

# NUNEATON & BEDWORTH BOROUGH PLAN REVIEW: EXAMINATION-IN-PUBLIC

**Matter 2: Vision, Strategic Objectives and Development Strategy**

**On behalf of Taylor Wimpey**

ProjectReference  
13 June 2024

REPORT

Document status					
Version	Purpose of document	Authored by	Reviewed by	Approved by	Review date
V1	Matter 2 Statement	DO	CAF	CAF	14.06.2024

Approval for issue		
Cameron Austin-ell	CAF	14.06.2024

The report has been prepared for the exclusive use and benefit of our client and solely for the purpose for which it is provided. Unless otherwise agreed in writing by R P S Group Limited, any of its subsidiaries, or a related entity (collectively 'RPS') no part of this report should be reproduced, distributed or communicated to any third party. RPS does not accept any liability if this report is used for an alternative purpose from which it is intended, nor to any third party in respect of this report. The report does not account for any changes relating to the subject matter of the report, or any legislative or regulatory changes that have occurred since the report was produced and that may affect the report.

The report has been prepared using the information provided to RPS by its client, or others on behalf of its client. To the fullest extent permitted by law, RPS shall not be liable for any loss or damage suffered by the client arising from fraud, misrepresentation, withholding of information material relevant to the report or required by RPS, or other default relating to such information, whether on the client's part or that of the other information sources, unless such fraud, misrepresentation, withholding or such other default is evident to RPS without further enquiry. It is expressly stated that no independent verification of any documents or information supplied by the client or others on behalf of the client has been made. The report shall be used for general information only.

Prepared by:

RPS

Prepared for:

Taylor Wimpey

## Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>ISSUE 1: HAVE THE VISION AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES BEEN POSITIVELY PREPARED, ARE THEY JUSTIFIED AND CONSISTENT WITH NATIONAL POLICY, AND CAN ALL BE REALISTICALLY ACHIEVED? .....</b>	<b>1</b>
	Q22. What does ‘a steady and adequate level of suitable housing’ mean in the context of strategic objective 4? .....	1
	Q23. Do the vision and strategic objectives have regard to and provide for the development needs of the area as well as any identified unmet needs in neighbouring areas? .....	1
	Q24. Does the Plan address/meet any identified unmet needs in neighbouring areas? If not, why not? .....	2
	Q25. Is it necessary for the Plan to consider the release of Green Belt land to meet identified development needs? .....	2
<b>2</b>	<b>ISSUE 2: HAS THE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY AND THE OVERALL DISTRIBUTION OF DEVELOPMENT BEEN POSITIVELY PREPARED, IS IT JUSTIFIED BY A ROBUST AND CREDIBLE EVIDENCE BASE, AND IS IT CONSISTENT WITH NATIONAL POLICY? .....</b>	<b>4</b>
	Q27. Does the development strategy in general, and Strategic Policy DS3 incorporate sufficient flexibility within it? Particularly with regard to the potential for unmet housing and employment need arising from neighbouring areas in the future.....	4
	Q30. Has the development strategy been fully informed by the SA and other evidence? Is it soundly based? Does it accord with the Framework? .....	4
	Q31. Is the site selection process clear and suitably robust, supported by the SA and other evidence, with particular regard to the proposal to not allocate some sites that are allocated in the adopted Plan? .....	7
	Q32. Have reasonable alternatives been considered and clearly discounted on the evidence? .....	8
	Q35. Does Strategic Policy DS6 deal with strategic matters, or does it deal with more detailed matters? .....	9

# 1 ISSUE 1: HAVE THE VISION AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES BEEN POSITIVELY PREPARED, ARE THEY JUSTIFIED AND CONSISTENT WITH NATIONAL POLICY, AND CAN ALL BE REALISTICALLY ACHIEVED?

## Q22. What does ‘a steady and adequate level of suitable housing’ mean in the context of strategic objective 4?

1.1.1 National policy<sup>1</sup> says that ‘plans should provide a positive vision for the future of each area’.

1.1.2 We have submitted representations on this objective which highlight the complete lack of any consideration to the wider housing needs across the Coventry and Warwickshire Housing Market area (“CWHMA”). It is clearly very important that the Plan includes a housing-related objective as part of the overall vision for the Plan. Nonetheless, we have proposed a modification to this objective to reflect concerns raised in our Reg 19 response, as follows:

*“To provide a steady and adequate level of suitable housing which meets the needs of existing and new residents, including housing to assist in meeting needs of households from elsewhere in the wider housing market area.”*

1.1.3 With regards to the question posed here, the wording ‘steady and adequate’ is not clearly defined and lacks precision in planning terms. For this reason, the wording is not effective or positively prepared and so is not soundly-based. We recommend this phrase is deleted and replaced with alternative wording. We suggest the following:

*“To provide a ~~steady and adequate~~ sufficient level of suitable housing...”*

1.1.4 The two modifications together will ensure the objective reflects national policy<sup>2</sup> whilst also reflecting local and strategic issues relevant to the Plan.

## Q23. Do the vision and strategic objectives have regard to and provide for the development needs of the area as well as any identified unmet needs in neighbouring areas?

1.1.5 No.

1.1.6 The vision and objectives are essentially ‘inward-looking’ focused exclusively on local issues but has no regard to identified unmet need in neighbouring areas elsewhere in the CWHMA. This ignores the current planning context that has framed the adopted Plans in place across the CWHMA authorities which sought to address wider housing need at a sub-regional level, but also ignores the likely future needs that will need to be addressed as part of those plan reviews.

<sup>1</sup> NPPF 2023, para 13

<sup>2</sup> NPPF 2023, para 20

- 1.1.7 Consequently, the vision and objectives do not provide an adequate basis for the strategic policies, notably Policy DS3, and so is not justified or positively prepared.

### **Q24. Does the Plan address/meet any identified unmet needs in neighbouring areas? If not, why not?**

- 1.1.8 No.
- 1.1.9 The Plan does not address or meet any identified unmet needs in neighbouring areas. Such an approach is complete 'u-turn' from the adopted Plan which made a significant contribution towards the unmet need from Coventry (4,020 dwellings specifically to address that shortfall). Given the relative speed at which the review process commenced after adoption the current Plan in 2019, the decision not to address or meet those needs would seem to be a key driver in bringing forward the review process in advance of other plan reviews that are currently being taken forward elsewhere across the CWHMA, currently Rugby, South Warwickshire (comprising Warwick and Stratford-on-Avon districts), and Coventry City.
- 1.1.10 This is evident based on the statements of common ground submitted at a very late stage in the process, notably between the Council and Coventry, which provides little clarity on the approach that the sub-regional authorities should take (alongside the other sub-regional authorities) to address any future unmet need. This is despite the Council's acknowledgment in its own evidence that there is a 'reasonable prospect' that an unmet need will again arise and, given the strong functional relationship between Nuneaton and Bedworth and Coventry, this may be an important consideration in considering overall housing provision within the Plan Review (EB6, para 10.7).
- 1.1.11 On this basis, the Plan should take steps to address this issue now, and not decant this to a future plan review. Such an approach is not positively prepared and not soundly-based.

### **Q25. Is it necessary for the Plan to consider the release of Green Belt land to meet identified development needs?**

- 1.1.12 We acknowledge that this question relates to the vision and objectives and not omission sites that might be located within the Green Belt.
- 1.1.13 Nevertheless, in general terms, we contend that it is necessary to consider the release of Green Belt land to meet identified needs because releasing Green land can be consistent with the vision and also help to deliver the Plan objectives. This is particularly in respect to the delivery of strategic objective 4 relating to housing. This is because a large proportion of Green belt land is nonetheless well-related to existing settlements and which can help achieve sustainable development. Releasing Green Belt can also help deliver the quantum of growth that can also provide significant benefits to existing and new residents, in terms of enhanced access to greenspace and provision of new community infrastructure and services for residents and users.
- 1.1.14 In addition, given the reasonable prospects that housing needs from elsewhere in the CWHMA will not be met in full in the future, it is justified in planning terms that consideration is given to how that

unmet need can be accommodated within the Plan. This, in our view, is an exceptional circumstance under national policy<sup>3</sup> that justifies consideration of Green Belt land release to meet those needs. This could include releasing sites from within the Green Belt. The Council has ignored this issue entirely, which is a significant failing of the Plan.

---

<sup>3</sup> NPPF 2023, para 140

## 2 **ISSUE 2: HAS THE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY AND THE OVERALL DISTRIBUTION OF DEVELOPMENT BEEN POSITIVELY PREPARED, IS IT JUSTIFIED BY A ROBUST AND CREDIBLE EVIDENCE BASE, AND IS IT CONSISTENT WITH NATIONAL POLICY?**

**Q27. Does the development strategy in general, and Strategic Policy DS3 incorporate sufficient flexibility within it? Particularly with regard to the potential for unmet housing and employment need arising from neighbouring areas in the future.**

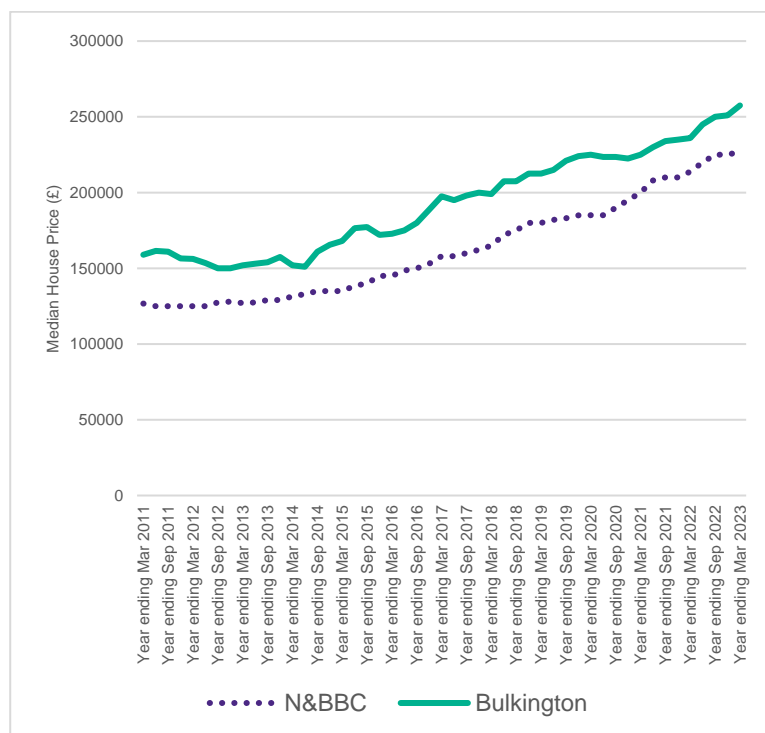
- 2.1.1 No.
- 2.1.2 The only reference to flexibility is stated at paragraph 6.26 of the Plan in the supporting text to Policy DS3, but this is only in respect of the potential delays or unforeseen circumstances that might result in some elements of the identified supply not coming forward as anticipated.
- 2.1.3 It is evident, nonetheless, that the development strategy in Policy DS3 seeks to address local housing and employment needs only. There is no allowance, either numerically or in policy criteria, to allow the potential for unmet housing and employment need arising from neighbouring areas to met during the plan period.
- 2.1.4 We observe a reference in the statement of common ground between the Council and Coventry City (CD6) which points to the housing requirement as a 'minimum' under policy DS3 as providing the flexibility to meet the needs of the borough 'and potentially neighbouring authorities unmet needs, over the plan period'. However, neither the statement of common ground nor the Plan itself defines any policy mechanism to deliver this if necessary, nor any ability to measure whether this has occurred in any event. This approach is vague, imprecise and lacks any sense of real commitment from the parties concerned. In reality, the Plan is essentially silent with regards to making any provision whatsoever for wider-than-local needs from any of its neighbours. The plan contains insufficient flexibility for this reason and so is not a soundly-based strategy.

**Q30. Has the development strategy been fully informed by the SA and other evidence? Is it soundly based? Does it accord with the Framework?**

- 2.1.5 No.
- 2.1.6 We highlighted in our Regulation 19 representations a number of factors that, taken together, justify a greater quantum of growth should be directed to Bulkington.

- 2.1.7 Firstly, the under-delivery of housing at Bulkington relative to total completions since 2011. Whilst delivery in the last two years has increased slightly, monitoring figures<sup>4</sup> indicate that only 111 dwellings were built in Bulkington (the ward, not the settlement) between 2011 and 2023. This equates to an annual average of 9 dwellings per annum. This is despite the allocation of a of four sites totalling 794 dwellings at Bulkington in the adopted Plan (under Policy DS5). There has clearly been some issues regarding the deliverability of site allocations that has contributed a significant under-delivery of housing. On this evidence alone, we contend an alternative strategy should be taken forward at Bulkington.
- 2.1.8 Secondly, and despite the under-delivery of homes highlighted above, we also highlighted that the Council was only proposing to allocate two sites at Bulkington totalling 377 dwellings (SHA5 – West of Bulkington for 348 dwellings, and NSRA9 Former Inn Public House for 29 dwellings). Whilst some smaller, non-allocated sites may come forward, even if these two site were built out (we note they both now benefit from planning permission) this would equate to just 21 dwellings per annum over the plan period. The delivery of 21 homes each year is not, in our view, consistent with a strategy that identifies Bulkington as a tertiary named settlement and a named foci for sustainable growth in the borough.
- 2.1.9 Thirdly, we highlighted that Bulkington suffers from higher house prices compared to the borough as a whole and is relatively more expensive place to own a home compared to other parts of the borough. This remains the case, as illustrated below.

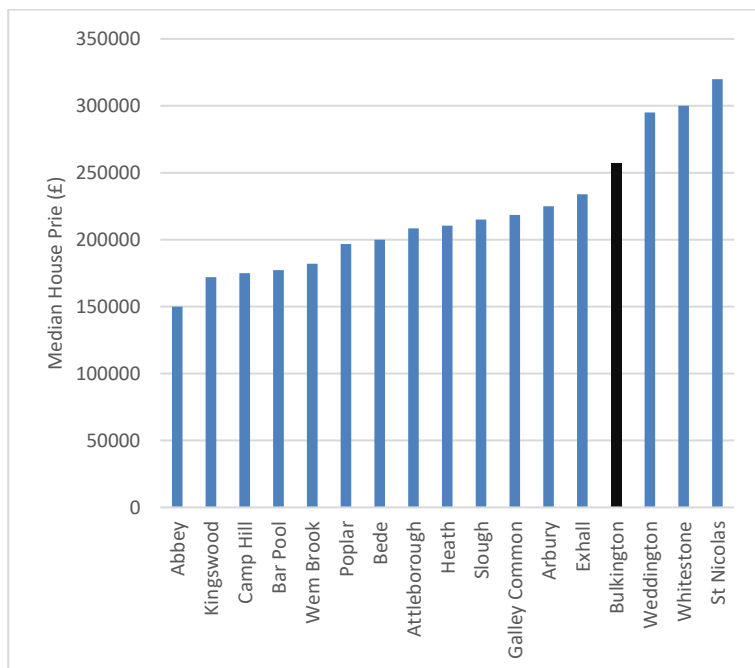
**Figure 2-1 Comparison of median house prices – Bulkington and Borough-wide**



<sup>4</sup> Completion data taken from NBBC AMRs 2011/12 to 2022/23

Source: HPSSA, Dataset 9 and 37 (all sales, all house types), Table 1a

**Figure 2-2 House prices in Nuneaton & Bedworth, by ward (March 2023)**



- 2.1.10 This data shows that housing in Bulkington remains relatively expensive in comparison to the majority of other parts of the Borough. This is further evidence of a supply-demand imbalance at the settlement. It is important that this issue is addressed given the status of Bulkington as a foci for housing growth.
- 2.1.11 National policy<sup>5</sup> says that the preparation of all policies should be underpinned by relevant and up to date evidence, which should be adequate and proportionate, focused tightly on supporting and justifying the policies, and takes into account relevant market signals. The preparation and review of all policies should be underpinned by relevant and up-to-date evidence. This should be adequate and proportionate, focused tightly on supporting and justifying the policies concerned, and take into account relevant market signals.
- 2.1.12 The evidence on market signals we have submitted in respect of the Plan has been consistently ignored in the distribution of housing provision under the proposed strategy in the Plan. Taken together, the draft strategy is neither justified on the evidence nor consistent with national policy and so, on this basis, is not soundly based.

<sup>5</sup> NPPF 2023, para 31

**Q31. Is the site selection process clear and suitably robust, supported by the SA and other evidence, with particular regard to the proposal to not allocate some sites that are allocated in the adopted Plan?**

- 2.1.13 No.
- 2.1.14 Policy DS4 of the Regulation 19 Plan proposes a number of strategic and non-strategic allocations to meet the housing requirement to 2039. We identified a number of soundness concerns in our Regulation 19 representations regarding the site assessment and selection process. We remain of the view that the site assessment process inconsistent with national policy and guidance, given the approach taken in the assessment, and the Plan in general, towards sites in the Green Belt.
- 2.1.15 We would make the further point that the site assessment and selection process should not be considered solely in terms of a technical or constraints-led process, but that the process is one that must also be informed by the development strategy. This is necessary because the Council must identify the strategic priorities for the development and use of land in the area, and policies to address those priorities must be set out in the development plan (taken as a whole)<sup>6</sup>. National guidance also says that plan-makers need to assess the suitability of identified sites or broad locations for different forms of development where appropriate, taking into account the range of needs for housing<sup>7</sup>.
- 2.1.16 On the first point, whilst the evidence in the Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (“HELAA”) relied upon for the assessment and selection of sites covers a range of constraints and other factors, it is not clear how the assessment or selection process has taken into account the preferred development strategy or any other reasonable alternative strategy. This information is not provided in HELAA or any other evidence base documents. Similarly, the Sustainability Appraisal focuses solely on the appraisal of the sites against the sustainability objectives (CD7.3, Appendix C).
- 2.1.17 The Council points to the emerging Plan review settlement hierarchy (EB2.1, para 3.10) as potentially assisting here, but we contend this does not constitute the whole of the development strategy, but merely a part of it.
- 2.1.18 We have also raised concerns elsewhere to this examination regarding the complete lack of any consideration in the Plan or the evidence regarding unmet need from elsewhere in the CWHMA, notably from Coventry, and which clearly falls into the ‘range’ of housing need that should be considered through the site selection process in the context of the appropriate development strategy that should be taken forward in the Plan. Such an assessment is also absent from the Plan or the evidence base.

---

<sup>6</sup> In accordance with Section 19 (1B-E) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Paragraph: 018 Reference ID: 3-018-20190722 Revision date: 22 07 2019

- 2.1.19 Taken together, we contend the site selection process is not and clear or suitably robust and so is not soundly-based.

### **Q32. Have reasonable alternatives been considered and clearly discounted on the evidence?**

- 2.1.20 No.
- 2.1.21 The issue of reasonable alternatives is dealt with in the Sustainability Appraisal. We have raised a number of soundness concerns in our Regulation 19 representation, which highlight reasonable alternatives relating the wider unmet need from neighbouring authorities has not been considered in the process of preparing the emerging Plan. These concerns have been expanded on in our Matter 1 statement to the examination. These concerns are not repeated here.
- 2.1.22 Nonetheless, given our strongly held view that reasonable alternatives for addressing wider housing needs have been effectively ignored at the outset of the review process, despite the evidence demonstrating they are reasonable, it cannot be said that reasonable alternatives have been considered and clearly discounted.
- 2.1.23 We would make the further point that if addressing the wider needs from neighbouring areas is a reasonable alternative for consideration in the development strategy, then it is only logical that sites are assessed (and selected) in order to establish an effective policy framework for dealing with it in a manner that ensures the Plan is soundly-based. The Plan has not done this in an effective manner and so is not soundly-based.

### **Q34. Is the overall level, pattern and distribution of development set out in the development strategy viable and deliverable in general terms?**

- 2.1.24 No.
- 2.1.25 National policy says that planning policies should identify a supply of specific, deliverable sites for years one to five of the plan period, and a specific, developable sites or broad locations for growth, for years 6-10 and, where possible, for years 11-15 of the plan<sup>8</sup>.
- 2.1.26 The Plan was submitted for examination on the assumption that the development needs of the borough would be met in full, including a buffer to provide flexibility in the supply of housing over the plan period (CD1, para 6.26). The Plan was originally prepared on the basis that the Council could demonstrate a 10.9 year supply of deliverable land. This figure was reduced on submission of the Plan in February 2024, to 10.1 years stated in the Overall Development Needs and Supply Background Paper (CD15).

---

<sup>8</sup> NPPF 2023, para 68

- 2.1.27 If these figures were believed, this would indicate the development strategy and distribution of development in the Plan is viable and deliverable.
- 2.1.28 However, the situation regarding housing land supply in the borough is not as healthy as the Council might have first suggested. In a letter submitted to the Inspectors, dated 28 March 2024, which post-dates submission explains that the Council can only demonstrate a 4.06 years supply at this time (NBBC/3). The Council says in the letter:
- “The housing trajectory submitted as part of the Borough Plan Review and housing land supply position which was stated in the suggested modifications have recently been superseded by events. The Council now considers that some of the sites included in the draft housing trajectory will realistically start delivering in the 6-10 year, medium term period as opposed to the 1-5 year, short term period and therefore the housing land supply position has reduced.”*
- 2.1.29 This change in position has been driven by a number of planning appeals that have recently challenged the Council’s evidence and assumptions on land supply. Given such a change, we have no confidence that the development strategy is viable or deliverable. Moving from a 10.9 to 4.06 years supply following submission of the Plan raises significant question marks as to the evidence underpinning the Council on deliverability of those sites included in the Plan. In our view, this is clearly a symptom of the Council’s single-minded determination to press ahead with a Plan review far in advance of its neighbouring authorities, without having the evidence in place to support it.
- 2.1.30 Whether or not the Council is able to demonstrate only 4.06 years supply will no doubt be a key matter for debate at the Matter 4 hearing, due to take place later this year. The Council accepts it cannot demonstrate a five-year supply at this point in time, a position that is contrary to national policy and which risks the Plan not being soundly-based.
- 2.1.31 In a letter submitted to the Inspectors (NBBC/4), dated 10 April 2024, the Council says it will submit an updated Development Needs and Supply Background Paper 2024 (CD15) and the Housing Trajectory (CD16). This, and a subsequent letter, dated 23 April 2024 (NBBC/5) provide no clarity on when this updated information will be provided to interested parties.
- 2.1.32 This is a highly unsatisfactory situation. Given the lack of clarity on the evidence base underpinning the Plan in regard to deliverability issues, we reserve our formal position subject to this new information being made available for scrutiny.

### **Q35. Does Strategic Policy DS6 deal with strategic matters, or does it deal with more detailed matters?**

- 2.1.33 Policy DS6 deals solely with detailed matters relating specifically to the appropriateness of development in the Green Belt. The policy is completely silent on how the Plan proposes to respond to strategic matters, in particular the likelihood that an unmet need for housing from Coventry will continue to exist beyond the current plan period (2031) based on current evidence.

- 2.1.34 In this context, the supporting text to the policy largely relates to the approach taken forward in the adopted Plan in respect of Green Belt release to accommodate Coventry's overspill, rather than any clear explanation of the turnaround in approach in this Plan.
- 2.1.35 Similarly, the Plan says that exceptional circumstances do not exist the justify further green belt release in the Borough (CD1, para 6.70). However, this is only in the context of meeting local need and the preferred housing requirement in Policy DS3. We contend that the housing requirement should increased significantly to address a number of relevant matters that have been discounted, namely affordable housing need and the wider needs from elsewhere in the Coventry and Warwickshire sub-region.