-NLP 2](#)] and associated Employment Distribution Paper [EMP-NLP 3] and the supply position at the time, based on

HDC Monitoring, as outlined in the Issues and Options Consultation Document [\[PRE-NLP2\]](#) para 6.6-6.13.

19. The justification for the economic growth and spatial distribution options that were tested through the SA is provided in Chapter 2 of the submitted SA Report [\[S-NLP3\]](#). The Leicester and Leicestershire Housing and Economic Needs Assessment (June 2022) was used as a starting point for determining the level of economic growth or the number of jobs that should be created. In addition, existing commitments and development that had been built were taken into consideration. The Leicester and Leicestershire HENA Employment Distribution Paper (June 2022) were also reviewed to understand Leicester's unmet need for employment land. It concluded that up to 2036 there should be no increase to Harborough's employment requirement.
20. The distribution of employment land is required to address local business need, with the main focus for employment growth being Market Harborough and Lutterworth. Three broad options for the distribution of employment growth were identified:
- Option 1: Intensifying the density of employment uses in existing employment areas, in appropriate and sustainable locations.
 - Option 2: Continue with the current approach of focusing new employment land in the district's main economic centres (Market Harborough/Lutterworth) and larger sustainable settlements.
 - Option 3: Align new employment land provision with areas of significant housing growth.
21. Each of these three options was considered in the context of two alternative levels of growth:
- Option B – Medium growth: Adopt a longer-term approach and allocate additional land for employment to maintain a flexible supply and support sustainable development.
 - Option C – High growth: Plan for greater growth to meet any enhanced economic aspirations or regeneration priorities for the district.
22. A further option for the level of employment growth was considered separately from the distribution options, as the option proposed to make no allocations so there was no distribution to consider.
- Option A – Low growth: Make no additional allocations of employment land in Harborough District.

23. The preferred option for the employment development strategy is Option B (Medium Growth) and a combination of Spatial Options 2 and 3. This approach is justified because the evidence [EMP-NLP 5] indicates only a limited need for additional allocations to meet needs, provide flexibility in supply and meet geographical gaps in provision [EMP-NLP 5]. Protecting and providing new employment land in the main economic and residential centres results in a mix of sites that are attractive to the market and provide sustainable benefits in terms of the co-location of jobs and homes both for existing and future populations as new residential development comes forward. The approach aligns with the NPPF, Local Plan objectives and is most capable of delivery. Further detail justifying the selection of the preferred strategy is provided in the Development Strategy Paper [PRE-NLP 4] pages 29-34 and Appendix G

Matter 1, Issue 1, Question 5

Q5: Are the scoring and conclusions reached in the SA reasonable, sufficiently accurate and robust so as to inform the Plan?

24. Yes, the likely effects identified and the conclusions reached in the SA are reasonable and robust. The likely effects of options and policies need to be determined and their significance assessed, which inevitably requires a series of judgments to be made. The SA attempted to differentiate between the most significant effects and other more minor effects through the use of clear, colour coded symbols. The dividing line in making a decision about the significance of an effect is often quite small. Where either (++) or (--) has been used to distinguish significant effects from more minor effects (+ or -) this is because the effect of an option or policy on the SA objective in question was considered to be of such magnitude that it will have a noticeable and measurable effect, taking into account other factors that may influence the achievement of that objective.
25. SA inevitably relies on an element of subjective judgement. However, in order to ensure consistency in the appraisal of a large number of site options, detailed sets of site assessment criteria were developed and applied. The criteria relate specifically to each type of site option (i.e. residential or employment sites) and set out clear parameters within which certain SA effects would be identified, based on factors such as the distance of site options from features such as biodiversity designations, public transport links and areas of high landscape sensitivity. The criteria are presented in Appendix D of the SA Report [S-NLP3] and were applied mainly through the use of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) data.

26. At each stage of the SA, consultation responses relating to the SA Report were reviewed. Where consultees disagreed with the identified effects, these matters were formally reassessed and the findings fact checked as appropriate against the site appraisal criteria. This process is detailed in Appendix A of the SA Report.

27. Therefore, the SA scoring and conclusions are considered to be sufficiently accurate and robust so as to inform the Plan.

Matter 1, Issue 1, Question 6

Q6: Does the SA provide a clear and justified audit trail of the Plan's strategic choices?

28. Yes, the SA does provide a clear and justified audit trail of the Plan's strategic choices. Chapters 4 and 5 in the final SA Report [[S-NLP3](#)] detail the process of appraising and refining the strategic options that were developed early in the plan-making process. Against the appraisal of each strategic policy in Chapter 7 of the SA Report, information is provided about which option was taken forward into the policy and why. In relation to site allocation options, the reasons for the Council's decision-making are detailed in Appendix E of the SA Report.

Matter 1, Issue 1, Question 7

Q7: In overall terms does the Plan meet the legal requirements of Section 19(5) of the 2004 Act and accord with National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) paragraph 32 and the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) in this regard?

29. Yes, it is considered that the SA provides a comprehensive and robust basis to inform the strategy and contents of the Local Plan. The methodology used is detailed in the SA report [[S-NLP3](#)] and is sound and consistent with relevant guidance.

Matter 1, Issue 2: Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)

The Council's response:

Matter 1, Issue 2, Question 1

Q1. Chapter 6 paragraph 6.4 of the Habitat Regulation Assessment [S-NLP4] concludes no adverse effect, subject to the successful implementation of safeguarding and mitigation measures. The Plan contains policy wording to require the safeguarding and mitigation measures detailed in Chapter 5 of that report. Natural England has raised no concern.

Given the above, has the HRA been undertaken in accordance with the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017?

30. Yes, the HRA has been carried out in accordance with the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 and has taken into account the implications of relevant case law, as detailed in Chapter 3 of the submitted HRA Report [S-NLP4]. As noted, Natural England has not raised any concern about the overall conclusions of the HRA.

Matter 1, Issue 3: Strategic Cross-Boundary Engagement

The Council's response

Matter 1, Issue 3, Question 1

Q1. The Council provides its Duty to Cooperate (Effective Cooperation) Statement of Compliance [SNLP9] and all signed Statements of Common Ground [SCG- NLP1-26 and HDC 4B, C, D, 9 and 15]. It considers together those demonstrate that the Council has collaborated effectively and constructively with neighbouring authorities and prescribed bodies on strategic cross-boundary matters throughout the Plan's preparation. Does this provide the necessary clear evidence of effective and ongoing joint working, in relation to matters including housing, transport, education provision and warehousing?

31. Yes. As set out in its Duty to Cooperate (Effective Cooperation) Statement of Compliance [S-NLP 9], and through continued cooperation since the submission of the Plan for Examination, the Council has collaborated effectively and constructively with neighbouring local authorities and prescribed bodies. The Statement of Compliance clearly identifies the strategic cross-boundary matters that have been the focus of collaboration and sets out where discussions and further work have been undertaken to address the concerns of partners.

32. A series of Duty to Cooperate Statements of Common Ground (SoCG) were agreed with most neighbouring authorities and prescribed bodies at Regulation 19 consultation (Section 5.0, [S-NLP 9](#)). These focused on how the Council had engaged with partners up to March 2025 in the preparation of the Regulation 19 Plan, on identifying the main strategic cross-boundary matters between the parties and on-going evidence preparation and joint-working.
33. Following the Regulation 19 consultation on the Plan (March-May 2025), subsequent engagement focused on resolving specific concerns raised in representations and seeking agreement on how these could be addressed, including through proposed modifications [[HDC 2 Appendix 1](#)] and further evidence preparation where required. The outcomes of these discussions are set out in published SoCGs with the various parties. These clearly state areas of agreement and, where necessary, any outstanding areas of disagreement.
34. The Council considers that it has collaborated effectively and constructively with neighbouring authorities and prescribed bodies on strategic matters throughout the Plan's preparation and is continuing to do so where required. The Statement of Compliance and suite of SoCGs provide evidence of ongoing joint working on strategic cross boundary matters including housing, transport, education provision and strategic warehousing.

Matter 1, Issue 3, Question 2

Q2. What is the up-to-date position in respect of transport matters?

35. The latest position in respect of transport matters is as set out in the Transport Topic Paper (Part 2) September 2026 [[HDC 14](#)].
36. This clarifies that the latest position of Leicestershire County Council (LCC) as the Local Transport Authority (LTA) remains as set out in the agreed Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) on Highway and Transport Matters (August 2026) [[HDC9](#)].
37. Furthermore, the LTA is continuing to review fully the Preliminary Scheme Design (Local Highway) [[HDC13](#)] report which was published on 11 September 2026. HDC will continue to work with LCC and may publish an addendum to the Preliminary Scheme Design (Local Highway) to address LTA comments as appropriate. The LTA have also made clear that it considers further proposed modifications to the Plan may be needed.

38. A SoCG with LCC and Warwickshire County Council relating to Strategic Distribution allocations (MP1 and MP2) and the A5 [[HDC15](#)] was signed on 11 September 2026 and sets out that they do not agree with the position of National Highways. HDC are continuing to work with all parties on this matter.

Matter 1, Issue 4: Superseded Policies

The Council's response

Matter 1, Issue 4, Question 1

Q1. Is the Plan's appendix 1 clear in identifying the policies of the existing development plan which would be superseded by the Plan consistent with Regulation 8(5) of the 2012 Regulations?

39. Yes. Appendix 1 clearly and explicitly identifies the specific policies of the extant Harborough Local Plan that will be superseded upon adoption, ensuring full compliance with Regulation 8(5) of the 2012 Regulations.

Matter 1, Issue 5: Plan Period

The Council's response

Matter 1, Issue 5, Question 1

Q1. NPPF paragraph 22 sets out the requirement for strategic policies (other than those in relation to town centre development) to look ahead over a minimum of 15 years from adoption. The Plan period runs from 2020-2041. If adopted in Q2 2027 it would not meet that requirement. In doing so would this be a sound approach?

40. Yes, the Council considers this to be a sound, evidence-led approach under the specific strategic circumstances of this Plan area.
41. While an adopted date in Q2 2027 means the period to 2041 falls slightly short of the 15-year period set out in paragraph 22 of the 2023 NPPF, this plan period aligns with the principal evidence base and strategic cross boundary work undertaken across Leicester and Leicestershire. This includes the Housing and Economic Needs Assessment, June 2022 ([HSG-NLP2](#)); the Housing Distribution Paper, June 2022 ([HSG-NLP3](#)); the Employment Distribution Paper, June 2022 ([EMP-NLP2](#)); and the Leicester & Leicestershire Statement of Common Ground, 2022 ([SCG-NLP3](#)).

42. The Plan has been positively prepared and comprehensively tested to meet identified development needs up to 2041. The housing and employment requirements, spatial distribution, site allocations, infrastructure planning, viability assessment and delivery trajectories have all been tested on that basis. Furthermore, by making explicit provision for the delivery of a cross-boundary Strategic Development Area extending beyond 2041, the Plan establishes a long-term strategy that satisfies the underlying objectives of national policy, notwithstanding the limited technical shortfall against the 15-year requirement from the anticipated date of adoption.
43. Extending the Plan period at this stage would not be a minor presentational amendment. It would require an additional year of housing and employment provision to be quantified and tested, together with consequential review of land supply, distribution, infrastructure delivery, viability, sustainability appraisal and potentially the need for further allocations. That exercise would disrupt the consistency of the existing evidence base and could delay adoption, while offering no meaningful practical planning benefit to Harborough District.