

**Ashfield District Local Plan
Examination**

**Matters, Issues and Questions
identified by the Inspectors**

Matter 3:

**The Spatial Strategy and the
distribution of development**

October 2024

Ashfield District Council's response to Inspectors' Document INS03

This document is Ashfield District Council's response to the Matter, Issues and Questions (MIQs) identified for examination by Inspectors Mr. Philip Mileham and Mr Graham Wyatt, of the Planning Inspectorate, as published on the 30th September 2024. This is one of twelve separate papers produced to address the specific matters and issues identified on the front page.

Each response paper includes a number of references to specific evidence which has been relied upon in answering the MIQs. These reference numbers (shown as [XXXX]) relate directly to the Examination Library website, where all evidence is published:

<https://www.ashfield.gov.uk/local-plan-examination/examination-library/>

The Inspectors' questions are shown below in ***bold italics***.

The Council's responses are shown in normal typeface below the Inspector's questions.

Proposed Modifications arising from the Inspectors' MIQs are set out in grey tint boxes.

Issue: Whether the Spatial Strategy and the distribution of development are justified, and can be accommodated without releasing land from the Green Belt? If not, do exceptional circumstances exist that would justify altering the Green Belt boundary?

Relevant Policies:

S1 - Spatial Strategy to Deliver the Vision

S4 - Green Belt

S7 - Meeting Future Housing Provision

EV1 - Green Belt

3.1 Is the spatial distribution of development across the district justified and what factors influenced the Spatial Strategy, for example physical and environmental constraints and the capacity to accommodate development?

Council's response

- 3.1.1 Yes - The spatial distribution of development across the district is justified. A Housing Position Statement has been prepared to provide up to date evidence in respect of housing supply in support of the submitted Ashfield Local Plan 2023-2040 [SD.01].
- 3.1.2 Background Paper 5: Analysis of Constraints for the District of Ashfield [BP.05] identifies that the district possesses several key constraints which limit the quantum of development that can be reasonably achieved across the District. Many of these constraints are located on the edge of, or outside of the Main Urban Areas and Named Settlements of Ashfield and are comprised of large areas of designated Green Belt, as well as undesignated countryside.
- 3.1.3 Approximately 41% of the total District area is designated as Green Belt, which due to national policy requirements, should only be altered in exceptional circumstances. The circumstances justifying the release of Green Belt land are discussed in Background Paper 1: Spatial Approach and Site Selection [BP.01]. Areas of countryside not designated as Green Belt and situated outside of the main urban areas and named settlements account for approximately 26% of the total District area, however not all of this area is likely to be suitable for development, due to other constraints, such as the ones listed below.
- 3.1.4 Separate from Green Belt (due to its nature as a policy-based constraint), there are other land-based designations which have a significant impact on the spatial distribution of new development. This includes constraints which heavily restrict the possible use of the land in question and therefore can be argued to rule out larger strategic-scale development as a matter of principle. This includes the following designations relevant to Ashfield:
- Land designated as a SSSI
 - Land containing Ancient Woodlands

- Land designated as a possible potential Special Protection Area
- Land designated as a Local Nature Reserve
- Land that is within the Functional Flood Plain (Flood Zone 3b)
- Land designated as a Registered Park and Garden

3.1.5 Figure 7 within Background Paper 5 [BP.05] shows the combined constraints, site allocations and built-up areas.

3.2 What alternative options for the spatial strategy were considered?

Council's response

3.2.1 Section 5.5 of the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) [SD.03] sets out in paragraphs 5.5.2 to 5.5.4 that the Council considered 10 spatial strategic options, from which:

- Option 1: Containment within existing settlements - NOT taken forward for SA
- Option 2: Urban Concentration within/adjoining existing settlements with no Green Belt release' - NOT taken forward for SA
- Option 3: Dispersed Development (across the district) comprising of smaller sites, each with capacity for less than 500 dwellings – SELECTED.

3.2.2 The reason for not taking forward Options 1 & 2 was that evidence showed that there are not enough sites available through the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) process to meet the minimum housing required in the district. In SA terms, it is therefore considered that they were not 'reasonable alternatives' as they will not deliver the Local Plan's growth objectives.

3.2.3 The following seven strategic spatial options were therefore considered as alternative options:

- Option 4: One large sustainable urban extension (SUE) adjacent Sutton/Kirkby (1000+dwgs) with smaller sites (less than 500 dwellings) within and adjacent to existing settlements, with significant Green Belt release.
 - ▶ 4a. Sub-option 1 considers Sutton Parkway as SUE.
 - ▶ 4b. Sub-option 2 considers Mowlands as SUE.
- Option 5: One new settlement (outside Green Belt), one large SUE adjacent Kirkby/Sutton and smaller sites in/adjacent existing settlements, including moderate Green Belt release in Hucknall and Rurals.
 - ▶ Sub-option 1 considers Sutton Parkway as SUE
 - ▶ Sub-option 2 considers Mowlands as SUE.
- Option 6: Two SUEs adjacent Kirkby/Sutton with smaller sites (less than 500 dwellings) in/adjacent existing settlements, with moderate Green Belt release.

- Option 7: One new settlement (approximately 3,000 dwellings) in Hucknall's Green Belt and smaller sites (less than 500 dwellings) in/adjoining Sutton and Kirkby, and moderate Green Belt release adjoining existing rural settlement.
- Option 8: Two new settlements (approximately 1,250 and 1,750 dwellings) and smaller sites (less than 500 dwellings) in/adjacent Sutton and Kirkby, moderate Green Belt release adjoining Hucknall and existing rural settlements.
- Option 9: Three new settlements (approximately 1,250, 1,750 and 3,000 dwellings) including one in Green Belt, with no other large sites over 500 dwellings.
- Option 10: Two new settlements with one in Hucknall's Green Belt (approx. 3,000 dwellings with around 1,600 in the plan period) and one at Cauldwell Road (approximately 300 dwellings in plan period) with further moderate Green Belt release around Hucknall and more limited development in/adjoining Sutton and Kirkby, and existing rural settlements.

3.3 Why was the submitted approach to disperse development chosen and is it an appropriate strategy having regard to reasonable alternatives?

Council's response

- 3.3.1 The Spatial Strategy for Ashfield is set out Policy S1 of the Local Plan and sets out sets out how future growth will be delivered taking account of the geography and key attributes of the District. It considers the size of settlements and their role and function, and how the Council aims to deliver its Vision by guiding the distribution of development across the District.
- 3.3.2 In choosing the Spatial Strategy, Officers first worked with Members of Local Plan Development Committee (formerly known as the Local Plan Working Group) to agree a Vision for Ashfield which is both aspirational and achievable.
- 3.3.3 The Council then considered a number of alternative options for spatial growth. These took into consideration the key issues that the Plan is seeking to address, the outcome of previous Local Plan consultations, and a broad the evidence base including (but not limited to) the Strategic Housing and Employment Availability Assessment (SHELAA), the identified housing and employment requirement for the District, a Brownfield Land Capacity Assessment, and the Green Belt Harm Report.
- 3.3.4 The range of alternative spatial options have been considered in the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) [SD.03] accompanying the Plan. Option 3 in the SA has now been taken forward as it represents the best option to deliver sustainable development and meet the Vision for the District. The SA also sets out the reasons why other options were discounted.
- 3.3.5 Background Paper 1: Spatial Strategy and Site Selection [BP.01] sets out in Chapters 2, 3 & 4 the Council's reasoning for choosing Option 3: Dispersed Development, this is also set out in the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) [SD.03], together with the reasons why other options were discounted – see Table 5.5 of the SA Report.

3.4 Are the Plan’s Strategic Policies sufficiently clear about the scale of development envisaged in each settlement/ area?

Council’s response

3.4.1 Table 1 in the Local Plan addresses the distribution of planned housing development at a geographical level and also draws a comparison with the existing population. Whilst this demonstrates the ‘dispersed development’ strategy, it does not demonstrate how planned development fits with the settlement hierarchy in accordance with Policy S1. As such, a new table has been prepared to clarify this matter and can be found in the Council’s Housing Land Supply Position Statement [ADC.04], which sets out the level of growth attributed to each area of the District based on the settlement hierarchy. It is proposed to incorporate this new table with supporting text to Policy S7.

3.4.2 The table demonstrates that planned housing growth is consistent with the identified settlement hierarchy with the following distribution:

- Tier a): Main Urban Areas 86%
- Tier b): Strategic Employment Areas N/A
- Tier c): Named Settlements 13%
- Tier d): Blenheim Industrial Estate N/A
- Tier e): The Remainder of the District 1%

Proposed Modification

Insert new Table (Table A, Housing Land Supply Position Statement [ADC.04]) into supporting text for Policy S1 after paragraph 3.24 and include additional explanatory text.

3.5 Does the submitted Plan’s approach strike an appropriate balance between the identification of land for new homes and employment?

Council’s response

3.5.1 Yes. The supply of land for new homes and employment identified in the submitted Local Plan [SD.01] aligns with the needs assessments for those uses, with the inter-relationship between job creation and housing delivery a key outcome of the Council’s evidence. Paragraph 3.61 of the Local Plan identifies that the Local Housing Need (LHN) for Ashfield District, based on the Government’s standard methodology, was 446 dwellings per annum (dpa) as of April 2023. Strategic Policy S7 states that over the 17-year Plan period 2023-2040, this would equate to the delivery of 7,582 dwellings.

- 3.5.2 Strategic Policy S8 aims to provide for the growth of the local and regional economy by ensuring sufficient and appropriate employment land is available within the District to meet local needs and to contribute towards future regional needs of businesses. The employment land demand requires 81 ha of employment land to be provided, which is addressed through Strategic Policy S6: Strategic Employment Allocation at Junction 27 M1 Motorway and Policy EM2: Employment Land Allocations.
- 3.5.3 The employment land requirement is derived via modelling work contained within *Background Paper No 3: Economy & Employment Land (2023)*, which is itself an update of the *Nottingham Core HMA and Nottingham Outer HMA, Employment Land Needs Study (ELNS)* (May 2021, Lichfields). These documents set out how the employment land target aligns with housing need.
- 3.5.4 For example, *Background Paper 3* revisited several scenarios for deriving employment land requirements based on the Planning Practice Guidance¹, including:
- **Labour Demand:** Forecasts of job demand by industrial sector (with 3 scenarios using Experian data for March/September 2020 and a Regeneration Scenario);
 - **Labour Supply:** modelling the employment implications of meeting housing delivery targets (and the associated uplift to Ashfield’s local labour-force). Two scenarios were modelled, based on the ONS’s 2014-based Sub-National Population Projections [SNPP]; and the Standard Methodology figure of 446 dpa;
 - **Past Completions:** Annual completions of industrial & office space projected into the future.
- 3.5.5 Following various adjustments to the net land requirements, including the incorporation of a margin of choice and an adjustment for loss replacement, *Background Paper 3* reported that the employment land range was between 1,433 sqm and 16,588 sqm of office floorspace, and between 12.2 ha and 80.6 ha of industrial / warehousing land to 2040 (summarised in Table 3.1):

Table 3.1: Revised Employment Land Requirements for Ashfield District 2023-2040

Scenario	Stage	2023 Update (2023-2040)		
		Office (sqm)	Total Industrial (ha)	ALL EMPLOYMENT LAND
1) Experian September 2020 Baseline	Net	6,626	-0.76	0.90
	Flexibility	73	7.30	7.32
	Loss	737	11.26	11.44
	Gross	7,436	17.80	19.65
2) Experian March 2020 Baseline	Net	4,185	-4.52	-3.48
	Flexibility	73	7.30	7.32
	Loss	737	11.26	11.44
	Gross	4,995	14.04	15.28
3) Regeneration Scenario	Net	15,778	5.35	9.30
	Flexibility	73	7.30	7.32
	Loss	737	11.26	11.44
	Gross	16,588	23.91	28.06
4) 2014-based SNPP	Net	4,267	-6.39	-5.32

¹ Planning Practice Guidance Housing and Economic Needs Assessment

	Flexibility	73	7.30	7.32
	Loss	737	11.26	11.44
	Gross	5,077	12.17	13.44
5) Current SM (446 dpa)	Net	5,558	-3.31	-1.92
	Flexibility	73	7.30	7.32
	Loss	737	11.26	11.44
	Gross	6,368	15.25	16.84
6) Past Take Up Rates	Net	623	62.06	62.22
	Flexibility	73	7.30	7.32
	Loss	737	11.26	11.44
	Gross	1,433	80.62	80.98

- 3.5.6 The updated local need for employment land requirements for industrial is reflected in the labour demand and labour supply scenarios (and by extension, the current SM target of 446 dpa) set out in Table 3.1 which range from 13 ha to 28 ha. The past take-up rate scenario identified a substantially higher figure of 81 ha which would suggest that this is, at least in part, influenced by the regional demand for logistics.
- 3.5.7 This is because the wholesale and distribution sector has been one of the major drivers of Ashfield's economy in recent years. Since 2015/16 Ashfield District has seen a significant growth in the delivery of strategic distribution and logistics units². This has included units at Castlewood Grange Business Park, Harrier Park, Hucknall and the Amazon distribution centre on Summit Park comprising 162,791 sqm which opened in autumn 2020, creating around 2,000 jobs.
- 3.5.8 The past take-up approach trends forward past completions and assumes a similar level of development will be needed in the future. Therefore, as this scenario has been driven primarily by the development of land for large scale logistics units, then pursuing this scenario in future will necessarily incorporate an allowance for 'bigger than local' needs. In contrast, the labour supply scenarios (including the SM 446 dpa scenario) do not make any allowance for strategic logistics needs and relate specifically to meeting the needs of the growing indigenous population of Ashfield District.
- 3.5.9 In these circumstances, the Council has opted to identify an overall employment land requirement that exceeds the labour demand and labour supply forecasts and factors in an uplift to go some way towards addressing the Functional Economic Market Area [FEMA]-wide demand for strategic logistics. Given the commentary above, Officers considered that the past take up rate figure of 81 ha represented a suitable balance between meeting Ashfield District's own needs in full, as well as providing an appropriate level of strategic industrial / warehousing needs.
- 3.5.10 In terms of how this local/strategic level employment land split might be derived, Table 33 of *Background Paper 3* indicated that a number of strategic-scale distribution sites have come forward for development in Ashfield District in recent years, totalling 39.49 ha out of the 60.07 ha that had come forward for development since 2011/12. This comprises around two-thirds of all employment land completions over that time period.

² Generally defined as units over 9,290 sqm or 100,000 sq ft. in size

- 3.5.11 At a hypothetical level therefore, it might be expected that for Scenario 6) Past Take Up Rates, applying this 1/3:2/3 ratio to the 81 ha requirement would suggest that around 27.5 ha of land would be required for 'indigenous' needs arising from within Ashfield District, and at least 53.5 ha of land would be required to meet wider strategic needs (extending across the much wider FEMA that includes the neighbouring Outer HMA districts of Mansfield and Newark & Sherwood). The 27.5 ha local needs figure is closely aligned with the Regeneration Scenario's total figure of 28 ha.
- 3.5.12 The Council accepts that the 27.5 ha 'local need' apportionment of the 81 ha overall requirement is still in excess of the 17 ha employment land requirement based on the current SM2 figure of 446 dpa (see Table 3.1 above). However, this does not mean that the supply of land for new homes and employment in the Plan is imbalanced.
- 3.5.13 Planning for this higher figure (around 10.5 ha above the SM 446 dpa scenario) is necessary to ensure a choice of employment land supply by size, type, location and quality of sites and premises for businesses, and maximises future job opportunities for the local workforce (including those who may currently commute elsewhere). This aligns with the NPPF (December 2023) requirement to ensure that planning policies are flexible enough to accommodate needs not anticipated in the plan, and to enable a rapid response to changes in economic circumstances [paragraph 86d].
- 3.5.14 This approach will make the best use of the existing labour force and help more inactive or unemployed Ashfield residents into employment. It aligns fully with the Council's Strategic Policy S8, which states that the "*Council is committed to developing a sustainable, diverse and resilient economy, reducing low wages and improving skill levels in order to narrow the difference between District and national figures*".
- 3.5.15 The supporting text to this Policy is clear that Ashfield's local economy is faced with a number of issues related to low paid and lower quality employment opportunities, a shortage of skills and qualifications, and a need to create economic diversity to minimise the District's reliance on the manufacturing sector:
- "High levels of deprivation remain within Ashfield; with areas ranked in the top 10% and top 20% of most deprived areas in the country. The 2019 ONS Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) ranks Ashfield as the 63rd most deprived local authority in England. A key message from the Ashfield and Mansfield - A Plan for Growth 2016 (Joint Economic Masterplan Update) is that to maximise the ability of the labour supply to drive growth, it is vital that opportunities are open to all to be economically active, through access to education, training and employment. The Council is committed to supporting opportunities which assist with the long-term re-skilling of the Ashfield workforce which is necessary to ensure the presence of a highly-skilled labour pool to take advantage of new jobs across the District". [paragraph 3.92]*
- 3.5.16 It is in order to address these significant economic challenges that the Local Plan has made a policy choice regarding the balance between identifying land for new homes and employment.

3.5.17 In summary, the 81 ha employment land target includes around 53.5 ha of strategic logistics needs across the wider FEMA. The remainder will specifically meet the local business and economic needs. This aligns with the 446 dpa SM labour supply scenario, with any remaining over-provision justified on the basis that it will help to ensure a choice of employment land supply by size, type, location and quality of sites and premises for businesses. It maximises future job opportunities for the local workforce by aligning with wider Council aspirations of increasing levels of economic activity, improving skills levels and helping to facilitate more local residents to return to the workplace, with higher workplace wages and improving skills levels the intended consequence.

3.6 Is the settlement hierarchy set out in Policy S1 Justified?

Council's response

3.6.1 Yes. The settlement hierarchy is justified, based on the 3 towns of Sutton-In-Ashfield, Kirkby-In-Ashfield and Hucknall (Main Urban Area), followed by the largest villages (Named Settlements). This is set out in the supporting text to Policy S1 in paragraphs 3.8 to 3.21.

3.7 What evidence is there to justify the identification of each settlement within the respective tiers of the hierarchy?

Council's response

3.7.1 The Greater Nottingham Accessible Settlements Study [ADC.05] was produced for Ashfield and other Nottinghamshire core authority areas in 2010 and ranks settlements in terms of the level of access to a range of facilities and services. The findings of this study support the hierarchy of settlements as set out in Policy S1. This is set out in paragraph 3.11 of the Plan. A summary of findings from the Accessibility Study is also cited in paragraphs 7.23 to 7.27 of Background Paper 1: Spatial Strategy and Site Selection [BP.01].

3.8 What reliance does the Plan's overall strategy have on the proposed Maid Marian line? Is there a reasonable prospect of it coming forward during the plan period? How will the Plan respond to it?

Council's response

3.8.1 The Local Plan strategy does not rely on the proposed Main Marion Line coming forward, however it is an aspiration to improve transport connectivity and facilitate economic development within the district. Further details can be found in paragraph 3.93 of the Plan.

3.8.2 The Main Marion Line is a stand-alone project which could come forward independent of the Plan and the HS2 Project. Delivery of the line is dependent on availability of external funding from regional partners and future funding bids.

3.8.3 The Maid Marian Line is being developed as a scheme which will provide greater local connectivity with cross county connections, an alternative route into Nottingham and to Derby and beyond. There is an opportunity through the Maid Marian Line to improve capacity in the wider strategic rail network. This will support Ashfield's ambition to be a destination for employment, education, and tourism.

Green Belt

3.9 What proportion of new housing and employment proposed in the Plan would be on land currently designated as Green Belt?

Council's response

3.9.1 Ashfield covers an area of 10,961 hectares (ha), of this, 4,525 ha is Green Belt, approximately 41% of the District.

3.9.2 The total Plan allocations on land currently in Green Belt is 119.66 ha - 2.6%.

3.9.3 The tables below identify all allocated Green Belt Sites.

Employment Allocations	Current Planning Status	Area ha	Existing Green Belt (4,525 ha)
S6 a – Land north-east of Junction 27 M1	Planning permission approved	20.47	
S6 b – Land south-east of Junction 27 M1	Allocation in Plan	25.00	
TOTAL		45.47	1.0%

Housing Allocations	Current Planning Status	Area ha	Existing Green Belt (4,525 ha)
H1Ka – Beacon Farm, K-I-A	Allocated in Plan	2.37	
H1Kh – Hucknall Road, Newstead	Allocated in Plan	2.51	
H1Va – Plainspot Farm, Brinsley	Allocated in Plan	2.11	
H1Vc – Bull & Butcher PH, Selston	Pending planning application	6.63	
H1Vd – Adj. 149 Stoney Lane, Selston	Allocated in Plan	0.20	
H1Ve – Park Lane/ South-west M1, Selston	Pending planning application	9.43	
H1Vg – North Larch Close, Underwood	Allocated in Plan	3.02	
H1Vj – Main Road, Jacksdale	Planning permission approved	4.22	

H1Hb – Linby Boarding Kennels, Hucknall	Planning permission approved for 9 dwellings on part of site	3.33	
H1Hc – South of Broomhill Farm, Hucknall	Allocation in Plan	31.53	
H1Hd – Stubbin Wood Farm, Hucknall	Allocation in Plan	8.85	
TOTAL		74.19	1.6%

3.10 What other reasonable options for meeting the identified housing requirement were considered prior to the proposed release of land from the Green Belt?

Council's response

3.10.1 Appendix G of the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) [SD.03h] appraises the spatial options considered by the Council. Of the 10 spatial options considered, only 2 did not propose Green Belt release. These were:

- Option 1: Containment within existing settlements; and
- Option 2: Urban Concentration within/adjoining existing settlements with no Green Belt release.'

3.10.2 It was evidenced early on the Plan making process that there are not enough sites available through the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) process to meet the minimum housing required in the district, for either Option 1 or Option 2. In SA terms, it was therefore considered that the two options are not 'reasonable alternatives' as they will not deliver the Local Plan's growth objectives.

3.11 Not all of Ashfield District is within the Green Belt. Could the need for new housing and employment be met by locating such uses outside Green Belt? If not, why is this the case?

Council's response

3.11.1 In relation to Housing, please see the Council's response to Qu.3.10.

3.11.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires local authorities to identify and provide sufficient housing land to meet the objectively assessed needs of a growing population, as set out in Policy S7 of the Local Plan [SD.01]. The Government places particular importance on promoting sustainable patterns of development (NPPF para 7) and a lower housing provision (Option 1 & Option 2) was not viewed to be sustainable when considering environmental, social and economic factors. It is considered that the approach to the proposed distribution of growth is justified and consistent with sustainable development.

3.11.3 The Council consider that Green Belt release is necessary to deliver growth in appropriate locations and to achieve the Vision through the preferred spatial

strategy. Sites have been selected according to the methodology set out in [BP.01] and aim to deliver proportionate growth in sustainable locations to serve existing settlements whilst minimising impact on the Green Belt.

- 3.11.4 In relation to Employment, the economic evidence for the Local Plan identifies that there is a significant demand for strategic logistics, particularly along the M1 Motorway corridor in Nottinghamshire, and a shortage in the supply to meet the needs of major logistics operators. With the substantial development of Castlewood Business Park and the building out of Summit Park, Ashfield no longer has the capacity to significantly contribute towards meeting this requirement. The Council considers that currently there are no sites in the District which would provide a realistic alternative with the necessary attributes that the sites at Junction 27 (Policy S6 of the Local Plan) possess which are well placed to meet demand for logistics in terms of scale, access to the motorway network and deliverability.
- 3.11.5 The proposed strategic employment allocations (Policy S6 of the Local Plan) provide a major economic opportunity for Ashfield, providing investment to boost the local economy and jobs, and helping to address local deprivation issues.
- 3.11.6 The need to weigh competing issues lies at the heart of the NPPF. It is considered, on balance, the public benefits of the proposed allocation in relation to heritage assets and the exceptional circumstances in relation to the Green Belt provide the justification for the allocation to be taken forward in the Local Plan.

3.12 How has the assessment of sites within the Green Belt informed the Council's approach to site selection?

Council's response

- 3.12.1 The Council has undertaken a two-stage approach to the assessment of sites within the Green Belt:
- **Stage 1:** Strategic Green Belt Review (SGBR) [SEV.07, SEV.07a – i]
 - **Stage 2:** Background Paper 4 - Green Belt Harm Assessment [BP.04]
- 3.12.2 The Stage 1 study provided a rating for each identified Green Belt parcel for 'harm of release' when assessed against the purposes of the Green Belt as set out in National Planning Policy, but this was a basic measure that did not reflect a detailed analysis. This Stage 2 study provides a more refined assessment of harm.
- 3.12.3 Both stages 1 & 2 assessments are technical exercise, which do not determine whether or not land should remain or be excluded from the Green Belt, nor is it their role to establish whether exceptional circumstances exist. They form an evidence base to help inform the selection process, alongside other evidence base documents.

3.12.2 Chapter 7 of Background Paper 1 [BP.01] sets out the key factors which have been taken into consideration when selecting the most appropriate sites that would deliver the Spatial Approach and achieve the Council's vision for the future. The Green Belt was considered as part of a 5-stage sequential approach, as follows:

- **Stage 1:** Sites with planning permission;
- **Stage 2:** Sites with a resolution to grant planning permission subject to signing a Section 106 legal agreement;
- **Stage 3:** Brownfield (previously developed) sites assessed through the SHELAA as 'achievable' or 'potentially achievable' and consistent with the Council's strategic approach for sustainable growth;
- **Stage 4:** Greenfield sites assessed through the SHELAA as 'achievable' or 'potentially achievable' and consistent with the Council's strategic approach for sustainable growth;
- **Stage 5:** Green Belt sites assessed through the SHELAA as 'achievable'³ or 'potentially achievable' and consistent with the Council's strategic approach for sustainable growth.

3.12.3 Background Paper 4: Green Belt Harm Assessment (Stage 2) [BP.04] examines the likely harm to Green Belt purposes that may result from the development of any of the sites which were identified as potentially 'developable'⁴.

3.12.4 Chapter 9 of Background Paper 1: Spatial Strategy and Site Selection [BP.01] sets out how the BP.04 has informed the selection of sites within the Green Belt.

3.13 Before concluding that exceptional circumstances exist to justify changes to Green Belt boundaries, paragraph 141 of the Framework states that strategic policy-making authorities should be able to demonstrate that it has examined fully all other reasonable options for meeting its identified need for housing. This will be assessed through the examination and will consider whether the strategy:

- ***Makes as much use as possible of suitable brownfield sites and underutilised land;***
- ***Optimises the density of development, and***
- ***Has been informed by discussions with neighbouring authorities about whether they can accommodate some of the identified need.***

How has the preparation of the Plan sought to make as much use as possible of suitable brownfield sites and optimise the density of development?

³ A site is considered achievable for development where there is a reasonable prospect that the particular type of development will be developed on the site at a particular point in time. This is essentially a judgement about the economic viability of a site, and the capacity of the developer to complete and let or sell the site over a certain period. (Housing & Economic Land Availability Assessment Planning Practice Guidance (para.20))

⁴ To be considered developable, sites should be in a suitable location for housing development with a reasonable prospect that they will be available and could be viably developed at the point envisaged. (NPPF, Annex 2: Glossary)

Council's response

3.13.1 This issue is addressed in Section 9 of Background Paper 1 [BP.01], in particular para. 9.5 provides an explanation in regard to the how the requirements of NPPF paragraph 141 have been addressed. More detail can be found throughout BP.01, however this the approach is summarised below.

Brownfield Sites

3.13.2 As set out in the Council's response to Qu.3.12, a sequential approach was utilised by the Council to select the most appropriate sites that would deliver the Spatial Approach and achieve the Council's vision for the future. Brownfield sites were considered at stage 3 before Green Belt. However, the Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment [SEV.20] and Brownfield Land capacity Study [SEV.44] identified that there are insufficient developable brownfield sites within the existing built-up areas to accommodate the required level s of growth over the Plan period.

Density of Development

3.13.3 Policy H7 of the Local Plan [SD.01] aims to encourage higher density development in areas which are close to key services and facilities, i.e., identified town centres, plus the major transport nodes which enable access to other centres and services further afield, and not just locally significant destinations.

3.13.4 Housing development in the District will be brought forward through sites mainly concentrated in and adjacent to the larger and more accessible towns of Hucknall, Sutton-in-Ashfield and Kirkby-in-Ashfield under Policy H1. Policy H7 of the Local Plan supports this approach by promoting higher housing densities in areas closer to town centre services and major transport hubs.

3.13.5 Policy H7 is in line with the NPPF in respect of a variable approach to requirements and maximising land use in more sustainable locations.

3.14 How would the proposed release of land maintain the openness and permanence of the Green Belt?

Council's response

3.14.1 The September 2023 NPPF confirms the importance that Government attaches to Green Belt and stresses the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy of preventing urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open (Para 137). The five purposes of Green Belt are recognised, and Local Plan [SD.01] Policy S4: Green Belt, confirms that the principle of the Nottingham Derby Green Belt will be retained.

3.14.2 The Councils Spatial Approach limits the release of Green Belt land to where necessary to plan for sustainable communities.

3.14.3 The Council considers that the sites proposed to be release from the Green Belt are well contained and will not impact on the openness and

permanence of the Green Belt. Chapter 9 of Background Paper 1: Spatial Strategy and Site Selection [BP.01] sets out the site-specific justification for Green Belt release, and include a summary of the findings from the Green Belt Harm Report [BP.04]. BP04 assesses the sites in respect of the potential degree of harm that their release would cause to the purposes of the Green Belt. A full list of sites assessed can be seen in Appendix 1 of BP.04, together with a map showing their location.

3.15 How has the Green Belt assessment considered the potential for mitigation?

Council's response

3.15.1 Background Paper 4: Green Belt Harm [BP.04] discusses in Chapter 4 appropriate mitigation to reduce harm to the Green Belt and how this will be achieved.

3.16 Do the Plan's strategic policies set out the scale and need for the release of land from the Green Belt as required by paragraph 140 of the Framework?

Council's response

3.16.1 Supporting text to Strategic Policy S1: Spatial Strategy to Deliver the Vision, sets out at paragraph 3.6:

“The SHELAA and Brownfield Capacity Study identify that there are insufficient developable brownfield sites within the existing built-up areas to accommodate the required levels of growth over the plan period. As such, it has been necessary to direct new development to greenfield land outside of the existing settlements. Some of this new development requires the release of land from the Green Belt, including strategic employment land allocated at junction 27 of the M1 (Policy S8) and several housing allocations identified under Policy H1.”

3.17 Having regard to the shortfall of housing provision over the plan period, what evidence is there that the Green Belt boundary will not need to be altered at the end of the plan period as set out at paragraph 143(e) of the Framework?

Council's response

3.17.1 The Council consider that Green Belt release is necessary to deliver growth in appropriate locations and to achieve the Vision through the preferred spatial strategy. Sites have been selected according to the methodology set out in [BP.01] and aim to deliver proportionate growth in sustainable locations to serve existing settlements whilst minimising impact on the Green Belt.

3.17.2 The Council considers that proposed changes to the Green Belt present long term strong defensible boundaries. Taking account of the settlement hierarchy in Strategic Policy S1, the only 'Level A' settlement wholly constrained by Green Belt in Ashfield is the town of Hucknall. It should be noted that this settlement is located on the District's boundary with Gedling Borough. Gedling Borough Council have allocated a significant sized site of 805 dwellings to the north of Hucknall, and are

proposing additional allocation on existing 'white land' in this location to accommodate future development.

- 3.17.3 Future development requirements beyond the Plan period are uncertain, and wholesale Green Belt release at this stage is considered inappropriate. It should also be noted that the remaining 'Level A' settlements of Sutton and Kirkby are not wholly constrained by Green Belt, albeit having other constraints to development.

3.18 At a strategic level, do exceptional circumstances exist to alter the Green Belt boundary, having particular regard to paragraphs 140 – 143 of the Framework? If not, how could housing and employment needs be met in other ways?

Council's response

- 3.18.1 Yes. Chapter 9 of Background Paper 1: Spatial Strategy and Site Selection [BP.01] discusses the requirements of paragraphs 140 – 142 NPPF, and why the Council believes that there are exceptional circumstances to release land from the Green Belt to deliver the strategy identified in the Local Plan [SD.01].
- 3.18.2 The requirements of paragraph 143 NPPF are addressed throughout BP.01.
- 3.18.2 The exceptional circumstances for the release of Green Belt for strategic employment purposes is also set out in BP.01 at paragraphs 9.51 – 9.62, but in particular:
- 9.60 sets out: "The economic evidence for the Local Plan identifies that there is a significant demand for strategic logistics, particularly along the M1 Motorway corridor in Nottinghamshire, and a shortage in the supply to meet the needs of major logistics operators. With the substantial development of Castlewood Business Park and the building out of Summit Park, Ashfield no longer has the capacity to significantly contribute towards meeting this requirement. The Council considers that currently there are no sites in the District which would provide a realistic alternative with the necessary attributes that the sites at Junction 27 possess which are well placed to meet demand for logistics in terms of scale, access to the motorway network and deliverability.
 - 9.61 sets out: "The proposed strategic allocations provide a major economic opportunity for Ashfield, providing investment to boost the local economy and jobs, and helping to address local deprivation issues."
 - 9.62 sets out: "The need to weigh competing issues lies at the heart of the NPPF. It is considered, on balance, the public benefits of the proposed allocation in relation to heritage assets and the exceptional circumstances in relation to the Green Belt provide the justification for the allocation to be taken forward in the Local Plan."