

Inspector's Matters, Issues & Questions (MIQs)

Matter 2 – Plan Period, Objectives and the Spatial Strategy

- 1.1 This Matter Statement has been prepared on behalf of Wates Developments Limited (Wates) in response to Matter 2.
- 1.2 Wates has interests in the District across 5 no. sites as set out below, and has submitted representations at earlier stages of Plan preparation at the Regulation 18 and 19 consultations:
 - Land west of Worthing Road, Tower Hill, Horsham (Southwater Parish)
 - Land west of Centenary Road, Southwater (Shipleigh Parish)
 - Land east of Marringdean Road, Billingshurst
 - Land west of Shoreham Road, Small Dole (Henfield Parish)
 - Land north of Melton Drive, Storrington
- 1.3 Two of the above sites are allocated for residential development in the Submission Plan these are:
 - Land west of Shoreham Road, Small Dole (Strategic Policy: HA16 (SMD1))
 - Land north of Melton Drive, Storrington (Strategic Policy: HA18 (STO1))

Matter 2, Issue 2 – Whether the Spatial Vision and Objectives are justified, effective, consistent with national policy and positively prepared?

Question 2 – Objective 9 refers to “smaller market towns” – how does this relate to the settlement hierarchy set out in Strategic Policy 2?

- 1.4 We consider the use of different terminology results in the lack of clarity between Objective 9 and the settlement hierarchy set out in Strategic Policy 2, an issue that we believe can be rectified by amending the wording within objective 9, replacing “smaller market towns” with “small towns and larger villages” in order to ensure consistency.

Question 3 - Do the objectives recognise the need for and role of services and facilities outside of the main town, smaller towns and villages (Tier 1 and 2)? If not, should they?

- 1.5 The spatial objectives of the Plan are naturally high-level ambitions however in our view there is an inconsistent approach to how settlements outside the top two tiers (e.g. the smaller villages) should be treated in respect of the Council's spatial approach. For example, objectives 3 and 6 make reference to all settlements in the District (in the context of landscape character and heritage) whilst we note that objective 8 (like with objective 9) uses terminology not found elsewhere in the Plan i.e. reference to 'rural centres' with it not being clear on how these are defined. There would be benefit in providing clarity on this matter but notwithstanding this, objective 9, which refers to the roles of settlements in the hierarchy, unlike objectives 3 and 6, is selective in only referring to the higher order settlements.

- 1.6 In light of the above and in order to recognise that each settlement tier has a role and function in which it performs as well as its own development needs (i.e. the need for new development does not solely exist in the higher order settlements) means that we consider additional wording should be added to objective 9 to reflect this and to support proportionate growth at these settlements (important to meet with the aims of objective 10). On this basis we would recommend the following wording at the end of objective 9 *“Other settlements also perform a role in serving the needs of residents whilst providing a more limited range of activities, providing suitable locations for proportionate growth”*.

Matter 2, Issue 3 – Whether the Spatial Strategy and overarching policies for growth and change are justified, effective, consistent with national policy and positively prepared?

Question 1 - What is the proposed distribution of development (housing and employment) for each settlement and type identified in the settlement hierarchy (in total and for each year of the plan period)? Is this distribution justified and effective?

- 1.7 In general terms, the Council's spatial strategy aims to focus the most development in and around the main settlements of the District which is explained within paragraphs 4.11-4.14 of the Local Plan as it is highlighted that based on work undertaken to inform the Plan it remains the case that larger settlements generally have more ability to accommodate larger scale growth (paragraph 4.12).
- 1.8 As an overall strategy we consider this to be a justified approach to take however, in respect to the provision of new housing, an inconsistent approach has been taken in respect to certain higher order settlements (i.e. Billingshurst). To date, it has not been possible to determine the exact number and distribution of housing per settlement although indicators are provided within the Council's Housing Delivery Study Update (ref: HOU3) which in the case of the west sub-region (which includes Billingshurst) highlights that delivery is heavily skewed by the proposed strategic allocation at land east of Billingshurst. Notwithstanding this the update states that the Council's proposed spatial strategy for this sub-region would see housing stock increase at a rate of 1.4% per annum across the Plan period which is below historic trends (paragraph 5.37). Furthermore, we note that the trajectory in HOU3 assumes first completions on land east of Billingshurst in 2027/28 (50 homes) whereas the Council's most recent housing trajectory (September 2024 – ref: HDC03) assumes first deliver in 2026/27 (50 homes) even though no planning application has yet been submitted.
- 1.9 Irrespective of the differences in the trajectory, it is evident that outside of the anticipated delivery of the strategic allocation, delivery in and around Billingshurst will be limited (HOU3 notes that delivery dropped to 56 homes per annum in 2022/23 (paragraph 5.34)) which in our view runs counter to the settlement's position in the settlement hierarchy. The Local Plan acknowledges that pressure for new housing at Billingshurst remains (5th bullet point, p127) however by limiting any new allocations to a single strategic allocation constrains supply from smaller sites around the town which could complement and deliver a more consistent supply of new housing in what is one of the most sustainable settlements in the District. On this basis, in respect to Billingshurst, we do not consider that the proposed distribution of new housing is justified and is a matter we return to in Matter 8.
- 1.10 In respect to the provision of new employment space we do not consider that the proposed locational distribution from a qualitative perspective is justified given that it would not meet the needs of the market in an effective way, for the reasons expanded upon within our Matter 7 statement.

1.11 Overall, when considering this and other reasons expanded upon within our Regulation 19 representations, these issues limit the ability of the proposed employment allocations to fully meet the needs of industrial and distribution businesses either in terms of location, access, operation or scale. We therefore consider that the Local Plan provides no additional capacity to the north of the borough for industrial and distribution businesses, meaning any businesses wanting to locate close to Horsham to service the town, draw on its labour force or access opportunities at Gatwick Airport and beyond will not be provided for. We consider that if this is not addressed then the district may lose out on future employment growth as businesses seek to locate outside of Horsham in order to access the space and accessibility to markets they need.

Question 2 - Is Strategic Policy 1: Sustainable Development sound? a) Should this policy or its justification have a greater emphasis on reducing the need to travel by private motorised transport?

1.12 We consider that this Policy is sound as it is consistent with paragraph 11 of the NPPF (2023). As is set out within paragraph 8 of the NPPF achieving sustainable development has three overarching objectives which are interdependent, one of which being a social objective to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities. The District is made up of a large number of villages (of varying sizes) which typically provide a range of services and facilities that also serve a rural hinterland. This being the case means that the need for new development exists to a greater or lesser extent across the District as a whole especially when viewed in the wider region (with most neighbouring authorities having an unmet need). On this basis local needs exist in and around these villages and so a spatial approach based on the proportionate growth of these settlements is considered sound when assessed holistically against the three overarching objectives set out in the NPPF (paragraph 8) even if this does rely, to some extent, on travel by private motorised transport which is an inevitability given the characteristics and demographic make up of the District.

Question 4 - Is Strategic Policy 3: Settlement Expansion sound? a) Is it consistent with other policies in the Plan? b) Is it justified and effective in terms of the approach to development outside of built-up area boundaries, secondary settlement boundaries or sites allocated in the Plan? c) Does this policy apply to all settlement types identified in Strategic Policy 2? d) Is it clear how a decision maker should react to the term "defensible boundary"? e) Does criterion 6 unnecessarily duplicate other policy requirements and is it necessary to reference any other specific development constraints such as those related to transport or the natural environment? f) Is the geographical application of this policy on the Policies Map effective?

1.13 We support the principle of this Policy which enables development to come forward outside of existing settlement boundaries. This is particularly important in circumstances where, as is acknowledged within the Local Plan (and referred to in our Regulation 19 reps and Matter 8 response), were it not for water neutrality issues then the District has the ability to deliver a greater number of new homes than is currently planned for. Strategic Policy 3 offers an important opportunity to allow *appropriate* development to come forward on a case-by-case basis which is able to demonstrate water neutrality. This would go some way to ameliorate the harm caused by establishing a housing requirement (and allocations to meet that housing requirement) which is significantly below local housing need and will provide no contribution to the unmet needs of the neighbouring areas.

- 1.14 However, as currently drafted Strategic Policy 3 would 'bake in' the restrictions on the housing requirement caused by the water neutrality issue. It would do so because criteria 1 requires any site coming forward under this policy to be "allocated in the Local Plan or in a Neighbourhood Plan". At a stroke this criterion would prevent any windfall development coming forward which was able to demonstrate water neutrality and would otherwise be appropriate. It would only permit allocated development to come forward: development which would have been allocated to meet a heavily restricted housing requirement. Such a restrictive policy is not sound. It is neither positively prepared, nor justified, nor consistent with national policy.
- 1.15 In order to make the policy sound, we suggest that criteria 1 is removed from Strategic Policy 3. In the circumstances there is no justification for restricting appropriate development coming forwards only under the plan-making regime (which is what the words "The site is allocated in the Local Plan or in a Neighbourhood Plan" would achieve). Nor is there any justification for sites to "adjoin" the settlement edge: sufficient control is provided by the fact that the policy applies only to the "expansion of existing settlements". This would allow Strategic Policy 3 to ensure that the delivery of housing is maximised consistent with the objective of ensuring that this would cause no adverse impact on the integrity of protected sites. Furthermore, the requirement for any proposal to be compliant with the remaining criteria in Strategic Policy 3 (such as criteria 2, 4 and 6), as well as other policies within the development plan, would ensure that only *appropriate* housing development would be permissible under this mechanism.
- 1.16 In respect to the current wording of the remaining criteria, we do not consider that criteria 3 and 5 are sound.
- 1.17 In terms of criteria 3, given that the Council is proposing to provide significantly fewer houses than identified by the local housing need for its area, and to make no contribution to the unmet needs of neighbouring authorities, there is no justification for requiring development coming forward under this Policy to meet "identified local housing needs".
- 1.18 In terms of criteria 5, the reference to any new development being contained within an existing defensible boundary is not effective as it assumes that in every case there is – or needs to be - an existing defensible boundary. This is simply not correct. For example, Policy HA16 (Small Dole), which is a site which Wates Developments have a controlling interest over, proposes development on only part of the site however the site comprises of a single field. On this basis there is no clear existing boundary within the site resulting in inconsistency between policies. Furthermore, the objective also seeks to maintain/enhance landscape and townscape features which are also objectives of Strategic Policies 19 and 20 (at the District level) and, where applicable, a feature of the individual site allocation policies thereby resulting in unnecessary duplication.
- 1.19 Finally, it could be considered that objective 6 is unnecessary as it simply refers to achieving water neutrality as required by Strategic Policy 9 which is a requirement regardless of whether it is referred to or not in this Policy. We understand that the Council may wish to ensure that the need to ensure water neutrality from development coming forward under this policy is not overlooked, however this could be achieved by simply cross-reference to the requirements of Strategic Policy 9 in the supporting text

1.20 In any event, as a permanent solution to the issues raised by water stress is expected midway through the Plan period, at that point this requirement would become superfluous. It follows that, if the requirement is to be retained, wording should be included in the criterion to reflect this eventuality (for instance “*The development can ~~conclusively~~¹ demonstrate either that it is water neutral in accordance with other development plan policies or that there is no need for the development to be water neutral in order to avoid adverse impacts on European protected sites*).

Question 5 - Should Strategic Policies 2 and 3 be more specific in terms of the amount of housing and employment land to be provided within each settlement or settlement type over the Plan period in the interests of effectiveness?

1.21 We understand that whilst the location of new development has been informed by the Council’s settlement hierarchy the exact quantum of new development to be delivered at individual settlements has been determined on a capacity based assessment informed by the availability of suitable sites (as considered by the Council) rather than on a by settlement basis depending on its position in the settlement hierarchy. Whilst for clarity it would be helpful to be more specific on the amount of housing to be delivered in individual settlements we are not convinced it would result, by itself, in an effective Plan as it may be the case that there are not sufficient alternative appropriate sites that could deliver the stated housing figure for that settlement.

Question 6 - Should the role of Neighbourhood Plans be more clearly articulated in Strategic Policies 2 and 3 or their justification text in the interests of effectiveness?

1.22 Notwithstanding the fact that there are references to Neighbourhood Planning throughout the Plan (e.g. at paragraph 2.18) providing additional articulation on their role especially as it varies across the District would assist the Local Plan’s effectiveness (e.g. some Parishes are not covered by any Neighbourhood Plan, some have a Plan but which does not propose any housing allocations whilst others do). Given this patchwork of coverage and the fact that where there is no Neighbourhood Plan (or where there is it doesn’t allocate housing sites) there will be certain areas where the Local Plan will play a greater role. On this basis, we consider that additional wording in the supporting text to Policy 2 outlining which Parish has a ‘made’ Neighbourhood Plan (or is in preparation) and its scope will make it clearer on the role of Neighbourhood Plans have in delivering the spatial strategy for the District.

¹ The word “conclusively” is otiose.