

Statement on behalf of Dacorum Environmental Forum for the Examination of the Dacorum Development Plan Document October 2016.

Matter 1 – Legal compliance, including duty to co-operate

3. Having regard to the scope of the adopted Core Strategy (CS) and the Council's intentions, as set out in the Local Development Scheme, are there any obvious omissions, in terms policy guidance, from the submitted Plan?

Yes, the scheme and Core Strategy upon which it is based take no heed of, or commitment to the continuing clarifications of National Policy Practice Guidance.

(From Development Plan Document Jan 2016)

1.18 The Site Allocations document has also had regard to national planning guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), National Policy Practice Guidance (NPPG), other policy statements and good practice guidance.

Clarification of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is an ongoing process, as evidenced by the latest Ministerial advice (see the reference under our Statement under "Matter 2"), therefore its interaction with the Site Allocations document is ongoing, and should be described as such, and not just in a past tense. We suggest adding "Site allocations will continue to be in accordance with evolving National Policy Practice Guidance".

4. (1) Is the Plan based on a sound process of sustainability appraisal? Does it test reasonable alternatives? Does it represent the most appropriate strategy in the circumstances? (4) Does the final report set out the reasons for rejecting earlier options?

No (specifically to questions 1 and 4). A sound process of sustainability appraisal should acknowledge where it departs from earlier long-standing appraisals of the same sites, and explain any departures from them.

Re Question 1:

(From Development Plan Document Jan 2016)

1.16 The Site Allocations has been based on a thorough understanding of the issues and challenges faced: a wide range of information and studies, collectively known as the 'evidence base', has been prepared. This evidence base includes a number background topic reports relating to each subject area covered by the Site Allocations and Schedules of Site Appraisals, which summarise and assess the suitability of development opportunities being promoted for allocation for housing and other uses.

(From Development Plan Document Jan 2016)

1.21 A separate Sustainability Appraisal Report accompanies the Pre-Submission Site Allocations. It explains how sustainability considerations have been taken into account and incorporated into the document. It also outlines how significant sustainability effects due to the implementation of the plan will be monitored. The Sustainability Appraisal Report is available online at www.dacorum.gov.uk.

These two paragraphs omit to mention the history of planning principles and decisions affecting Green Belt/Local Allocations, and should acknowledge the need for an explanation the differences between past and current judgments.

Examples of such differences are:

(from the Dacorum Borough Council Local Plan 1995)

"The existing Green belt boundary is generally appropriate for the long term"

(from the Deposit version of the Dacorum Borough Council Structure Plan 1996)

there should be "no room for urban sprawl and other development on the edge of towns which take up green fields but do nothing to improve the town"

(1996 Technical Report 3 of the Dacorum Borough Plan first review to 2011)

This assessed five parcels of land, A to E, which approximately correspond to LA3 in the current round, and which were collectively termed "West Hemel Hempstead", of which only parcel A (400 Houses) was selected for the then-proposed development strategy .

Parcel B was seen as "a natural area for open space linking with Shrub Hill Common", while Parcels C, D and E were "considerably more prominent" (than Parcel A) "and should remain undeveloped". See Appendix B of our submission under Matter 9 for the map.

(Pre-Submission Core Strategy 2011)

In Section 1.4, Hemel Hempstead Local Allocation Assessment, of Appendix F of the accompanying Sustainability Appraisal Report "West Hemel Hempstead" achieved only three ticks out of 20 sustainability appraisal objectives, and of these three, one was because the development would provide social housing and the other two were little more than aspirations that, because of its size, it would attract new local facilities.

Re Question 4:

The options for annual averages given in the consultation on the Core Strategy of DBC's Local Development Framework in November 2010 were Option 1 (no Green Belt land take): 370 and Option 2: 430. The majority of respondees to the consultation favoured the lower growth figure of "Option 1" . The Council Leader, in justifying the Council's subsequent choice of Option 2 reportedly said that he didn't believe that "Option 1 is something we could defend", implying that the Council would have preferred Option 1 were it not for the fear of legal or challenges, which might argue that it was inconsistent with Government Policy. Revision of 1.18 as we suggest above would undermine any claim to have set out the reasons for rejecting the earlier Option 1.