



# **Dacorum Borough Council**

## **Local Planning Framework**

### **DACORUM SITE ALLOCATIONS DPD EXAMINATION IN PUBLIC**

**Statement by Dacorum Borough Council**

**Matter 10: Policy LA4: Hanburys, Shootersway, Berkhamsted**

**September 2016**

## **Purpose of this statement**

The purpose of this statement is to summarise the Council's position regarding the following matters, issues and questions raised by the Inspector in advance of their discussion at the public hearing sessions.

To avoid repetition this statement includes cross references to appropriate technical work and includes relevant extracts as appendices.

## Matters raised by Inspector and the Council's response

### 1. Is compensation necessary for the loss of species rich grassland?

- 1.1 The Council accepts that the proposal will lead to the loss of grassland on the site and that it would be difficult to compensate for this directly. However, the principle of the development is already firmly established through the Core Strategy (Examination Document CS4) and the Council is committed to its delivery. The principle of sustainability offsetting (which can encompass biodiversity off-setting) is also established in the Core Strategy, through Policy CS30.
- 1.2 The reference to the potential for biodiversity offsetting with regard to this site is included within the text of the existing 'Delivery and Phasing' section of Policy LA4 (fourth bullet point) (Examination Document SUB1). This text states that:
- "Contributions may also be required towards offsetting loss of wildlife resources and early liaison with Hertfordshire County Council (Ecology) is recommended."*
- 1.3 The LA4 proposal will be designed, as far as is reasonable, to promote biodiversity across the site through the retention of trees and the pond feature, reinforcing existing landscaping, and the creation of open spaces. Biodiversity offsetting is to be investigated through discussions with the Council's Ecological Adviser which could help mitigate for some of the loss. This issue is also explicitly referred to within the draft master plan (Examination Document LA39).
- 1.4 On the advice of the Council's Ecological Adviser from Hertfordshire Ecology (part of Hertfordshire County Council) it is proposed to amend the text of Policy LA4 with regard to offsetting as follows:
- 'Contributions ~~may also be~~ required towards offsetting loss of wildlife resource ~~and, following early liaison with Hertfordshire County Council (Ecology)~~ Ecology.'*
- 1.5 This change is recommended for the following reasons:
- It makes a clear commitment to finding some form of compensation, which given the quality of the site is not unreasonable;
  - There needs to be a distinction between the features that can be retained on site, and the wildlife resource to be lost. As this will essentially be the bulk of the grassland habitat, this issue should be adequately covered by default; and
  - If the land is to be developed to its full potential there is little scope for retaining any of the grassland habitat *in situ*. This places greater emphasis on the grassland resource affected and providing appropriate compensation.
- 1.6 The Council's Ecological Adviser has confirmed that the above wording change will address previous ecological concerns raised over this site. This wording change is therefore included as a suggested Main Modification (see Appendix 2 to Matter 2). If agreed, the draft master plan will also need to be amended accordingly.

## 2. Should the site come forward prior to 2021 if it is available?

2.1 The Council considers that the Plan housing programme does represent a significant body of housing which is likely to further improve in the future (see paragraph 2.5 below). The Council will continue to take steps through its planning powers and landownership, and through close working with the development industry and other bodies to ensure delivery and to boost the overall supply of housing land.

2.2 This issue of when the Local Allocations should be released for development was considered in some detail through the Core Strategy Examination. This took account of the context provided by the NPPF (Examination Document REG10), including its objective of boosting significantly the supply of new housing. The Core Strategy Inspector clearly supported the Council's general approach to phasing in finding the Core Strategy (Examination Document CS4) sound, subject to a number of Main Modifications (paragraphs 16-18 of the Inspector's Report (Examination Document CS6)). With explicit regard to the phasing, delivery and management of development he concluded that:

*"The Council's approach has been satisfactorily justified in the context within which the plan has been prepared."* (paragraph 16)

2.3 The Core Strategy (paragraph 8.17) (Examination Document CS4) advises that:

*"Local Allocations will be held back to encourage urban sites to come forward earlier, to retain countryside for longer and to ensure an appropriate contributions to land supply in the later part of the plan period."*

This same principle is reflected in the submitted Site Allocations document (paragraph 6.26) (Examination Document SUB1) and in the Providing Homes and Community Services Background Issues Paper (paragraphs 2.73-2.80) (Examination Document SA4) in discussing the phasing of allocations.

2.4 The Council has demonstrated that it can be flexible over the phasing of Local Allocations when circumstances justify, and will continue to be so (see paragraph 2.6 below). Following further consideration of local housing needs and the role the Local Allocation LA5: Icknield Way, west of Tring will play in delivering other essential local infrastructure, the site has been brought forward into Part 1 of the Schedule of Housing Proposals and Sites. Whilst no specific delivery date has been set, this will follow the formal release of the site from the Green Belt i.e. after adoption of the Site Allocations DPD. The reasons for this earlier release of LA5 are set out in the Meeting Homes and Community Needs Background Issues Paper (November 2015) (Examination Document SA4).

2.5 The Council believes that there remain sound planning grounds for continuing to constrain the release of Local Allocations LA1-4 and LA6. These Local Allocations are included in Part 2 of the Schedule of Housing Proposals and Sites in the Site Allocations DPD (Examination Document SUB1) and are planned to bring forward completed homes from 2021 onwards. There have

been no fundamental changes in circumstances since the adoption of the Core Strategy and in consulting on the Site Allocations DPD, to warrant bringing forward these allocations sooner:

- There is no overriding local justification to release them earlier;
- The Council wants to continue to give emphasis to the supply of brownfield sites and future opportunities as sought by national policy (paragraphs 17 and 111 of the NPPF (Examination Document REG10)).
- Local Allocations are still needed to boost supply in the medium to longer term, to ensure a steady delivery of housing.
- There is no pressing need to bring forward Local Allocations to boost immediate supply. As at 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015, there is a healthy pipeline of housing and the Council can meet and modestly exceed its 5 year housing supply (see Matter 4, Table 1 and the response to Question 6).

2.6 The position on supply is only likely to improve given progress being made with sites, increasing levels of completions and on-site activity, growing levels of commitments and the potential for allocations to deliver additional homes (see response to Matter 4, Question 10).

2.7 Policy CS3: Managing Selected Development Sites already provides sufficient flexibility for Local Allocations to be brought forward, if required. Furthermore, paragraph 6.28 of the Site Allocations DPD makes clear that:

*“.....there will be a lead in period in order to allow practical delivery from 2021. In practice, this will mean that applications will be received and determined in advance of 2021 and that site construction and works may actually take place ahead of the specified release date to enable occupation of new homes by 2021.”*

This approach remains appropriate and will ensure that the Council can continue to demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply as required by the NPPF. It is also consistent with the wording of paragraph 8.17 of the Core Strategy.

2.8 The Council recognises that the recently completed SHMA and subsequent ONS population and DCLG household projections continue to point to growing housing demand. It does not accept, however, that they justify fundamental changes to the current approach to the Green Belt and allocation of sites in the Site Allocations DPD. This is a separate matter better addressed comprehensively outside of the Site Allocations DPD in taking forward work on the new Local Plan (incorporating the early partial review of the Core Strategy) (see response to Matter 2, Question 3).