

**MATTER 4 – SETTLEMENT HIERARCHY (SPATIAL STRATEGY),
DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES & APPROACH TO THE GREEN BELT**

Issue 1 - Whether the distribution of development is justified and consistent with the local evidence base and national planning policy.

Q4.1) Is the submitted strategy the most sustainable when considered against reasonable alternatives? Please explain. What other spatial strategy options were considered and why were they rejected? How has Sustainability Appraisal assessed and recorded the process?

- 1.1 Paragraph 182 of the NPPF establishes the four tests of soundness and for local plans to meet the “justified” criteria “*the plan should be the most appropriate strategy, when considered against the reasonable alternatives*”.
- 1.2 The Sustainability Appraisal (SA, Examination document D6.1) only briefly mentions the eight spatial alternatives that were considered as part of the Issue and Options consultation in 2009. Paragraph 4.1.28 defines the reasonable alternatives as follows:
 - i) to allocate sites to meet the objectively assessed need for the Borough in full and as much of Coventry’s overspill as possible;
 - ii) to allocate sites to meet a lower level of objectively assessed need for the Borough; and
 - iii) to allocate sites to meet the level of objectively assessed need for the Borough and 4,020 dwellings towards Coventry’s unmet need.
- 1.3 Stage one of the examination concluded that option three is the chosen strategy despite the SA confirming that option one is the chosen strategy. As we outlined in our response to the Housing Topic Paper (HTP, Examination document NBBC/33), the Borough Plan needs to be subject to a main modification to amend the housing requirement in policy DS4 to 14,060 new dwellings which must be appropriately scrutinised through the SA process.
- 1.4 Critically, the defined ‘reasonable alternatives’ all relate to the quantum of development and do not consider spatial considerations or sustainable development criteria which are fundamental to the SA site selection process.
- 1.5 In terms of alternative sites, the former Hawkesbury Golf Course site (herein referred to as Hawkesbury) is the only site that is identified as an alternative in the SA as it is included in Appendix D (Examination document D6.11) along with all the proposed strategic allocations. Hawkesbury is situated in a sustainable location as matrices at Appendix D verify. Indeed, the site scores more positively than most of the allocation sites due to its proximity to Bedworth town centre and accessibility to public transport options.

- 1.6 NBBC acknowledges in its HTP (Examination document NBBC/33) at paragraph 2.100 that the highways objection has been overcome. Accordingly, paragraph 4.1.57 of the SA (D6.1) should be deleted and Appendix D (D6.11) updated to include potential mitigation measures to reflect this change in position.
- 1.7 To conclude, the submitted strategy is not the most sustainable option when considered against reasonable alternatives as sites are proposed to be allocated in less sustainable locations such as Bulkington (HSG7 & HSG8) and Arbury (HSG2) with limited access to services and public transport. Whereas sustainable locations such as Hawkesbury have been discounted contrary to the Council's evidence base including the conclusions of the SA. Evidently in accordance with the SA, Hawkesbury should have been allocated in advance of other allocations because of its sustainable location as verified by the SA.
- Q4.2) Does the Memorandum of Understanding relating to the planned distribution of housing within the Coventry & Warwickshire Housing Market Area include any spatial dimension such as requiring development arising from the unmet needs of Coventry to be located either adjacent to the City's boundary or along key transport corridors that connect into the City?***
- 1.8 Although the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is principally focused on addressing Coventry's unmet housing needs across the remainder of the HMA, there is a spatial dimension to its redistribution as the Boroughs closest to Coventry are expected to accommodate the largest proportion of Coventry's unmet needs. After Warwick District Council, NBBC is expected to take the second biggest proportion of Coventry's unmet needs in recognition of the supporting role of the Borough due to its proximate location.
- 1.9 In terms of sustainability, it makes perfect sense that sites located closest to Coventry's boundary should meet the unmet needs of Coventry to minimise commuting and reduce environmental impacts.
- 1.10 Hawkesbury is located in the south of the Borough, close to the Coventry boundary. Therefore, the site is perfectly positioned to accommodate Coventry's unmet needs. It is highly likely that residents in the southern part of the Borough have a closer relationship with and make better use of services and facilities in Coventry than residents in north Nuneaton where a significant proportion of the Borough's housing is proposed.
- 1.11 The Inspector to the Warwick Local Plan made a series of main modifications recommendations in his report (Examination document OTH/11) which included amending the spatial strategy to also focus growth on the southern edge of Coventry (MM2) to meet the unmet needs of Coventry.
- 1.12 In reaching his conclusions that further sites on the edge of Coventry should be allocated, the Inspector states at paragraph 87:

“A number of factors need to be taken into account when considering the options for identifying additional housing sites. A significant proportion of the increased housing requirement is as a result of the commitment to contribute towards unmet needs from Coventry. Proximity and accessibility to Coventry and the jobs and services it offers is an important consideration therefore.”

- 1.13 In accordance with the Inspector’s recommendations, the Warwick Local Plan has been amended to include 2,245 new homes on the edge of Coventry, which includes the allocation of two strategic sites at Westwood Heath (425 dwellings) and Kings Hill (1,800 dwellings).
- 1.14 NBBC should take the same approach and address Coventry’s housing needs at sites close to the Borough boundary and Hawkesbury is ideally placed to address these needs in a sustainable manner. We therefore request that the Inspector adopts the same approach as the Warwick Inspector and recommends main modifications to the Borough Plan which includes the allocation of Hawkesbury.

Q4.3) Explain whether other locations in the Borough proximate to Coventry have been assessed in sustainability appraisal as part of an alternative spatial strategy for meeting the housing and employment land requirements? Which parts of the Borough are within the Coventry Travel to Work Area? Has accessibility to, and availability and capacity of, services outside of the Borough boundary informed the spatial strategy?

- 1.15 Further to our response to Q4.2, Bedworth is in the Coventry Travel to Work Area and therefore there is a logic in Hawkesbury being allocated to meet the unmet needs of Coventry. Allocation of the site is the sustainable solution and it should be a main modification to the Plan.

Q4.4) Does the spatial strategy in Policy DS2 reflect paragraph 179 of the Framework in terms of local planning authorities working collaboratively with other bodies to ensure that strategic priorities across local boundaries are properly coordinated and clearly reflected in individual Local Plans?

- 1.16 As outlined in our response to Q4.2, the other HMA Authorities have been primarily concerned with meeting the unmet needs of Coventry in terms of addressing housing numbers rather than taking a holistic spatial overview. NBBC’s unwillingness to sign the MOU and address Coventry’s unmet needs until recently has frustrated the process and any meaningful dialogue between authorities. Therefore, policy DS2 does not appear to have any endorsement from the other HMA Authorities most critically Coventry, which should have some influence on how its unmet housing needs are met in the adjacent boroughs.

Q4.5) Explain why the strategy of concentrating new development around Nuneaton is the most appropriate for sustainable growth and justify the approach of two strategic urban extensions for the town (North of Nuneaton & Arbury).

- 1.17 Whilst we acknowledge that Nuneaton is the larger of the two towns, Bedworth is as equally sustainable in terms of its access to employment, services and public transport. Neither of the two strategic urban extensions to Nuneaton represent sustainable growth options as both are peripheral locations that encourage out commuting. HSG2 Arbury is in a particularly unsustainable location as at its closest point it is 3km from both Nuneaton and Bedworth Town Centres (Examination document D6.11) and the site has significant environmental constraints including the presence of two ancient woodlands and is adjacent to Ensors Pool SSSI, SAC and Arbury Hall GII* listed building. Clearly, sites in Bedworth are being overlooked in favour of Nuneaton sites and there is concern that this decision may be politically motivated rather than based on a sound evidence base.

Q4.6) Is the Plan's spatial strategy robust and sufficiently flexible to accommodate higher homes and jobs figures and/or able to respond to changing circumstances? (NPPF paragraph 153)

- 1.18 Policy DS2 proposes a very rigid spatial strategy with a strong bias towards Nuneaton sites in advance of Bedworth. The settlement hierarchy should be defined on the settlements' sustainability credentials (i.e. the availability of services and facilities). Therefore, sites in Nuneaton and Bedworth should be prioritised in advance of lower order settlements such as Bulkington.
- 1.19 We recommend that a main modification be proposed to delete the final paragraph of policy DS2: ***“Development will be directed to other settlements at a scale that reflects the role and function of the settlement in the hierarchy and the settlement's ability to accommodate change”***.
- 1.20 This statement could unduly restrict the growth of Bedworth and run counter to sustainability considerations. Moreover, it does not reflect the flexibility as promoted by paragraph 153 of the NPPF.
- 1.21 Furthermore, it is noted that there is no review policy in the Plan. The Warwick Local Plan includes policy DS19 which triggers a local plan review in any of the following circumstances: duty to cooperate requirements (i.e. HMA housing matters); change in national policy; monitoring demonstrates that the policies are not delivering the local plan objectives; and development and growth pressures relating south of Coventry; and other reasons that makes the plan out of date.
- 1.22 Other Authorities that have made significant alterations to the Green Belt have also designated areas of safeguarded land to meet the longer-term development needs beyond the plan period. Paragraph 85 of the NPPF promotes the principle of safeguarding land to ensure the Green Belt boundaries are robust and can endure beyond the plan period. A recent example where safeguarded land has been

designated is the Joint Core Strategy for Gloucester, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury. Safeguarding is another planning tool that enables flexibility in plan making as encouraged by paragraph 153 of the NPPF.

- 1.23 We therefore request that the Inspector recommends Main Modifications to the Borough Plan which includes a Borough Plan review policy that is similar to the Warwick Local Plan to enable flexibility.

Q4.7) Explain the evidence that Bulkington can sustainably accommodate the additional scale of development proposed (691 dwellings). What is the connectivity from Bulkington by non-car modes to higher order centres (including Coventry) and areas of employment?

- 1.24 Bulkington was never previously considered as a location suitable for housing growth in the earlier Borough Plan consultations; on the basis that it is a lower order settlement than the towns of Nuneaton and Bedworth, which should be the main focus for growth given the extent of the availability of supporting services and facilities. In other words, Bulkington is not a sustainable location for growth.

- 1.25 Policy DS2 describes both Bedworth and Bulkington as having a “supporting role” despite Bedworth being a highly sustainable town with an extensive range of service provision including a mainline railway station. Whereas Bulkington has no employment provision and limited services and public transport provision, i.e. it is an unsustainable location. In our previous representations we have made detailed comments about the inappropriateness of the two large strategic allocations for Bulkington in terms of their scale, form and impact on the landscape and how these allocations are not supported by the evidence, namely the Green Belt Review, Landscape Capacity Assessment (T13.1-6) and SA.

Issue 3 - Whether the approach to the Green Belt is justified and consistent with the local evidence base and national planning policy.

Q4.10) Is there a robust evidence base that demonstrates that all other reasonable options for development land have been examined fully prior to the consideration of alteration of Green Belt boundaries?

- 1.26 Green Belt is a significant constraint on Nuneaton and Bedworth and as the HTP (NBBC/33) advises, 48% of land in the Borough is currently designated Green Belt. The Borough does not have a wealth of brownfield sites that can be progressed in advance of greenfield or Green Belt sites. Hence the Green Belt boundaries need be reviewed to facilitate sustainable housing and employment growth.

- 1.27 The inability of NBBC to meet its development needs within the existing urban boundaries is apparent by the allocation of eight strategic Green Belt housing sites in the Submission Borough Plan. Consequently, there is an accepted inevitability that the Green Belt needs to be reviewed to accommodate the Borough’s housing requirements and very special circumstances exist to justify Green Belt release, but

justification for each site removal from the Green Belt needs to be made on a case-by-case basis.

- 1.28 Pertinently the three reasonable alternative options assessed in SA (see paragraph 1.2 above) are reliant on the release of Green Belt to accommodate housing growth.

Q4.11) Is the Plan clear on what are considered to be the exceptional circumstances to justify the release of land from the Green Belt for housing and employment? What is the key supporting evidence that the Council relies on?

- 1.29 As outlined above, Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough is heavily constrained by Green Belt and a review of the Coventry and Warwickshire Green Belt is long overdue. Whilst it is accepted that there is need to release Green Belt to accommodate housing and employment growth, it is NBBC's justification for the release of each of the Green Belt sites (i.e. demonstration of exceptional circumstances) that is currently lacking.
- 1.30 The NPPF makes it clear that the Green Belt can only be reviewed as part of the local plan making process and altered in exceptional circumstances. Paragraph 85 advises that local planning authorities should *"satisfy themselves that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the development plan period"*.
- 1.31 Therefore, NBBC should ensure that the right Green Belt sites are being released for development and that the revised Green Belt boundaries are robust and can endure beyond the Plan period.
- 1.32 In its HTP (NBBC/33), NBBC cites seven reasons for Green Belt release which mainly relate to housing need, lack of available sites and to achieve sustainable development. The final and critical reason justifying exceptional circumstances is *"sites identified for release are not key sites for fulfilling the five purposes of Green Belt"* (Paragraph 3.7)
- 1.33 Despite the 2009 and 2015 Green Belt Reviews (Examination documents P1.1-2 and P2.1-10) comprising a fundamental part of its evidence base, NBBC has ignored the findings of the key documents. The Green Belt Study 2015 (paragraph 5.8) recommends that the lowest performing parcels of Green Belt or parts of them, could be considered for removal from the Green Belt. These include BU3 (the southern half of HSG8 West of Bulkington), BE4 Hawkesbury and BE5 (HSG6 School Lane). Key strategic allocations HSG2 Arbury, HSG3 Gipsy Lane, HSG5 Hospital Lane and HSG7 East of Bulkington are not listed and consequently are recommended to be retained as Green Belt.
- 1.34 Our previous representations included landscape evidence prepared by Matt Lee (March 2017) which provides thorough landscape analysis of the Green Belt reviews and landscape studies and compares Hawkesbury with the 12 proposed strategic housing allocations, of which eight are in the Green Belt. Hawkesbury is the third worst scoring site with regards to fulfilling the five purposes of Green Belt. A

summary of the Joint Green Belt Study (Examination document P2.1-10) findings is provided below:

Borough Plan Site Ref.	Allocation Capacity	2015 GB Study		2015 GB Study recommends sites for release
		Score	Rank	
Hawkesbury	- (at least 308 dwellings)	9	Joint 3 rd	Yes
Strategic Sites				
HSG2: Arbury	1525	10	4 th	No
HSG3: Gypsy Lane	575	13	Joint 7 th	No
HSG5: Hospital Lane	398	13	Joint 7 th	No
HSG6: School Lane	388	6	Joint 2 nd	Yes
HSG7: East of Bulkington	196	12	6 th	No
HSG8: West of Bulkington	495	13	Joint 7 th	No
HSG9: Land at Golf Drive	621	11	Joint 5 th	No
EMP2: Phoenix Way/Wilsons Lane	73	6	Joint 2 nd	Yes
Non- Strategic Sites				
NUN181: Stockley Road	80	9	Joint 3 rd	Yes
NUN286/317: Burbages Lane	127	11	Joint 5 th	No
NUN318: Land rear of Marston House Farm, Nuneaton Road, Bulkington	43	5	1st	Yes

1.35 In its HTP (NBBC/33) NBBC states in paragraph 2.97 that:

“The Council has retained the highest performing Green Belt parcels, particularly where it serves a key purpose of separating settlements. The Council has allocated sites that fit with the Council’s preferred spatial approach, whilst also utilising the lowest performing Green Belt parcels. As there is not enough low performing parcels for all the required development, it has also been necessary to utilise sites within low-medium performing parcels, as long as the wider Green Belt parcel was not unduly comprised.”

- 1.36 It is incredulous that NBBC states that *“there is not enough low performing parcels”* when it has blatantly overlooked Hawkesbury which scores only 9/20. The rationale for not allocating Hawkesbury is then further confused by NBBC acknowledging at paragraph 2.100 that it is a low scoring Green Belt site and that the withdrawal of the highway objection means that the site warrants a strategic allocation in the Borough Plan.
- 1.37 The audit trail justifying the strategic and non-strategic allocations is evidently lacking and the Inspector gave NBBC an opportunity to further clarify its site selection process in its HTP (NBBC/33). However, NBBC did not fully utilise this opportunity to put forward robust evidence to justify its position as our previous representations to NBBC/33 (ref. 2.0022) demonstrated. The Landscape Capacity Study 2017 (Examination document T13.1-6) is another key evidence base document which should influence the allocations, but it has been largely overlooked and is not considered at length in the HTP.
- 1.38 We provided detailed analysis of the TEP Landscape Capacity Study 2017 (T13.1-6) in our landscape evidence representations prepared by Matt Lee (March 2017). The conclusions of the Landscape Capacity Study should have a strong influence on the site selection process and the exceptional circumstances justification for individual sites to be released from the Green Belt. However, NBBC has ignored the findings of both the Green Belt Reviews and the Landscape Capacity Study which is a significant shortcoming of its site selection process and justification of exceptional circumstances.

Q4.12) Is the Green Belt Review evidence justified and does it provide a sound basis for altering the Green Belt boundaries as submitted? (NPPF paragraphs 83-85) Is it up-to-date, robust and fit for purpose? Does it support the consideration of any reasonable alternative Green Belt alterations to those proposed in the submitted Plan?

Q4.13) Has the Green Belt Review used the most appropriate methodology? Please explain.

- 1.39 The Green Belt Review is a robust evidence base document which makes sound recommendations. However, NBBC has disregarded these recommendations and has not justified its site selection process thereby failing the test of soundness.
- 1.40 The Green Belt Study 2015 (paragraph 5.8, P2.1-10) recommends that the lowest performing parcels of Green Belt or parts of them, could be considered for removal from the Green Belt. These include BU3 (the southern half of HSG8 West of Bulkington), BE4 Hawkesbury and BE5 (HSG6 School Lane). Key strategic allocations HSG2 Arbury, HSG3 Gipsy Lane, HSG5 Hospital Lane and HSG7 East of Bulkington are not listed and consequently are recommended to be retained as Green Belt.

- 1.41 Hawkesbury is an alternative Green Belt site as identified by in the SA (D6) and the evidence base indicates that it should be released from the Green Belt. Accordingly, a main modification should be made to the plan which removes Hawkesbury from the Green Belt and allocates the site as a strategic housing allocation.

Q4.15) Having regard to their intended long term permanence, explain why it is considered the proposed Green Belt boundaries will be capable of enduring beyond the Plan period?

- 1.42 Further to the above, we contend that NBBC has not defined the right Green Belt boundaries as they have not followed the recommendations of the Green Belt Study or Landscape Capacity Study. The Green Belt boundaries therefore do not satisfy the requirements of NPPF paragraph 85 as they will not endure beyond the Plan period.
- 1.43 Hawkesbury should be removed from the Green Belt because it does not meet the five purposes of Green Belt, namely:
- i) **To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.**
 - The site does not have the characteristics of a large built-up area and the proposed allocation would not have the appearance of sprawl.
 - The site has strong defensible boundaries: housing to south, canal to east, railway to the west and existing opens space to the north and its development would not result in sprawl.
 - ii) **To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another.**
 - Due to the site's defensible boundaries it would not merge with Bulkington to the east or Bedworth to the north.
 - iii) **To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.**
 - The site is not countryside in character and is removed from wide countryside due to defensible boundaries.
 - iv) **To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.**
 - Bedworth is not a town of special historic character.
 - v) **To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.**
 - The site is part brownfield and is previously used.
 - NBBC needs to allocate Green Belt sites to meet its housing needs and Hawkesbury is a low scoring Green Belt site.