



Harborough Local Plan 2011-2031 Examination

Council Responses to the

Matters and Issues

- Statement 6 -

7th September 2018

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MATTER 6.1

6.1 Is the spatial strategy as set out in Policies SS1 and H1 and their supporting text soundly based? Is the settlement hierarchy soundly based?

Spatial strategy

6.1.1 The process leading to the spatial strategy is described in paragraphs 3.1.18 to 3.1.20 of the Explanation to Policy SS1 and in much more detail in the Spatial Strategy Topic Paper (TCP1). The latter concludes that the identification of the preferred spatial distribution of housing and, to a lesser extent, business and employment development has followed an objective, robust, logical but also flexible and pragmatic approach. It has been founded on national planning principles and local planning objectives, as well as the objectives and guiding criteria contained within the Sustainability Appraisal. It has used the available evidence at each stage in the process to enable a judgement to be made about how an initially large number of options should be whittled down to a smaller number of selected options and, eventually, to a single preferred option.

6.1.2 In doing so the process has responded to the views expressed at the Options consultation and to the views of elected members, based on a thorough presentation of the evidence. The process has also responded to changes in circumstances as they have emerged. This has included:

- the introduction of a variation of one option, replacing it with a radical but practical re-distribution of land uses in the Scraftoft area;
- responding to a change in views from a key land-owner and working to overcome the risks to delivery that had been identified at the East of Lutterworth SDA;
- increasing the flexibility allowance in terms of housing provision and the associated change in status of the Scraftoft North SDA; and
- putting a quantitative cap on further strategic distribution development at Magna Park, addressing the concerns of Duty to Cooperate partners.

6.1.3 While it has reassessed its previous decisions as evidence is refined and further information has come forward, the Council has resisted the temptation to go back to square one and introduce new strategic sites late in the process. This is mainly, but not entirely, because this would lead significant delays in the getting the Local Plan adopted. The opportunity to assess and potentially allocate additional land will come about as part of the Strategic Growth Plan for the 2031 – 2050 period.

6.1.4 In the meantime, the Council considers that the Spatial Strategy set out in the Submission Local Plan, based as it is on SDAs within two broad growth areas determined by sub-regional policy, and located where local need will arise from Magna Park and the Leicester Principal Urban Area, is sound. It is fully justified as being the most appropriate strategy when considered against all the reasonable alternatives, based on proportionate evidence at each stage. It is also positively prepared in order to deliver the needed housing, business and employment, retail and other development and is effective in that it is deliverable over the plan period and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary priorities. Moreover both the Spatial Strategy and the Local Plan Objectives which it meets are firmly grounded in national planning policy and national Planning Practice Guidance.

Settlement hierarchy

6.1.5 It is considered that the settlement hierarchy set out in Appendix F of the Submission Local Plan (S1) is soundly based. It takes into account up to date evidence on access to service provision within settlements and sets out an appropriate approach to development for each tier within the settlement hierarchy based on the relative sustainability of settlements.

Background

6.1.6 A review of the Core Strategy (2011) Settlement Hierarchy was the starting point for identifying the most sustainable settlements in the District. The 2013 New Local Plan Scoping Consultation document (PRE2a) stated that 'the settlement hierarchy, which seeks to direct development to the most sustainable settlements whilst addressing local need', was expected to remain unchanged. This was in recognition that the Core Strategy settlement hierarchy was proving effective in distributing development across the District and reducing the proportion of development taking place in unsustainable rural settlements to a more sustainable, urban focused pattern of development.

6.1.7 However, it was accepted that, as part of preparing Local Plan, there was a need to improve the Council's understanding of the main settlements across the District and verify the settlement hierarchy. As part of this process settlement profiles (PPL1) for the towns and larger villages were prepared. The aim of this profiling work was to bring together existing information and evidence relating to each settlement in order to understand how it functions, its key characteristics, its level of services and facilities along with any specific local issues and community priorities. Parish councils were given the opportunity to comment on the draft profiles early in 2015 and their comments

were incorporated where appropriate. The profiles helped the Council to understand each settlement's sustainability and any issues facing the local community. Alongside the settlement profiles, a services audit was maintained for all settlements and the latest version is available (HCF6).

6.1.8 In order to identify the most sustainable rural settlements, both pieces of work assessed the number of key services (food shop, GP surgery, library, post office, primary school and public house) accessible to the local population. Access to at least 4 of these services helped to identify potential Rural Centres while access to at least 2 was the starting point in identifying potential Selected Rural Villages.

Overview of settlement hierarchy tiers

6.1.9 Principal Urban Area: Scraftoft, Thurnby and Bushby are settlements within the Principal Urban Area (PUA) forming part of the built up area of Leicester. Residents not only have access to local services and facilities within their village centres, but their proximity to Leicester means that there is relatively easy access to a wide range of higher order services and facilities, retail provision and employment opportunities. Within the context of the wider District the access to public transport (i.e. bus services) is relatively good, offering an alternative to car-based trips. Policy SC1 sets out the proposal for the Scraftoft North SDA and specifies the additional infrastructure needed to support its development. Given their sustainable position on the edge of Leicester, the approach to development for these settlements is considered appropriate.

6.1.10 Sub Regional Centre: Market Harborough, identified as a Sub Regional Centre, is the District's principal town and benefits from good public transport provision (bus and rail) and road links. It has a wide range of retail provision, services and facilities including 2 secondary schools and a recently completed local hospital. Along with proposed allocations in the Local Plan, development has started on the town's North West Market Harborough SDA as identified in the Core Strategy. It is one of several towns performing a sub regional role in the Leicester and Leicestershire Housing Market Area and as such justifies its assigned approach to development.

6.1.11 Key Centres: Lutterworth and Broughton Astley are identified as Key Centres. Whilst this reflects the current good level of retail, service and employment provision currently enjoyed in Lutterworth, the inclusion of Broughton Astley as a Key Centre recognises that retail, employment and service provision is currently improving as a result of commitments and positive policies in the Broughton Astley Neighbourhood Plan. Both settlements have secondary school provision and a similar population (c.10,000). However, Lutterworth

has a wider range of employment opportunities, retail provision, services and facilities along with easy access to the M1 and A5. Both settlements are capable of sustaining expansion and the identified approach to development is justified. Broughton Astley has set out policies for growth in its Neighbourhood Plan and the Lutterworth area is considered a sustainable location for the delivery of the SDA as proposed in the Plan.

- 6.1.12 Rural Centres: Seven villages are identified as Rural Centres (listed in Appendix F of the Plan) on the basis of them having at least 4 of the 6 key services and being of a size considered appropriate to sustain these services. Houghton on the Hill is included as a Rural Centre for the first time in view of its size and 4 key services. All these Rural Centres currently have a scheduled bus service. However, the service is limited in some cases and not a specified criterion as provision is subject to change. Recognising that these Rural Centres vary considerably in level of services, retail and employment provision, the approach to development purposely allows for new housing and employment development on a scale which reflects this variation.
- 6.1.13 In identifying Rural Centres, a village's relationship with higher order settlements has also been considered. Great Bowden has facilities equivalent to a Rural Centre but it does not perform a Rural Centre role owing to its close proximity and relationship with Market Harborough. Residents from surrounding villages use the town's services and facilities, not those in Great Bowden. It therefore remains a Selected Rural Village.
- 6.1.14 Selected Rural Villages: In all 16 Selected Rural Villages are identified in the Local Plan. These are identified on the basis of having access to at least 2 key services and being of a size considered appropriate to sustain these services. The approach also recognises that village schools are an important element in maintaining the vitality of rural settlements. Given that primary schools generate a large number of car trips, it is important that the potential benefits of walking to school are recognised in the settlement hierarchy through the grouping of villages. As a result three joint Selected Rural Villages (Claybrooke Magna/Claybrooke Parva, Church Langton/East Langton and Great Easton/Brighthurst) have been identified where primary schools are within acceptable walking distance with a safe pavement or footpath. This is consistent with the NPPF paragraph 55 and is further explained, together with a link to a report on the matter, in TPC1.
- 6.1.15 The approach to development in Selected Rural Villages allows for infill development and limited extensions which reflect the services and facilities of the settlement, thus contributing to rural prosperity.

6.1.16 Other villages and rural settlements: These are small villages and hamlets which do not meet the criteria for identification as Selected Rural Villages. Whilst covered by countryside policies, it is recognised that all settlements can play a part in delivering sustainable development through meeting a specific local need for housing. GD4 allows for housing on small sites, within or well related to the settlement, which meet a specific local identified need. This can be evidenced through a local housing needs survey or a neighbourhood plan. Neighbourhood plans are already bringing forward small sites for housing which meet the needs of their community.

Conclusion

6.1.17 It is considered that the settlement hierarchy, as summarised above, provides a sound basis for the delivery of a sustainable pattern of development across the District in line with national policy. It is justified and has been positively prepared to direct ensure that development is directed to the most appropriate, sustainable locations, maximising and supporting existing services, facilities, public transport, employment opportunities and retail provision. However, it also recognises that all settlements can contribute to achieving sustainable development by allowing for housing to meet specific local needs.

MATTER 6.2

6.2 What regard has been given by the SA and the other analyses to the impact on community severance and the difficulties of urban integration arising from allocation L1, which would result in development on both sides of a major motorway? Have these factors been taken account in evaluating the performance of this option against others, and if so, what weight have they been given?

- 6.2.1. The east of Lutterworth SDA is intended to be largely self-sufficient at the neighbourhood level, but well integrated with Lutterworth. It should be a well-planned community with its own sense of place, while also benefitting Lutterworth by supporting its town centre and its other higher level facilities such as the secondary schools.
- 6.2.2. The fact that the M1 runs between the existing and the new settlements was recognised as a potential challenge in achieving this in the process of evaluating the SDA against other strategies.
- 6.2.3. An advantage of the location of the M1 in relation to Lutterworth is that it has constrained the growth of Lutterworth to the east of the town centre. As such, the East of Lutterworth SDA is less than 700 metres from Lutterworth town centre which is well within walking distance and even the furthest point of the proposed development is less than 2 kilometres away. By comparison a development of similar size to the west of Lutterworth would extend to Magna Park and Bitteswell and be no nearer than 1.2 km from the town centre and 2.5 km away at its furthest point.
- 6.2.4. In order to ensure integration the proposed SDA includes the following:
- early provision of a cycle and pedestrian link to the town centre making use of the existing agricultural crossing over the M1;
 - conversion of the existing Gilmorton Road crossing over the M1 into a sustainable transport corridor dedicated to public transport, cyclists, pedestrians and emergency vehicles, providing a direct route to the town centre.;
 - to link with these crossings, a network of convenient, safe and attractive walking and cycling routes as set out in Policy L1 (3) (p);
 - a regular and frequent bus service to all parts of the SDA as they are developed as set out in Policy L1 (3) (q);
 - travel plans and green travel packages that provide an attractive alternative to private car use as set out in Policy L1 (3) (r).

- 6.2.5 In considering the factors of community severance and urban integration as part of the analysis of spatial strategy options, these proposed mitigations were taken into account. Even so, the impact and challenges raised by the M1 separation were not discounted as a result of the mitigation. While the terms 'community severance' and 'urban integration' were not specifically used, they were implied by various elements of the analysis of Selected Options described in TPC1.
- 6.2.6 While there were earlier assessments of the Selected Options carried out in September and October 2016, the final one was undertaken in April 2017, and is described in detail in TPC1, paragraphs 5.73 to 5.86 and Appendices B, C and D.
- 6.2.7 Appendix B refers to relevant issues as follows:

Transport Assessment

- 6.2.8 *Accessibility by Sustainable Transport Modes:* Option 6 (East of Lutterworth) scored equal last (with Option 5- Kibworth North east) of the four selected options, commenting that 'Access to employment opportunities by public transport likely to be limited, but a bus service will be a provided to serve the SDA, with priority access over the M1 via Gilmorton Rd in the long term towards the end of the Plan period. Access within 30 minutes cycling to employment in Lutterworth and Magna Park.'

Socio-Economic Assessment

- 6.2.9 *Proximity to existing employment:* Option 6 scored equal first with 2 other options (2 –Core Strategy and 4 –Scraptoft North), with only Option 5 (Kibworth North East) scoring worse. The comment was 'Substantial employment provision both within Lutterworth and at Magna Park, all of which are in relatively close proximity.'
- 6.2.10 *Proximity to retail and impact on centres:* Option 6 scored best on this factor relative to the other Selected Options, commenting that 'Lutterworth has a good town centre with a range of shops and facilities. 2 large supermarkets in town centre, which are a minimum of 0.5 miles away from nearest part of SDA. Lutterworth centre to benefit from increased expenditure and environmental improvement.'
- 6.2.11 *Proximity to/ provision of education:* Option 6 scored best on this factor relative to other Selected Options, commenting that there was currently secondary school capacity in Lutterworth (which needs to be maintained) and that two primary schools were being provided within the SDA.
- 6.2.12 *Proximity to/ provision of other community facilities:* Option 6 scored best on this factor relative to the other Selected Options, commenting that 'Lutterworth has a good range of community facilities. These are all in or close to the town

centre. Their accessibility to SDA residents will depend on appropriate and safe links to SDA from Lutterworth.’

NPPF Selected Principles

6.2.13 *A creative exercise in finding ways to enhance and improve the places in which people live their lives:* Option 6 comes only third (after Option 4- Scraftoft North and Option 5 – Kibworth North East) in relation to this factor, commenting that ‘The SDA offers the potential to create a well-planned new community without direct impact on existing residents, although there would be increases in local traffic. New residents will help the retention and enhancement of existing local retail and community facilities for the benefit of all.....The creation of an attractive place for new residents is made more difficult for by the constraints affecting the SDA, in particular 140 houses will be in an isolated location bounded by the M1, a motorway junction and the main spine road...’

6.2.14 *Making the fullest use of public transport, walking and cycling:* Option 6 comes equal last with Option 5 in relation to this factor, commenting that ‘Potential walking/ cycling distances to existing services and facilities from new houses within the SDA could be an issue. However, given the scale of the development, safe walking / cycling access to proposed new services and facilities could be achieved through sensitive master planning, while movements to Lutterworth would be improved by upgrading crossings over the M1. Reliance on car-based trips to employment and some higher order services elsewhere is likely to continue given its location in relation to the strategic road network, but employment and most services are available locally.’

6.2.15 In conclusion it can be seen that 7 (out of 30) factors were relevant to severance and urban integration and that the East of Lutterworth SDA scored relatively poorly in relation to 3 of them and clearly first in relation to 3. Option 6 came marginally second to Option 4 in the assessment and was clearly ahead of the other two options for the reasons set out in paragraph 5.79 of TPC 1.

6.2.16 With regard to Local Plan Objectives (Appendix C of TPC 1), there were none relating to preventing community severance or enabling urban integration, but the following 4 (out of 14) are considered relevant to this issue:

3 Location of development: Locate new development in sustainable locations....

5 Protection of local services: Protect accessible community services and local facilities.

8 Town/village centres: Support and enhance the vitality and viability of market towns and larger village centres....

10 Transport: Provide greater opportunities to reduce car use by locating development where there is good access to jobs, services and facilities, and by supporting improvements in public transport, walking and cycling networks and facilities.

6.2.17 Option 6 met all of these objectives. Options 2 and 4 met Objectives 3, 5 and 10, but had only a neutral effect in relation Objective 8. Option 5 met all these objectives apart from Objective 3, because the scale of development in what is only a Rural Centre would increase commuting. Therefore, in as far as the issue of severance/ integration might have been expected to influence the achievement of these objectives, it did not appear to have counted against Option 6.

6.2.18 The Sustainability Appraisal contains 6 Sustainability Themes and 9 SA Objectives. Each Objective also has a set of guiding criteria. The issue of impact on community severance and the difficulties of urban integration would fall under the theme of Health and Well-being and the SA Objective (4): to safeguard and improve community health, safety and wellbeing. The criterion most relevant to the issue raised is:

6.2.19 4.2) Could proposals have an effect on efforts to maintain and strengthen local identity and community cohesion?

6.2.20 The Internal Report on the Selected Spatial Options (PRE13) was considered as part of the Assessment in September/ October 2016 and its conclusions on Health and Well-being were included as a specific factor under Socio-economic Assessment in the assessment of selected options described above and in TPC1. The Internal Report showed that Option 6 had major positive effects on Lutterworth in relation to Health and Well-being which include 'community cohesion' whereas the other three options had only minor positive effects. However the report did not specifically address the effects on community cohesion. The reasons for the major positive effects at Lutterworth were stated to be 'upgrades, jobs and housing provision at a new community'. On the basis of the assessment of effects on all settlements and overall, the Selected Options Assessment Appendix B (see TPC 1) shows that Option 6 scored equal best (with Options 2 and 5) in relation to the SA assessment of effects on health and well-being.

MATTER 6.3

6.3 What regard has been given by the SA and the other analyses to the impact on neighbouring communities arising from allocation SC1, which would be remote from a main road such that all movement would be channelled through residential and village streets? Have these factors been taken into account in evaluating the performance of this option against others, and if so, what weight have they been given?

- 6.3.1. The impact of traffic generated by the proposed SDA at Scraptoft North was assessed through the Preliminary Traffic Impact Assessment (also referred to as the Selected Options Transport Assessment) by Jacobs dated November 2016 (TRP2), the land east of Hamilton Lane Scraptoft Initial Transport Feasibility Assessment by RPS dated August 2016 (TRP4), and the South East Leicester Transport Study Phase 1 by Edwards and Edwards dated 2016 (TRP 15).
- 6.3.2. All these studies look at the impact of the proposal on the highway network, in particular at junctions that could lead to a requirement for mitigation through off-site road improvements. TRP 2 includes information on the effects on air pollution of the proposed development, but none of them specifically look at the impacts of traffic generated on neighbouring communities.
- 6.3.3. The report by RPS (TRP 4) relates specifically to the Scraptoft North site and so does not enable a comparative evaluation. However it does demonstrate that:
- the existing traffic levels of traffic are within the operational capacity of the various links;
 - the issue of capacity is only likely to affect the peak hour operation of some junctions;
 - the effect of the development traffic can be mitigated by measures within the local highway network, subject to which the residual cumulative impact of development traffic would not be severe;
 - these measures would also provide benefits to the local network rerouting traffic away from Scraptoft village; and
 - the measures proposed provide a safe and suitable access.
- 6.3.4. The Jacobs report (TRP 2) was commissioned specifically to enable comparison of the Selected Options and so is most relevant to evaluating the performance of the Scraptoft North option against others. The Edwards and Edwards Phase One study (TRP 15) looked at the impact of both the Kibworth North and East SDA and, in less detail, the East of Lutterworth SDA. It was therefore also used in the assessment of options described in the Spatial Strategy Topic Paper (TPC1).

6.3.5. While there were earlier assessments of the Selected Options carried out in September and October 2016, the final one was undertaken in April 2017, and is described in detail in TPC1, paragraphs 5.73 to 5.86 and Appendices B, C and D.

6.3.6. Appendix B refers to relevant issues as follows:

Transport Assessment

6.3.7. *Selected Options Transport Assessment (consultant: Jacobs)*: overall Option 4 (Scraptoft North) scored equal best with Option 2 (Core strategy). In common with all other options, no critical issues were identified, although there was localised impact on the A47/ Station Road junction and Stoughton T-junction, with increased junction delays in Leicester City. This option scored well because it had the highest average speeds and lowest travel times across the District and offered more opportunity for modal shift to sustainable transport.

6.3.8. This compared with the longest travel times for Option 5 (Kibworth North and East), which scored equal worst despite reducing congestion on the A6 through the neighbouring community of Kibworth. Option 6 (East of Lutterworth) had more significant problems at local junctions as well as on rural routes leading to Leicester, particularly through the nearby village of Gilmorton, and for these reasons scored equal worst with Option 5.

6.3.9. Thus the issue of impact on neighbouring communities was only one aspect of the comparison and did not necessarily determine the overall score arising from this transport assessment.

6.3.10. The AM peak hour CO2 emissions plot shows that there are only minor changes across the network in Option 4. Refer to air quality:

6.3.11. *South East Leicester Study: Stresses (Edwards and Edwards)*: Option 4 scored worst in relation to the other options on this analysis as a result of impact on rural roads around the development and poor connectivity to west Leicester and the wider road network, including ring road impact.

6.3.12. *Local transport benefits*: for Option 4 these included improving traffic circulation through Scraptoft village but the option still scored worse than Options 5 and 6, because these offered the prospect of by-pass/ relief road to remove congestion in Kibworth and Lutterworth respectively.

6.3.13. In conclusion it can be seen that 3 (out of 30) factors were relevant to traffic impacts on neighbouring communities and that Scraptoft North scored poorly in relation to two of them and clearly first in relation to one. Despite this Option 4 came marginally best compared with Option 6 in the assessment and was clearly

ahead of the other two options for the reasons set out in paragraphs 5.80 and 5.81 of TPC 1.

6.3.14. With regard to Local Plan Objectives (Appendix C of TPC 1), the following 4 (out of 14) are considered relevant to this issue:

3 Location of development: Locate new development in sustainable locations that respect the environmental capacity of the local area...

4 Infrastructure: Support local communities and maintain a high quality of life by ensuring that new development delivers the necessary range of infrastructure.

10 Transport: Provide greater opportunities to reduce car use, thereby reducing the impacts of road traffic on local communities, the environment and air quality by locating development where there is good access to jobs, services and facilities, and by supporting improvements in public transport, walking and cycling networks and facilities.

12 Environmental impact: Minimise the environmental impact of development ...by reducing pollution...

6.3.15. Option 4 met all of these objectives, as did Options 2 and 6. Option 5 met all these objectives apart from Objective 3, because the scale of development in what is only a Rural Centre would increase commuting. Therefore, in as far as the issue of traffic impacts on neighbouring communities might have been expected to influence the achievement of these objectives, it did not count against Option 4.

6.3.16. The Sustainability Appraisal contains 6 Sustainability Themes and 9 SA Objectives. Each Objective also has a set of Guiding Criteria. The issue of impact on neighbouring communities would fall under the theme of Health and Well-being and the SA Objective (4): to safeguard and improve community health, safety and wellbeing. The two criteria most relevant to the issue raised are:

4.2) Could proposals have an effect on efforts to maintain and strengthen local identity and community cohesion?

4.4) How could proposals impact upon air quality?

6.3.17. The SA assessed the four Selected Options against all of the Themes and SA Objectives and in relation to each of the settlements in all but the lowest level in the settlement hierarchy (i.e. Scraftoft/ Thurnby/ Bushby, Market Harborough, the Key Centres (Lutterworth and Broughton Astley), the Rural Centres and the

Selected Rural Villages). It does not look specifically at the impact on Scraftoft on its own.

- 6.3.18. The Internal Report on the Selected Spatial options was considered as part of the Assessment in September/ October 2016. This showed that Option 4 had moderate positive effects on Scraftoft/ Thurnby/ Bushby in relation to Health and Well-being, which include 'community cohesion' and 'air quality', as did Option 2, whereas the other two options had only minor positive effects. However the report did not specifically address the effects on community cohesion or air quality. The reasons for the moderate positive effects at Scraftoft/ Thurnby/ Bushby were not given.

MATTER 6.4

6.4 Is policy GD2 a sound approach to allowing additional development in sustainable locations (having regard to any modifications the Council propose to make to the policy as indicated in IC3 in their response to IC2 Q13)?

6.4.1. As set out in IC3, the Council is willing to consider splitting Policy GD2 to apply separate criteria to development proposals within and adjoining sustainable settlements. A proposed modification to Policy GD2 is set out below:

Proposed modification to Policy GD2:

1. ~~In addition to sites allocated by this Local Plan and neighbourhood plans, d Development within or contiguous with the existing or committed built up area of Market Harborough, Key Centres, the Leicester Principal Urban Area (PUA), Rural Centres and Selected Rural Villages will be permitted where:~~

a. ~~in the case of housing, it does not, cumulatively with other proposals, significantly exceed the target for the delivery of new homes in the Rural Centres and Selected Rural Villages specified in Policy H1 Provision of new housing;~~

b. ~~it reflects the size of the settlement concerned and the level of service provision within that settlement;~~

c. ~~it is physically and visually connected to and respects the form and character of the existing settlement;~~

d. ~~it retains as far as possible existing natural boundaries within and around the site and the settlement, particularly trees, hedges, rivers and streams that have a visual, ecological or cultural significance; and~~

e. ~~it does not harmfully diminish the physical and/or visual separation of neighbouring settlements.~~

a. it respects the form and character of the existing settlement and, as far as possible, it retains existing natural boundaries within and around the site, particularly trees, hedges and watercourses, or

b. it includes the redevelopment or conversion of redundant or disused buildings, or previously development land of low environmental value, and enhances its immediate setting;

~~2. Development involving the appropriate and efficient re-development of previously developed land which is not of high environmental value and re-use of buildings will be permitted where such re-use achieves the objectives of sustainable development.~~

2. Residential development adjoining the existing or committed built up area of Market Harborough, Key Centres, the Leicester Principal Urban Area (PUA), Rural Centres and Selected Rural Villages, but excluding Green Wedges, will be permitted where:

a. it does not, cumulatively with other commitments, significantly exceed the individual settlement target for the delivery of dwellings; or it comprises the redevelopment, or conversion, of redundant or disused buildings, or the development of previously developed land of low environmental value, and enhances its immediate setting; and

b. it reflects the size of the settlement concerned and the level of service provision within that settlement;

c. it is physically and visually connected to and respects the form and character of the existing settlement;

d. as far as possible, it retains existing natural boundaries within and around the site, particularly trees, hedges and watercourses; and

e. it does not harmfully diminish the physical and/or visual separation of neighbouring settlements.

6.4.2. The proposed amended policy, as set out above, is considered to be a sound approach to allowing additional development in sustainable locations. Proposed criteria GD2(1) (a) and (b) are considered a positive approach towards infill development in sustainable settlements, in accordance with the presumption in favour of sustainable development set out in para. 11 of the Framework.

6.4.3. The proposed amendments to Policy GD2(2) take a positive approach to development proposals on land adjoining sustainable settlements. As set out in Policy H1, and in the Council's response to Question 11 in IC3, a number of settlements have remaining residual housing targets to be met, with the delivery of these targets expected to come forward through Policy GD2. In addition to the residual targets, the Council's response to Question 11 in IC3 provides clarity on the approach to allowing additional development at all sustainable settlements, with Policy GD2 allowing housing development to come forward in sustainable settlements with a residual requirement of zero where proposals meet the relevant criteria. As such, appropriate development, up to around 10% above the total provision for the settlement in the Local Plan, could occur in these sustainable locations, in addition to development meeting both remaining residual targets and

the identified windfall allowance as set out in the revised housing trajectory HSG14. Furthermore, development that comprises the redevelopment, or conversion, of redundant or disused buildings, or the development of previously developed land of low environmental value will not be restricted by the proposed 10% exceedance.

6.4.4. With regards to Rural Exception Sites, the Council is willing to consider a modification to the explanation wording to Policy GD2 to clarify that whilst they are covered by Policy H3, such development would be considered appropriate on land adjoining sustainable settlements.

6.4.5. Policy GD2 is considered to be a positive approach towards development within and adjoining sustainable locations, with Policy GD4 a stricter policy approach towards development proposals that are neither within or adjoining a sustainable settlement.

MATTER 6.5

6.5 Are the range of policies GD3 to GD7 governing rural development and the protection of landscape and the countryside sound (having regard to any modifications the Council propose to make to the policy as indicated in IC3 in their response to IC2 Qs 12, 13 and 14)?

Summary

6.5.1. The Council considers that policies GD3 to GD7 provide a sound and effective basis for supporting sustainable rural development whilst protecting the landscape and safeguarding the countryside as a whole. They promote the sustainable growth and diversification of the rural economy, allowing for housing to meet identified local needs. The Countryside Topic Paper (TPC5) sets out further detail in relation to the evolution the rural development policies.

Policy GD3: Development in the countryside

6.5.2. Policy GD3 reflects the Framework's objective of supporting a prosperous rural economy. It allows for development that supports the diversification of the rural economy and recognises that certain types of development can only take place in rural locations. It supports the conversion and re-use of permanent and substantial buildings, including proposals for the optimum viable use of a heritage asset. Whilst the policy outlines specific permissible uses, it allows for other uses which justify and are compatible with a countryside location, thus supporting the sustainable growth and expansion of rural businesses. It is considered that the policy will support economic growth in rural areas and allow for innovation in the retention, diversification and delivery of local services and facilities to improve the sustainability of settlements. The approach to the delivery of rural housing is set out in Policy GD4. The modification below is proposed to clarify the area to which this policy applies.

Proposed modification to GD3

6.5.3. As currently drafted, GD3 does not apply to 'land adjoining' sustainable settlements. A modification is proposed to GD3(1) so as to ensure that the policy's criteria apply to all countryside outside the existing built-up area of sustainable settlements and the Green Wedges as follows:

1. Outside Market Harborough, Key Centres, the Principal Urban Area (PUA), Rural Centres, Selected Rural Villages, and ~~land adjoining them~~, but excluding Green Wedges, development will be permitted where it is required for the following purposes:

Policy GD4: New housing in the countryside

6.5.4. Whilst policy H3 supports the delivery of Rural Exception Sites in accordance with the Framework, policy GD4 sets out the circumstances where new residential development in the countryside is justified. This policy applies outside Green Wedges and sustainable settlements.

6.5.5. The majority of new rural housing development will take place in and adjoining identified Rural Centres and Selected Rural Villages (as set out in the settlement hierarchy) where it will support local services and facilities. However, there are circumstances where isolated homes in the countryside are justified. Policy GD4 reflects the Framework by allowing for housing to meet the essential needs of a rural worker, the re-use of redundant or disused buildings, the sub-division of existing dwellings, and for design of exceptional quality. Development which would secure the optimal viable use of a heritage asset or would be enabling development to secure the future of a heritage asset is covered by Policy HC1.

6.5.6. A number of sub-criteria are specified in relation to 'Housing to meet the needs of a rural worker'. These reflect previous guidance in the now superseded Planning Policy Guidance 7: Countryside. In the absence of more up to date guidance they remain a useful and generally accepted basis for judging the need and justification for rural worker housing.

6.5.7. Harborough District has numerous 'other villages and rural settlements' below Selected Rural Village level in the settlement hierarchy. Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) emphasises that all settlements can play a part in delivering sustainable development and therefore blanket policies restricting housing development in some settlements should be avoided. Policy GD4 therefore supports the delivery of housing on small sites in and adjoining these settlements to meet an identified local need (evidenced through either a neighbourhood plan or a rural housing needs survey).

Policy GD5: Landscape character (reflecting proposed modification in IC3)

6.5.8. The proposed modification to GD5 set out in IC3 results in a policy which focuses on the protection and enhancement of the local landscape, the landscape setting of settlements and settlement distinctiveness. It seeks to

ensure that the location and design of development takes into account its landscape setting and the qualities of the landscape character area (as defined in the Harborough District Landscape Character Assessment (LAN2)). The policy ensures that development proposals do not result in unacceptable harm to the landscape.

Policy GD6: Areas of Separation

6.5.9. Areas of Separation are proposed where the risk of coalescence is greatest. Several such designations have come forward through the neighbourhood planning process and these already form part of the District's development plan, so it has not been necessary to include them in the Local Plan. The focus of policy GD6 is on maintaining separation between Great Bowden/ Market Harborough and Bitteswell/ Lutterworth/ Magna Park as these are sustainable locations for growth with high levels of development pressure. As a result two Areas of Separation are proposed. The identified boundaries are based on evidence provided by the Area of Separation Study (LAN1) which used a bespoke methodology and have taken into account the spatial strategy and the need to provide for development needs to 2031.

6.5.10. Whilst the overall aim of policy GD6 is the prevention of coalescence in these two areas, the policy allows for development which, either alone or in conjunction with other existing or proposed development, would not compromise the effectiveness of the Area of Separation in protecting the identity and distinctiveness of the settlements. Applicants putting forward proposals in these areas will need to show that they have considered the potential effects on separation and suggest mitigation to minimise the impact on separation. Countryside policies apply to Areas of Separation.

Policy GD7: Green Wedges

6.5.11. The Plan's proposed Green Wedges form part of a wider network of such designations around the Leicester Principal Urban Area (PUA). Essentially they are strategic areas of undeveloped land between the PUA and the countryside aimed at preventing the merging of settlements, guiding urban form, providing access from urban areas to green areas/countryside and facilitating recreational opportunities. They guide new development to ensure that existing communities retain access to greenspace and links to the countryside. These functions are set out in policy GD7 along with the type of development that is considered appropriate for Green Wedges. Given their strategic role, policies GD3 and GD4 will not apply to Green Wedges.

6.5.12. The Plan proposes the designation of two Green Wedges as follows:

- Thurnby/Leicester/Oadby Green Wedge: This Green Wedge adjoins similar designations in the Leicester City and Oadby & Wigston Borough. Only minor changes to the current designation (as defined in the 2001 Local Plan) are proposed. Justification for and details of the proposed boundary adjustments are set out in the Green Wedge Review: Technical Update 2015 (LAN4, Sections 6.3 – 6.4).
- Leicester/Scraptoft/Bushby Green Wedge: The identification of Scraptoft North SDA as a key element of the proposed spatial strategy to meet development needs means that a large part of the current Leicester/Scraptoft Green Wedge (as defined in the Scraptoft Neighbourhood Plan and previously in the 2001 Local Plan) will be lost. A new Leicester/ Scraptoft/Bushby Green Wedge is proposed incorporating part of the existing designation to the west and south of Scraptoft village, the majority of the Area of Separation identified in the Scraptoft Neighbourhood Plan and the northern slopes of the Thurnby Brook valley. The justification for the selected boundaries is set out in the Proposed Leicester/Scraptoft/Bushby Green Wedge: Background report (LAN12).

Conclusion

6.5.13. Taken together policies GD3 – GD7 provide a positive and sound framework for supporting the rural economy and safeguarding the local landscape. The policies are considered effective, justified and consistent with national policy.