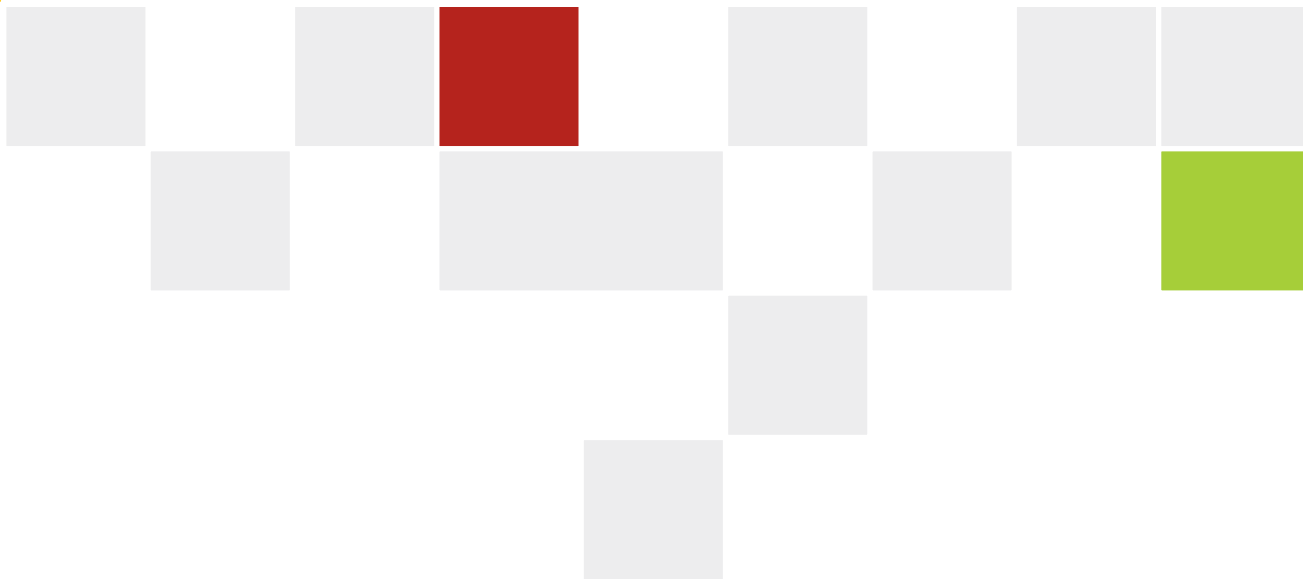


Hearing Statement: Matter 4

Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan Examination



Boyer

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Hearing Statement has been prepared by Boyer and is submitted on behalf of Vistry Group, trading as Vistry Homes Limited, in relation to their interest in the following sites:
 - Land north of Butcher's Land, Boxford; and
 - Land north of Brockford Road, Mendlesham.
- 1.2 Vistry Group was formed in January 2020 and brought together the former house builders known as Bovis Homes, Linden Homes and Galliford Try Partnerships.
- 1.3 Representations were previously submitted by Vistry Group to the Regulation 19 promoting the Sites for development.
- 1.4 This Hearing Statement relates to Matter 4: Settlement Hierarchy, spatial distribution of housing and housing site selection process. The Statement should be read in conjunction with the previous Regulation 19 representations, and Hearing Statements also submitted in relation to Matters 3 and 8.
- 1.5 Vistry Group welcome participation in the preparation of the Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils (BMSDC) Joint Local Plan (JLP).

2. MATTER 4: SETTLEMENT HIERARCHY, SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSING AND HOUSING SITE SELECTION PROCESS

Q 4.1 Has the settlement hierarchy set out in Tables 2 and 3 been derived using a robust and objective process?

2.1 No comment.

Q 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 comment.

Q 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?

2.3 No, the requirement to demonstrate exceptional circumstances is not consistent with NPPF paragraphs 79 and 83, which make no reference to exceptional circumstances. In this context, NPPF references to exceptional circumstances relate to development within the Green Belt and designated sites. Therefore, the requirement to demonstrate exceptional circumstances sets an artificially high bar for criteria that unallocated sites will need to adhere to. It is important that settlement boundaries are not used as a basis for preventing otherwise sustainable development from coming forward.

Q 4.4 Are the criteria of policy SP03(4a-c) of relevance to the Settlement Hierarchy and do these relate to issues covered by other policies of the plan?

2.4 No comment.

Q 4.5 Is there sufficient clarity as to whether policy SP03(4d) concerns the cumulative impact of the various effects of an individual development proposal or the cumulative impact of more than one development proposal?

2.5 No comment.

Q 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?

- 2.6 Paragraph 09.07 of the Draft JLP states “*The spatial distribution of housing set out in this Plan seeks to secure a balance to growth in the strategic transport corridor areas, as well as ensuring that other market towns and rural communities’ benefit from appropriate growth*” and this objective is supported. It is also supported that a high proportion of new development is attributed to the Ipswich Fringe, Market Towns and Core Villages. However, there are concerns with the approach taken to the distribution of new housing among the individual settlements, which is not based upon robust evidence.
- 2.7 For example, despite being recognised as a focus for new development under its Core Village status and suitable sites such a Land north of Butcher’s Lane being available, no sites are proposed for allocation in the main Boxford village within the Draft JLP (just one site for 5 dwellings is proposed within the Boxford Stone Street Hamlet). As an identified sustainable settlement this approach is not justified and is not consistent with the NPPF and national policy aims of boosting housing supply. It is also important to acknowledge that opportunities for growth and development in rural locations has a positive effect on the vitality of existing settlements and surrounding rural communities by supporting existing services and facilities and through the provision of additional facilities, alongside financial contributions paid through the Community Infrastructure Levy.
- 2.8 All the sustainable settlements should be attributed an appropriate level of new housing growth in order to ensure the plan is positively prepared and justified. Policy SP04 should allocate additional housing growth to Market Towns and Core Villages to enable the effectiveness of Policy SP04 in fulfilling the JLP’s spatial approach (paragraph 09.07) of ensuring that other market towns and rural communities’ benefit from appropriate growth.
- 2.9 The Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) (October 2020) informs the spatial distribution within the Draft JLP and provides an initial assessment of the development capacity of potential future sites across the districts. Paragraph 2.32 of the SHELAA states that sites that have been discounted are for “*clearly evidenced and justified reasons*”. However, there is no evidence that full site assessments were undertaken for the discounted sites and therefore it appears as though a thorough assessment of these sites in accordance with the SHELAA methodology was not undertaken. This has led to sustainable sites being incorrectly dismissed, affecting the overall settlement capacity estimates. In order for the spatial distribution to be informed by robust evidence, the SHELAA must make a thorough assessment of all sites and not discount sites for unjustified reasons.
- 2.10 There are also concerns that by providing a prescriptive breakdown of housing numbers and percentage distribution to each settlement category, this may be treated as ‘ceilings’ for growth within each of the tiered settlements, rather than being treated as a minimum consistent with the NPPF. References to percentage breakdowns should be removed from the policy, or amended to clearly state that these are minimum figures.

- 2.11 Policy SPO4 rightly makes reference to the role of Neighbourhood Plans in assisting with delivery of the overall district housing need requirements. However, the numbers identified for these Neighbourhood Plan Areas include outstanding planning permissions (OPPs) granted as of 1st April 2018 and give little flexibility for a Neighbourhood Plan to evolve and effectively address identified need through the plan period. The purpose of a Local Plan is to provide the strategic context for Neighbourhood Plan groups to plan properly for the future of their community and as currently presented, the Joint Local Plan is stifling these opportunities, which is not justified or consistent with the NPPF.

Does the distribution appropriately reflect the Ipswich Strategic Planning Area-wide growth objectives?

- 2.12 No comment.

Q 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?

- 2.13 No, Policy SP04 is not sufficiently clear and is therefore not consistent with NPPF paragraph 16 d), which requires plans to contain policies that are clearly written and unambiguous. To ensure consistency, minimum housing requirements should be included for all parishes. Clarity is also required on what proportion of the new homes requirements set out in Policy SP04 have had planning permission granted since 1st April 2018.

Q 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?

- 2.14 It is unclear if the “total homes required” are sum of outstanding planning permissions (as of 1st April 2018) and allocated sites, and as such Table 04 or supporting text should be amended to make this clear and to ensure an effective and justified approach is presented.

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?

- 2.15 As noted previously, the purpose of the JLP is to provide the strategic context for Neighbourhood Plans, to enable them to plan properly for the future of their community and to contribute to district wide housing delivery. NPPF Paragraph 13 states that *“Neighbourhood plans should support the delivery of strategic policies contained in local plans or spatial development strategies; and should shape and direct development that is outside of these strategic policies”*. The reliance of Neighbourhood Plans on the JLP for housing allocations does not therefore comply with national policy. The approach is highly unjustified and as currently presented, Policy SP04 does not provide a strategic approach to sustainable development in Neighbourhood Plan Areas. The policy would therefore be ineffective as currently worded and would stifle opportunities for a Neighbourhood Plan to evolve and effectively address identified need through the plan period.

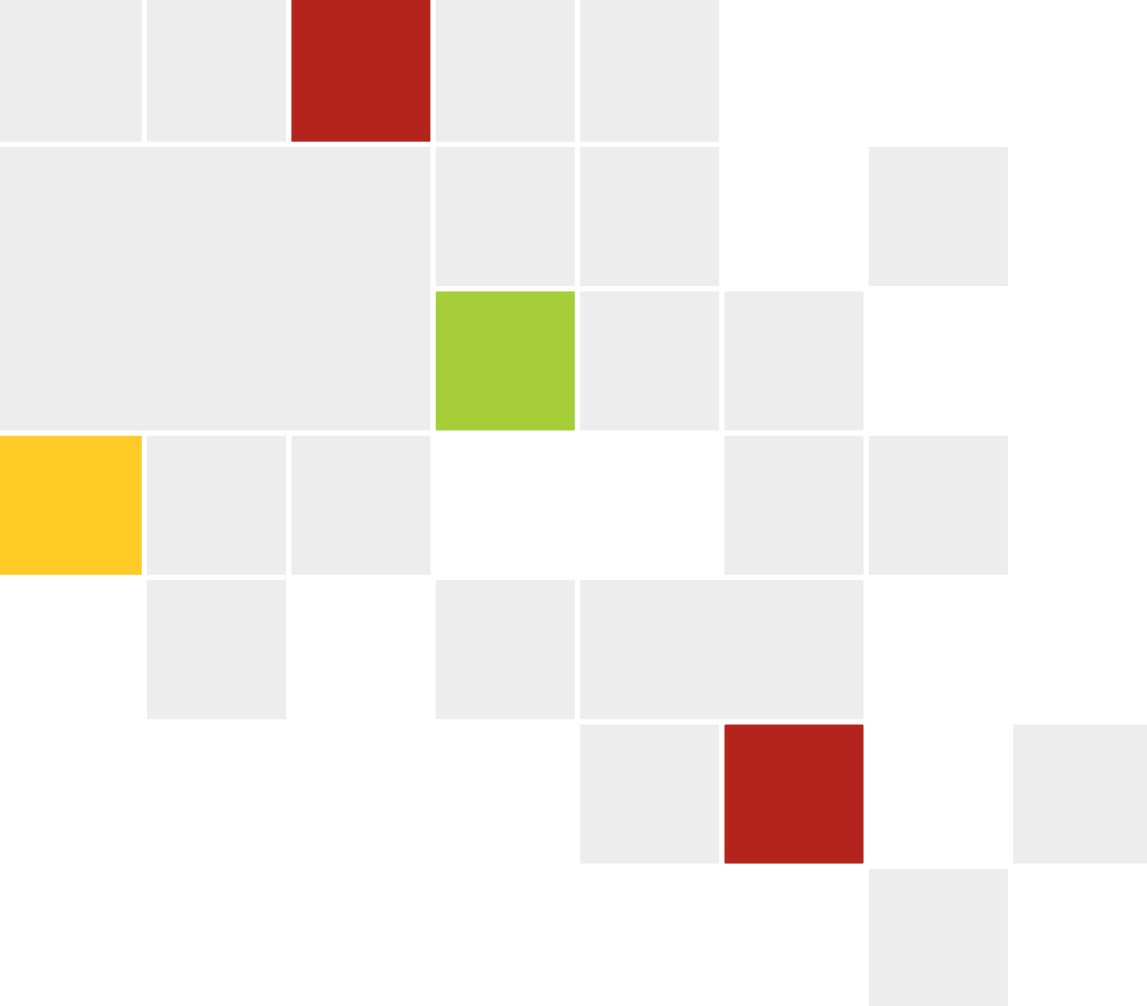
Q 4.9 The Councils have stated that “the settlement hierarchy and the distribution of development between settlement categories have not been of particular significance in the selection of housing sites, to the extent that they might be overriding of other factors” (paragraph 4.01 of Doc G01).

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?

- 2.16 No comment.

Q 4.10 Have the housing sites allocated in the plan been selected against possible alternatives using a robust and objective process? [Note: the soundness of specific housing allocation sites and their relevant policy criteria will be considered as part of Matter 9 and this question focusses on the overall approach by which the sites were appraised and selected.]

- 2.17 As mentioned in response to question 4.6, there is no evidence that the SHELAA made a proper assessment of all the submitted sites and the robustness of the site selection process is therefore questioned.
- 2.18 There is no evidence to demonstrate that suitable alternative sites have been properly and robustly assessed leading to suitable sites being wrongly discounted.



Boyer

15 De Grey Square, De Grey Road, Colchester, CO4 5YQ | 01206 769 018
colchester@boyerplanning.co.uk | boyerplanning.co.uk