

Examination of Harborough Local Plan 2011 to 2031

Statement on behalf of Bloor Homes Ltd

Submitted by Define Planning & Design Ltd

Matter 2 – The Housing Requirement and its Delivery

Q 2.2 & 2.3: The SDAs

1. The Local Plan Housing Trajectory (Appendix G) indicates that the Council anticipate that the Lutterworth Strategic Development Area (SDA) will deliver its first completions in the period 2022/23, i.e. within 3½-4½ years. Annual completions are then expected to significantly increase to circa 240 dpa. The first completions at the Scraftoft SDA are expected even earlier in the period 2021/22, i.e. 94 dwellings within only 2½-3½ years. Annual completions are then expected to increase to circa 180 dpa. On that basis, it is anticipated that the SDAs will deliver a total of 2,702 dwellings in the period to 2031, which equates to over 55% of the total housing supply for the remaining plan period (excluding sites already completed or committed). This over reliance on the delivery of the SDAs represents the greatest risk to the Local Plan's housing delivery and, therefore, whether the identified housing needs in the District will actually be met within the plan period.
2. The representations submitted by Bloor Homes highlighted that the underlying assumptions within the housing trajectory in terms of both the timing and rate of delivery at the SDAs are entirely unsubstantiated and unrealistic. Indeed, it is notable that the revised housing trajectory as at April 2018 (HSG14) already suggests (only circa 6 months later) that the first completions at the Lutterworth SDA will take place a year later than assumed in the Local Plan, with a reduction in the total delivery expected within the plan period from 1,500 dwellings to 1,250 dwellings.
3. Given the delay in the progression of the Local Plan and that neither SDA has the benefit of a planning permission, there is still a very lengthy process to go through before housing construction can take place. In short:
 - Outline application preparation and submission;
 - Application determination following further consultation and potential revisions;
 - Section 106 Agreement;
 - Site acquisition /sale post detailed cost & revenue planning;
 - Detailed scheme design and Reserved Matters approval;
 - Conditions discharge and other (highway and drainage) consents required for site delivery;
 - Resource mobilisation (labour, equipment and materials);
 - Site preparation and enabling works (e.g. infrastructure provision)

4. It is not uncommon for local planning authorities (LPA) to make ambitious assumptions within their housing trajectories in respect of how long that process will take, and their aspiration and intent, often supported by the site's promoter, is not doubted. However, the delays to the delivery of strategic sites in particular often arise as a result of matters that cannot be directly controlled by an applicant or the LPA and/or the involvement of other parties in the delivery process. In the case of these two SDAs as well as the District Council and the site land owners who are promoting the sites, there are the other statutory consultees, notably the Highways Authority (and Highways England at Lutterworth) but also those with environmental / infrastructure related interests, the local community and the actual (currently unidentified) developers who will deliver the required housing.
5. Indeed, it is apparent that both of these SDAs are particularly complex projects and that will have a direct bearing on the timing of their delivery:
6. **Scraptoft:** The delivery of the Scraptoft SDA requires the prior relocation of the golf course that is currently located within the site. That will inevitably affect the timescale for the SDA's delivery, as the new course will need to be constructed and opened before the club can relocate and release the site for development. Whilst the site for a replacement golf course has been identified, there is no information in relation to how and when it will be delivered. Furthermore, Policy SC1 also refers to the planning application requirements in relation to the replacement golf course (part 4) and it is apparent that there are a range of significant issues that will need to be robustly addressed through a separate planning application in due course.
7. In relation to the SDA itself, Policy SC1 highlights there are sensitive environmental matters that will need to be carefully considered in the development of the scheme proposals and the preparation of a planning application (ecology, drainage, landscape/visual and heritage issues). The impact on the local highway network (given its nature) will also need to be addressed in a robust Transport Assessment and mitigation measures identified. EIA Scoping Opinions for both the SDA and the golf course were submitted to the District Council in May 2017, but they did not include even a Concept Masterplan for the development of either site and only refer to the vast array of detailed assessment work that would be undertaken in due course. The District Council provided their opinions 6-7 months later in December 2017, but there is no other publically available evidence of the applications being advanced since then.
8. Indeed, there is no evidence of the preparation of a Masterplan that accords with the "specification" set out in Appendix L of the Local Plan, that has been the subject of any public consultation or a design review, and can, therefore, form the basis of a Supplementary Planning Document SPD and/or planning application as set out in Policy SC1. In the absence of that Masterplan, it is not apparent that the various matters highlighted in the Local Plan have been resolved or to take a robust view on the actual capacity of the site to deliver the scale of housing that is anticipated.
9. **Lutterworth:** The promotion of this SDA is now being led by the County Council. It has been known for some time that District Council would need to exercise their compulsory purchase powers in order to deliver the highway crossing over the M1 and associated link road required to serve the development and ensure that there is not an unacceptable severe impact on the local and strategic highway network. However, it is now apparent that one of the other land owners, Hallam Land Management who control the land adjacent to the M1/A4304 junction, are no longer involved in the site's promotion. The report to the County Council's Scrutiny Commission dated 7th March 2018 sought approval to acquire Hallam Land Management's land interest in the site and indeed all other land within the SDA either by private treaty or via a Compulsory Purchase Order, but it also highlighted that there were no signed agreements with the other landowners within the SDA at that time. Whilst these land issues may well be resolvable in the fullness of

time, it still requires significant resources and there is no certainty in relation to the outcome. Therefore, there remains significant doubt that all of the land required to deliver the SDA is actually available (in NPPF terms) at this point in time.

10. The Scrutiny Commission report also seeks approval of the substantial expenditure required to progress a planning application for the development of the SDA, which indicates that there had been no significant progress in that respect prior to March. An EIA Scoping opinion request has since been submitted to the District Council (on the 29th June), but that is still pending. The Scoping Report sets out the vast array of detailed assessment work that will be undertaken in due course and that reflects the Local Plan's evidence base which refers to major environmental issues, including drainage, ecological (SSSI) and heritage constraints within the site. They will all need to be appropriately addressed in the development of the scheme proposals and the preparation of a planning application.
11. Notably the EIA Scoping Request did not include a Masterplan or Parameters Plan and instead refers to developing the scheme proposals through the iterative EIA and engagement process. The Vision Document for East Lutterworth includes a very high level conceptual Masterplan, but that does not include many of the elements set out in the Local Plan's Masterplan "specification". They are required before the Masterplan can form the basis of a SPD and/or planning application as set out in Policy L1. Public consultation is planned, but it is not known whether the Masterplan has been the subject of a design review as yet.
12. Indeed the Concept Masterplan (that was also included in the March Scrutiny Commission report) does not appear to be underpinned by a robust access strategy (large development areas of circa 800 dwellings are served by a single points of access), drainage strategy (very limited SUDS provision is indicated) or Green Infrastructure strategy (no formal sports pitches are shown and there is limited strategic landscaping at the site's periphery to moderate the potential landscape/visual impact). It seems that the site's predicted capacity (and, therefore, viability) has been assessed on the basis of the Concept Masterplan, yet in the absence of a resolved plan that addresses these fundamental matters, it is difficult to take a robust view on the actual capacity of the site to deliver the scale of housing that is anticipated in the Local Plan.
13. The development will require significant infrastructure provision on and off site, and it is clear from Section 19 of PBA's 2017 Infrastructure Delivery Report that there are a number of critical drainage, utilities and highways issues that still to be resolved in that respect. Notably the development will have a significant impact on the local highway network and there is no evidence at this stage that they can actually be appropriately addressed (paras 19.2.3 and 22.3.5). Moreover, the funding of the early infrastructure delivery required to facilitate the construction of the housing in the SDA is dependent on the prior delivery of the B8 employment area in the southern part of the SDA (para 21.7.4). That itself indicates that there is a significant risk that actual housing delivery will be delayed.
14. It is critical to the Local Plan's soundness that the assumptions that unpin the housing trajectory reflect the difficulty of bringing strategic sites forward and the reality of the lead in timescales required to do so. Indeed, it notable that the new NPPF now explicitly requires (para 72d) a "*realistic assessment of the likely rates of delivery, given the lead-in times of large scale sites*". It is recognised that is not an easy task, but the draft NPPG now suggests that plan makers should use benchmarks based on past trends / evidence.
15. Indeed, the representations submitted by Bloor Homes highlighted the evidence provided by the various nationwide studies that have been published in recent years; notably the 2016 NLP report "Start to Finish: Housing Quickly do Large Scale Housing Sites Deliver?". Moreover, they presented an analysis of the experience of the delivery of similar schemes in excess of 1,000

dwelling allocated in post NPPF Development Plan Documents elsewhere in the Housing Market Area (HMA). All of those sites have taken or are taking much longer to deliver than was anticipated when they were allocated, and as a consequence the LPAs are now having to manage significant shortfalls in the housing land supply and delivery in their areas by allocating additional sites and/or allowing speculative applications.

16. Taking account of the conservative analysis of the required timescales to deliver the SDAs set out in the submitted representations and the “benchmarks” highlighted above, the Local Plan should assume the first delivery of housing completions at the SDAs a minimum of 6 years post the likely adoption of the Local Plan in 2019; i.e. in the 2025/26 period. Even then there is a significant risk that the resolution of the site specific environmental constraints, infrastructure provision and landownership issues highlighted above will further delay delivery.
17. Thereafter a robust view on the rate of delivery also needs to be taken. NLP’s Start to Finish Study highlights the growing recognition that the rate of annual delivery is largely shaped by “absorption rates”. That is driven by 3 key factors: the strength of the market, the number of outlets and the tenure of housing. The assumed rates of delivery (rising to around 175dpa at Scraftoft North and 240dpa for a sustained period at Lutterworth East) are very ambitious and no actual evidence has been presented to demonstrate that they are actually achievable and sustainable through the plan period in these locations. For example, it is not always practically possible to increase the number of outlets in direct proportion to the size of the site (i.e. in the case of Lutterworth, can 4-5 outlets realistically be consistently provided where there are limited access points into the site?), and delivery can also be suppressed by the strength of the local market.
18. That recalibration of the housing trajectory has a significant impact on the housing land supply position in the District and its ability to meet the identified housing need. The delay in getting to the point of delivery alone will mean that the Lutterworth East SDA will only provide 782 dwellings in the period to 2031 and the Scraftoft North SDA will only provide 702 dwellings, resulting in a total shortfall of 970 dwellings against the latest housing trajectory. The Local Plan is, therefore, fundamentally unsound and that can only be addressed through the allocation of additional development sites and, given that the Leicester PUA is positioned at the top of the settlement hierarchy, that should be the first location considered.

Q2.4 & Q2.5: Contingency & Unmet Need

19. There is a significant element of unidentified housing supply within the Local Plan, and it is also inevitable that some of the identified development sites will not deliver as currently anticipated. In order to reflect the NPPF’s positive plan led approach (para 150-151) and ensure that there is sufficient flexibility in the spatial development strategy to positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of the area and to adapt to rapid change (para 14), that inevitability should be addressed at the outset rather than monitored and managed. The proposal to incorporate an uplift of 20% above the identified housing needs into the housing requirement in Policies SS1 and H1 was, therefore, supported in the representations submitted by Boor Homes. However, the uplift must be applied to the true housing need (i.e. the HEDNA OAN plus the recommended uplift to reflect the growth of Magna Park) and across an extended plan period to 2036.
20. Given that, however, it is not sound to also rely on the additional provision addressing the established unmet needs arising in Leicester. In the first instance if the additional housing land supply is identified and delivered to compensate for the failure or delay in the delivery of other sites that were allocated in the Local Plan to specifically meet the District’s own identified housing needs, then by definition, those sites cannot also address the identified unmet needs that are

arising in Leicester. That would only result in the continued failure to address the identified housing needs across the HMA.

21. There is also the issue of geography to consider in relation to unspecified provision. Particularly given that the Local Plan only allocates the Scraftoft North SDA at the PUA, which is identified as being the most sustainable location for development in the District and is ideally located to address housing needs that are arising in the adjacent city.
22. Indeed, it is clear from the evidence (the HEDNA) that unmet needs have been arising in Leicester since 2011 and will continue to arise in the absence of a commitment from the other LPAs in the HMA, including Harborough District, to address those needs with positive actions rather than continued procrastination.
23. The District Council refers to the Strategic Growth Plan, but that is a non-statutory plan that will consider options for guiding growth in the HMA over the period 2031 to 2050. A Joint Position Statement on Housing and Employment Land Supply has also been published seeking to demonstrate that the housing need identified in the HEDNA can be met across the HMA in the period 2011-31. However, that provides little comfort that this critical matter is being effectively addressed. Notably it relies on both an evidenced allowance in excess of 5,500 dwellings for windfall development that is, by its very nature, an unreliable source of new housing, and on *“notional guide figures for estimated supply in currently unpublished plans”* including within Leicester City itself where the limited capacity for development and rate of delivery has already been highlighted as a critical issue.
24. It is understood that it remains the intention to agree a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the HMA LPAs to address the unmet needs arising in the period to 2031. That however, continues to be significantly delayed; purportedly because the precise scale of unmet need has not yet been confirmed even though it is patently obvious that it is substantial. The MoU is now not expected until the end of the year, nearly 2 years post the publication of the HEDNA when the unmet need issues were first highlighted by the City Council. In its continued absence there remains a great deal of uncertainty in relation to how much development should take place and where within the HMA and ultimately lead to a situation where the housing needs in the City continue to be ignored.
25. It is not appropriate to seek to defer the issue to a future review of the Local Plan and in the interim rely on unspecified provision that is in any case required to mitigate the inherent risk within the Local Plan’s spatial development strategy that arises from its over reliance on the two SDAs. The identified unmet need in Leicester is arising now and needs to be addressed now as a priority in this Local Plan as part of the District Council’s obligations under the Duty to Co-operate otherwise the Local Plan will remain fundamentally unsound in terms of its effectiveness and compliance with the NPPF.