

CPRE COMMENTS

Session 7 – 09.30 Tuesday 15 June 2021

Matter 5

Housing Land Supply

This matter considers how the housing requirement will be met; whether those means of meeting the requirement have been justified and will be effective; and whether the LP will have a 5-year housing land supply (HLS) on adoption of the LP

Policies to be covered by Matter 5: LPA05, LPA05.1

Main Evidence Base

SD025 - Housing Need and Supply Background Paper

HOU002 - St Helens Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA)

SHBC001 – Council response to Inspector’s preliminary questions

SHBC004 - Further evidence on Housing Supply, including updated SHLAA Site Assessments

SHBC005 – Council’s response to Inspectors' Preliminary questions on Site Allocations and Safeguarded Land

In response to preliminary questions the Council has indicated as follows:

- Table 4.6 of the Plan (housing land requirements and supply) will be updated to reflect the tables in Appendix 5 to SD025 but as of 31 March 2021 and potentially including an extended Plan period up to 2037.
- The housing trajectory at Figure 4.3 would be replaced by an update reflecting that shown in Appendix 1 to SD025.
- SD025 also includes a more detailed trajectory showing how allocations and other major sites (including commitments and SHLAA sites) will deliver for each year over the Plan period.
- The above takes into account updated SHLAA site assessments (SHBC004).
- The Table at Appendix 2 of SD025 shows the key assumptions and parameters that will be relied on to calculate the 5-year HLS (5% buffer and the Sedgefield2 approach to dealing with shortfalls). This could be added to the reasoned justification to Policy LPA05.

Issue 1: Components of Housing Supply

1. Having regard to the Council’s responses referred to above, will the up to date housing supply position be clearly shown in the Plan (base date of 31 March 2021)?

Table 4.6 needs to be updated to take account of the discussions under Matter 2 and 3, namely a reduced OAHN and buffer. Also, there is likely to be an increased supply of land arising from the

updated Brownfield Register (including any Part II sites), and arising from Government's relaxation of the planning rules via permitted development concerning change of use from commercial to housing, and other windfall, which are likely to be higher than previously anticipated due to economic uncertainty of Brexit and Covid. The increase of delivery attributed to higher density should also be indicated.

CPRE believes that the justification to remove Green Belt land may be removed in entirety or at least substantially reduced.

Progress in terms of residual delivery in the past 2 years is higher than anticipated and this should be corrected.

2. Having regard to Council's responses referred to above, will the components of the housing supply that will meet the housing requirement be clearly shown in the Plan?

CPRE recommends that the components of the housing supply to meet the housing requirement should be clearly shown in the Plan.

3. Is the small sites allowance of 93 dpa justified by compelling evidence (see paras 4.10 to 4.13 of SD025)?

The Government, in NPPF para 68 and 69, requires 10% of housing supply to be comprised of smaller sites. However, due to the significant amount (more when compared to most) of previously developed sites then a higher percentage of the housing plan could be comprised of smaller sites.

4. Should the supply shown within the Plan make an allowance for demolitions or are they accounted for within the net number of homes anticipated to be delivered from each site?

There is no obvious source of a significant number of demolitions, as no regeneration programme targeting urban renewal as previously progressed by Government. We are aware the Liverpool City Region has agreed a £50 million Brownfield Fund and St Helens Council is working with English City Fund to revitalise the town centre, but the sums committed are very small and unlikely to target housing clearance.

5. Should empty homes be included as a component of supply?

Yes. We are aware that there are vacant properties that could be brought back into use.

6. Does the Plan show sufficient flexibility in the supply to ensure that the housing requirement will be met over the Plan period (the Council's latest figures show a residual requirement of 7778 units and potential housing supply of 8384 units assuming a Plan period until 20373)?

Yes

7. Is the flexibility in housing supply provided by the Green Belt sites justified?

There is too much Green Belt land identified as part of the housing supply.

8. Would greater certainty be provided within the Plan if SHLAA sites (or the larger sites) were to be allocated (see SHBC001 – PQ52)?

Suitable (deliverable and available sites) and sustainable (accessible location and least harm to the environment/landscape etc) should be allocated. But there is less certainty provided within the local plan if larger sites are allocated due to deliverability constraints (Please ref to the findings of the Letwin Inquiry and problems of sites stalling and land-banking) and phasing limiting their contribution to the 5 year supply.

The Brownfield Register 2019 identifies 113 suitable sites with capacity for 5,941 dwellings on. These help to provide certainty.

Issue 2: The Housing Trajectory

9. Is the evidence that supports the Housing Trajectory (Figure 4.3 as amended by Appendix 1 to SD025) based on realistic assumptions?

The housing trajectory numbers should be revised down to reflect the revised OAHN, and a higher small site allowance applied to ensure the prospects of the 113 suitable sites identified for 5,941 dwellings on 2019 Brownfield Register are better supported through local plan policy to deliver needed jobs and homes.

Local Planning authorities do not complete homes, but progress applications in accordance to a development plan. The capacity constraints of the development industry should be noted. We are aware some large house builders have had to stock-pile materials, due to supply constraints and cost of imported bricks and steel increasing causing viability issues. Brexit is adding to existing skilled labour shortages in trades such as brick laying, plumbing and electricians.

10. In particular:

a. Should a lapse rate be applied to sites expected to deliver in the next 5 years as well as those delivering later in the Plan period (see SHBC001 – PQ50)?

For transparency the public requires a better explanation of the application of the lapse rate in supporting a reasonable housing delivery trajectory.

b. Is the evidence about the delivery of SHLAA sites contained within the SHLAA together with SD025 and SHBC004 robust?

CPRE takes deliverability to be as set out in the NPPF Glossary.

All sites are ultimately deliverable, even those now assessed as unsuitable, but they require investment to unlock constraints and the costs vary due to a range of factors. Many constraints are capable of being removed. Suitable sites on the Brownfield Register must be assumed to be deliverable over the life of the local plan.

There are a range of brownfield land development partners including Homes England, who seek to unlock constraints. Liverpool City Region has a £50 million Brownfield Fund. The Council is working with English City Funds.

c. Is the evidence about delivery from stalled sites robust (see SHBC001 – PQ53)?

CPRE has expressed concern (to Government and the Council) that developers stall sites to trigger consent for development of unallocated greenfield, some of them in Green Belt. The viability focus of the NPPF in effect promotes greenfield first, but this is clearly counter to NPPF Section 11 and the Council's aim of promoting development of its waste of space, i.e. previously developed land. Secretary of State Robert Jenrick has yet to fulfil his promises to apply a penalty to developers who do not build out their consents in a timely fashion.

d. Are the assumptions about delivery from allocations robust (discussed under Matter 4)?

CPRE thinks the delivery assumptions underplay the amount of housing and jobs that can be realised as more brownfield could be reused and higher density housing should be sought by the plan.

e. Are lead in times and build out rates realistic?

It is more logical to begin with a lower rate and then build capacity to achieve the higher rate of delivery later, to enable the Council a fair chance of achieving its housing requirement. Otherwise, failure will occur and this will lead to further greenfield loss.

f. Is the significant spike in delivery shown in the trajectory between 2025/26 and 2026/27 realistic and supported by evidence (see SHBC001 – PQ54)?

There is a lead in time to site preparation and sites being shovel ready.

CPRE recommends that the Local Plan should require consents to be based on agreed timetables specifying when houses will be completed, with penalties if they fall behind (assuming no reasonable excuse for under-delivery). Penalties could include: the development of sites by others; council tax payable on units that should have been completed. This would help ensure a timelier delivery of housing and avoid land-banking.

Issue 3: Five Year Housing Land Supply

The five-year housing requirement is based on the annual requirement of 486 dpa x 5 with a 5% buffer applied. There has not been any shortfall in provision since the start of the Plan period (2016). Supply is made up of large sites under-construction and those with planning permission, some SHLAA sites, delivery from some LP allocations and a small sites allowance. Appendix 2 to SD025 shows a supply of 5 years.

11. Is the use of a 5% buffer to calculate the housing land supply position appropriate?

Yes, given the high level of completion in the last 2 years 5% is appropriate.

12. Is the inclusion of 465 units from small sites in the 5-year supply justified?

The amount should be more than 10%, as this is the minimum. Unlike most places St Helens has considerable amounts of PDL sites.

13. Generally, are the assumptions about the delivery from commitments, SHLAA sites and allocations within the 5-year supply realistic?

Yes, generally we agree with the assumptions. Where we have detailed comments, we will raise this during the hearing.

14. Are lead in times and build out rates within the 5-year supply realistic?

Sites do take time to prepare and this varies due to specific circumstances.

15. Are there any measures that the Council can take to provide more elbow room in terms of the 5-year supply?

CPRE recommends that the housing requirement is reduced in order to reflect the evidence and be reasonable. The local plan will be readily found out of date by virtue of an impossible to achieve housing requirement figure.

Note - SHBC001 – PQ55 refers to the possibility of a stepped housing requirement and/or increasing the small sites allowance.

16. Will there be a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites on adoption of the LP?

CPRE agrees a demonstrable 5 year supply of deliverable housing sites is important for a sound plan, otherwise the policy will be out of date and ineffective by the stringent Housing Delivery Test. The Housing Delivery Test ultimately pushes development to greenfields as it readily finds local plans out of date. We believe the Government needs to change its approach as it is not in the public interest to build houses in rural areas.

Issue 4: The wording of Policy LPA05

17. Will Policy LPA05 as worded be effective in maintaining delivery through the Plan period?

CPRE makes the following observations:

1. the minimum number of dwellings should be reduced.
2. extant planning permissions should be counted towards the 5-year supply (and not be argued as excluded on viability grounds – this is a problem with the NPPF – viability focus means an ever eroded five year supply).
3. We recommend the lower density be increased to 35dph.
4. As discussed above, there is a lead in time to site preparation and sites being shovel ready. The Local Plan should require consents to be based on agreed timetables specifying when houses will be completed, with penalties if they fall behind (assuming no reasonable excuse for under-delivery). Penalties could include: the development of sites by others; council tax payable on units that should have been completed. This would help ensure a timelier delivery of housing and avoid land-banking.