

Ashfield Local Plan 2023 to 2024: Consultation on Additional Housing Site Allocations

P&DG on behalf of Aldergate Property Group

March 2025

Our Ref. 21.113 ADC 31-03-2025

Introduction

I write on behalf of Aldergate Property Group ('Aldergate') in response to the Council's 'Consultation on Additional Housing Sites Allocations' as part of the examination of the Ashfield Local Plan 2023 to 2024.

Aldergate welcome the opportunity to provide comments on the proposed Additional Housing Site Allocation. Aldergate have actively and consistently engaged in the Local Plan review process. As such, should the Inspectors consider it appropriate to recommence the Local Plan hearings, Aldergate wish to retain their right to participate in any future hearing sessions.

Aldergate have persistently raised concerns in relation to the appropriateness of the Plan's Spatial Strategy and its ability to effectively deliver the identified housing needs of the District, particularly in the Hucknall area of the District, over the plan period. This includes the Council's failure to recognise the 'Main Urban Area' of Hucknall as an opportunity to accommodate further housing growth in the plan period. It also includes the inconsistent approach the Council have taken to releasing Green Belt land for residential development.

Aldergate own Land at Common Lane, Hucknall, that is available now, suitable for residential development, economically viable and can realistically be developed in the plan period. Part of that land is currently subject of an outline planning application for up to 100 home (ref: V/2024/0288) following a previous refusal solely on Green Belt grounds. Despite its merits as a sustainable residential development site, it has not been included as an additional housing site allocation by the Council.

In light of the above, our comments in relation to the identified 'Additional Housing Site Allocation' are as follows:

Planning and Design Group

Midlands Office: Pure Offices Lake View Drive Sherwood Park Nottingham NG15 0DT tel 01623 726256

London Office: 5 St John's Lane London EC1M 4BH tel 020 7549 2858

Oxford Office: Bee House 140 Eastern Avenue Milton Park Oxfordshire OX14 4SB tel 01235 854008

Planning and Design Group is the trading name of Planning and Design Group (UK) Limited, Unit 1, Poplars Court, Nottingham, England, NG7 2RR
Registered in England No 8329904 VAT No 155486191

Additional Housing Allocations

The Background Paper 1: Spatial Strategy and Site Selection that was published by the Council in support of the emerging Local Plan concluded (Paragraph 11.2) that:

“All available and developable brownfield sites (above the threshold of 9 dwellings) have been allocated and densities optimised in appropriate locations”

It is, therefore, not clear how the Council have now been able to identify several additional brownfield sites within both Kirby-in-Ashfield and Sutton-in-Ashfield. If all sites had been appropriately assessed the additional brownfield sites must have previously been considered unsuitable for allocation. This draws into question the robustness and consistency of the Council's site selection process and whether the additional housing sites are genuinely available, suitable and deliverable.

Additionally, the evidence and justification that underpins the selection of the additional housing sites is opaque. The Council state they were reviewed as part of the SHELAA process but there is no actual evidence of this available within the examination documents published on the Council's website.

Indeed, the latest SHELAA available on the Council's website was published in October 2021 and does not include any reference to the additional sites. It is not, therefore, clear whether the sites have been appropriately and fairly assessed alongside other suitable reasonable alternatives, and critically, whether they are genuinely suitable for allocation.

From the information that has been provided it is clear that a number of the sites have potential issues that may impact their deliverability within the plan period. This includes site constraints (access and land contamination) as well as landowner issues. There is no evidence that these constraints are resolvable or that there is actual landowner agreement to the development of the sites.

The Council also rely on increased capacity of housing sites, but it is not clear if this has been informed by an actual design and capacity assessment to provide a realistic and justified estimated of the suggested residential yields. There is no evidence that BNG has been considered, nor whether the estimated capacities have taken into account the land take needed to deliver a 10% Biodiversity Net Gain on site, or alternatively, what effect the purchase of off-site gains/credits would have on the overall viability of the site.

In light of the above, it is considered that the Council need to provide further evidence and justification for the selection of the additional housing sites to demonstrate that they are actually suitable, available and developable within the plan period. In absence of this information, it is considered that the plan has not been positively prepared, justified and effective in accordance with Paragraph 36 (of the NPPF December 2023).

Given the importance of the Council adequately addressing the shortfall of 882 dwellings over the plan, it is presumed that the sites will be examined in further detail through the recommencement of the hearing sessions.

Spatial Strategy

As noted above, Aldergate have persistently raised concerns that the current spatial strategy does not sufficiently recognise the functional relationship that Hucknall shares with the city of Nottingham. Hucknall shares a strong and well-established functional relationship with the city of Nottingham with sustainable public transport links to and from the city. This includes the NET tram service and the Robin Hood Rail Line with a station in Hucknall and direct connections in to Nottingham.

Hucknall is evidently the most sustainable location in the District. However, the Council's spatial strategy seeks to avoid it to reduce the impact on the Green Belt. Hucknall is an entirely appropriate location to deliver a significant proportion of the shortfall of 882 dwellings. However, none of the identified additional housing allocations are located within Hucknall.

The NPPF (Paragraph 147) states that: *'when drawing up or reviewing Green Belt boundaries, the need to promote sustainable patterns of development should be taken into account.'* It goes on to state that: *'strategic policy making authorities should consider the consequences for sustainable development of channelling development towards urban areas inside the Green Belt boundary.'*

In light of the above, in the failure to recognise Hucknall as a sustainable location for additional residential development, it is considered that the Council have not fully considered the consequences for sustainable development of channelling development towards urban areas inside the Green Belt boundary. Rather than base the spatial strategy on identifying the most sustainable patterns of development and then assessing whether there is a need to review Green Belt boundaries to achieve that, the Council has taken as its starting point the avoidance of development in the Green Belt, with the consequence that the spatial strategy fails to direct growth to the most sustainable settlements, and instead, 'leapfrogs' the Green Belt. The Local Plan fails to prioritise sustainable development and instead forgoes these locations for settlements beyond the Green Belt that are less sustainable. The additional sites identified and presented, simply exacerbate this misguided approach.

This is, therefore, completely contrary to the NPPF and renders the plan unsound and inconsistent with regard to Paragraph 35 of the NPPF.

Overall Conclusion

Overall, it is considered that there is a significant degree of uncertainty as to whether all of the identified additional housing allocations are genuinely, suitable, and deliverable, and therefore, whether the identified shortfall of 882 dwellings can actually be addressed.

It is clear that the Council has taken limited time to thoroughly considered the additional sites, in an attempt to meet the Inspectors' timetable. As a result, the Plan will at best only meet the transitional 'need rules' of the new NPPF (Paragraph 234 - Annex 1) rather than seek to meet the areas housing needs in full. This is in direct contrast to neighbouring authority, Gedling Borough Council, who have withdrawn from the preparation of the Greater Nottingham Strategic Plan (GNSP) specifically to allow them to meet their new Standard Methodology local housing need figure in full, rather than providing only 80% of that need in the Regulation 19 GNSP.

This rather rushed process included the Council's Local Plan Committee being requested to select and endorse to Cabinet, the additional sites in its February meeting, despite the fact that consideration of those sites was not included on the published agenda, which may be procedurally questionable.

Aldergate own Land at Common Lane, Hucknall that is available now, suitable for residential development, economically viable and can realistically be developed in the plan period. Part of that land is currently subject of an outline planning application (ref: V/2024/0288) and could come forward swiftly. It could and should be recognised as a substantial opportunity to help address the Council's identified shortfall and be allocated for residential development in the emerging Local Plan.