



HEARING STATEMENT

Examination of the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan

On behalf of:

Hopkins Homes and Hopkins & Moore (developments) Ltd

In respect of:

Matter 4 – Settlement Hierarchy, Spatial Distribution of Housing and Site Selection

Date:

June 2021

Document Reference:

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Hearing Statement has been prepared on behalf of our clients Hopkins Homes Limited and Hopkins & Moore (Developments) Limited (the 'Hopkins Group') in respect of **Matter 4 – Settlement Hierarchy, Spatial Distribution of Housing and Site Selection** of the Inspector's Matters and Questions for the Examination of the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan (the 'JLP').
- 1.2 The Statement is intended to assist the Inspector's consideration of the soundness of the Plan and will form the basis of the discussion at the Examination Hearing session on 22nd June 2021. We have only sought to answer those questions that relate to our previous representations.

2.0 Questions

Question 4.1

Has the settlement hierarchy set out in Tables 2 and 3 been derived using a robust and objective process?

- 2.1 Yes. The methodology used is clearly set out in the Topic Paper – Settlement Hierarchy Review (Core Document EP01). We have reviewed this methodology which is similar to that used by Local Planning Authorities across the country and is considered to be objective and robust.

Question 4.2

Is it sufficiently clear how policy SP03(1) would be applied to (a) development on sites allocated in the plan (b) applications for development not on sites allocated in the plan?

- 2.2 No. The statement at SP03(1) that "Development which would lead to visual or physical coalescence of settlements will not be supported" is unclear. The dictionary definition of coalescence is "the joining together of elements to form one mass or whole". Physical coalescence is therefore an easily understood concept, but it is far less clear how visual coalescence would be judged. We consider that this concept would be open to dispute, rendering it ineffective and unsound. We therefore recommend that the policy is amended to refer to direct physical coalescence only.
- 2.3 The status of sites with planning permission that are not allocations is also unclear. We recommended that text be added to the policy to explain that these sites are included within the settlement boundary and should any of these consents lapse, there will be a presumption in favour of re-submitted applications for substantially similar proposals.

Question 4.3

Is the requirement to demonstrate “exceptional circumstances” for development outside of defined settlement boundaries in isolated locations consistent with NPPF paragraphs 79 and 83?

2.4 No. As set out in Hopkins Group’s previous representations, this requirement is not consistent with Paragraph 79 of the NPPF as it does not identify what constitutes an exceptional circumstance. To ensure accordance with national policy, we consider the policy must be updated to refer to the list the specific circumstances referred to in the NPPF.

Question 4.6

Is the proposed distribution of development set out in policy SP04, based on robust and objective evidence and is it justified and consistent with national policy? Does the distribution appropriately reflect the Ipswich Strategic Planning Area-wide growth objectives?

2.5 In the Hopkins Group’s representations to Policy SP04 we set out our client’s support for the stated spatial distribution and in particular its balanced approach to growth in the strategic transport corridor areas, as well as ensuring that other market towns and rural communities benefit from appropriate growth (JLP paragraph 09.07). The Councils have set out how they developed this policy in the Topic Paper: Spatial Housing Approach (Core Document: EP03) and we consider that the approach followed is robust. We are, however, concerned with the implementation of this spatial strategy for the following reasons:

- **Transport Corridors:** Key to the spatial strategy is a focus for growth along transport corridors, but there is no way to easily tell if this has been achieved as the tables in Policy SP04 do not specify the amount of growth allocated to these corridors. The policy wording also fails to mention that this is the spatial strategy followed and the reader has to look to paragraph 09.07 to find this reference.
- **A1071 Corridor:** Taking the A1071 transport corridor as an example, it is clear that there has been no attempt made to direct growth to what is an important route between Ipswich and Sudbury. Additional growth in the key settlements along this corridor (e.g. Hadleigh and Boxford) would support rural services that support a wider catchment area of small villages and hamlets that rely on the A1071 as a key access route.

2.6 NPPF paragraph 20 requires strategic policies to set an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and quality of development. Policy SP04 fails to specifically set a strategy for the pattern of development

in the Districts. At no point does it refer to the transport corridor focus, nor demonstrate how this is achieved through the proposed allocations.

Question 4.7

Is it sufficiently clear how the numbers and percentages of new homes, by settlement hierarchy categories, set out in policy SP04 will be applied in the determination of planning applications for housing development?

- 2.7 In Hopkins Group’s representations to this policy, we criticised the JLP for not providing a schedule of settlements detailing their committed and allocated levels of growth. Without this it is very difficult to assess the extent to which the level of growth actually meets the proposed spatial distribution. In response to this question it is also hard to see how the number and percentage of homes, by settlement hierarchy category, can be used to determine planning applications if there is no detail on how these figures are broken down by settlement.
- 2.8 We are pleased to note that the Councils have now provided a schedule of settlements detailing their committed and allocated levels of growth in the Topic Paper: Spatial Housing Approach (Core Document: EP03). This helps in understanding the amount of growth proposed in each settlement for the purpose of determining planning applications and we recommend that this schedule is included as an appendix to the Local Plan.

Question 4.8

Are the “Total homes required” figures for Neighbourhood Plan Areas, detailed in Table 4, a sum of the outstanding planning permissions (as of 1/4/18) and the sites allocated for housing in the plan in each Neighbourhood Plan Area? If so:

(a) are all outstanding permissions from after 1/4/18 identified as housing allocations in the plan or do they need to be otherwise accounted for?

(b) is it sufficiently clear as to how and when the requirement to identify the indicated total number of homes required in each Neighbourhood Plan (NP) Area will operate in practice; in particular:

(i) in respect of outstanding permissions in NP areas which expire (both those pre- and post-dating 1/4/18)?

(ii) in respect of housing sites allocated in the plan in NP areas for which planning applications do not come forward?

(iii) is not flexibility to reflect existing permissions/housing allocations which do not come forward already accounted for in the approximate 20% buffer of housing provision over the housing need targets?

- 2.9 It is our client's understanding that the figures in Table 04 are a sum of the outstanding planning permissions (as of 1/4/18) and the sites allocated for housing in the plan. To take Capel St Mary as an example, Table 04 identifies a total home requirement of 792 dwellings which includes 142 with outline planning permission at 1/4/18 and the schedule of sites at Appendix A to the Topic Paper: Spatial Housing Approach (Core Document: EP03) identifies 650 dwellings on new allocations. The total of new allocations plus existing consents is therefore the same as the total homes required figure (650+142 = 792).
- 2.10 In answer to part b, it is far from clear when Neighbourhood Plans will be required to identify new allocations as the JLP allocates the full quantum of development required in most instances. As set out in our client's representations, we consider that it is appropriate for the JLP to allocate sites in NDP areas in most instances and in this respect the NDP should not be required to allocate additional sites. We do, however, consider that NDPs should still be encouraged to address the specific local needs of their areas and be required to conduct local housing needs surveys and plan to meet the needs identified if not being met by the JLP.

Question 4.9

The Councils have stated that "the settlement hierarchy and the distribution of development between settlement categories have not been of particular significance in the selection of housing sites, to the extent that they might be overriding of other factors" (paragraph 4.01 of Doc G01). In view of this is it justified and effective to require existing permissions/housing allocation sites which are not implemented to be offset by other sites within the same Neighbourhood Plan Area?

- 2.11 The Council's response to the Inspectors' questions at paragraph 4.01 of Core Document G01 is more nuanced than simply stating that the distribution of development has not been of particular significance. It is clear that it has played a role in what the Council has described as both a 'top down' and 'bottom up' process in selecting sites (although as set out under Question 4.6 the spatial strategy should be more clearly set out and evidenced). In view of this, there is some justification for requiring replacement sites within the same Neighbourhood Plan Area, but it will be practically difficult to require Neighbourhood Plans to allocate additional sites at a later date if they have already been made based on the JLP meeting their required housing needs. The decision on replacement sites should therefore be made through a JLP Review as required.