
Stantec, on behalf the Co-operative Group

Examination into the Leicester City Local Plan

Matter 3: Housing

Issue 3: Has the Plan been positively prepared and is it justified, effective consistent with national policy in meeting the housing needs of all groups in Leicester over the plan period?

Housing Land Supply

Policy Ho01 – Non-Strategic Housing Allocations

Q77: Is Policy Ho01 effective, given that the housing allocations are not set out in the policy but listed in Appendix 6?

1. Whilst the Co-op considers that policy Ho01 is effective, as currently drafted, they do consider that it could be better worded so as to assist with the interpretation of the Policy.
2. As it is currently written, the policy provides signposts to all of the relevant information, but given the size of the Plan (at over 300 pages) it is a rather cumbersome process to understand whether a site falls under the terms of Policy Ho01. In order to remedy this, it is considered that the list at Appendix 6 should be included within the Policy, or at least feature within the supporting text of the Policy.
3. Additionally, the Co-op considers that the Policy would benefit from a link to the Local Plan Policies Map (Doc. Ref: SD/3). As written, there is no link between the policy, the table at Appendix 6 and the Policies Map, which provides the only illustration within the Plan of where the non-strategic housing allocations are, and their scale. It may be prudent, for ease of interpretation and understanding, to adapt the table currently at Appendix 6, so that it includes a site location plan for each allocation. It is considered that this would provide additional clarity and understanding to each of the non-strategic allocations. It would also assist in the interpretation of the accompanying Policies Map.

Q78: To ensure that the implementation of Policy Ho01 is robust and clear for decision makers, should the site specific constraints and proposed mitigations set out in the Non-Strategic Sites Proposed for Allocation in the Draft Leicester Local Plan (2023) [SD/19] be included within the Plan?

4. Yes. Linked to the Co-op's response to question 77 above, the inclusion of site information contained in the Non-Strategic Sites Proposed for Allocation in the Draft Leicester Local Plan (Doc. Ref: SD/19) document should be included within the Plan because it provides a suitable level of detail on each of the proposed non-strategic allocations, and what their anticipated yields will be, as well as any anticipated site constraints, mitigation etc. This would be to the benefit of all stakeholders, as it would provide a greater level of clarity, but all within one place (i.e. within the Plan document itself, as opposed to being spread across a number of documents).
5. However, the Co-op does not consider that this information needs to be included within Policy Ho01 itself or within its supporting text. The most appropriate and least cumbersome approach would be to use SD/19 as a replacement for Appendix 6. It is suggested however that certain matters within the document, including capacity and delivery timescales, are noted as "indicative", to ensure that these figures do not preclude a greater level of development on the sites if it can be demonstrated

that such an approach would be acceptable. Having regard to our Client's comments in respect of Matter 1, and the wider provisions of the NPPF, it is important to ensure that the potential of any site allocation for the delivery of new homes is maximised to assist in addressing the pressing need for new homes across Leicester.

Q79: Was the methodology used to assess and select the proposed site allocations, as set out in the Housing Sites Methodology report [EB/HO/5] robust and appropriate? Are the reasons for selecting the preferred sites and rejecting others clear and where is this set out?

6. In the first instance, it is important to highlight that, in line with previous comments made in respect of Matter 1, the Housing Sites Methodology Statement (Doc. Ref: EB/HO/5), which is dated November 2022, was written under a different national planning policy context than exists today. This does not necessarily harm the methodology of site selection itself, but does impact upon the context set out in the early sections of this report.
7. In terms of the methodology itself, this would appear to be appropriate and it is clear from the document why sites (in general terms) were selected or discounted. Our Client considers that the approach taken in this respect is reasonable and justified. Our Client does note however that, at pages 11 and 12 of the document, a summary is provided of the total sites assessed and how many have been progressed / discounted as a result of the process.

Q80: How was the historic environment considered in the process for the assessment and selection of the Non-Strategic Housing Allocations? Where is that evidence set out in the supporting evidence base?

8. Whilst this is a question that the Council are best placed to answer, the 'Site Assessment Criteria' table at pages 14 – 20 of the Housing Sites Methodology Report (Dec. Ref: EB/HO/5) provides a RAG (Red, Amber, Green) table for the assessment of sites. Within this, the Council details how it will assess heritage assets, which are detailed as including scheduled ancient monuments, listed buildings, registered parks and gardens and conservation areas. The table then provides three levels of impact (red, amber and green) as to whether a site can comply with the indicator for heritage assets as part of the wider assessment process.
9. Similar to our comments made in respect of Q79 above, the methodology for the assessment of heritage assets appears robust, and is consistent with national planning policy
10. Notwithstanding the above, it is noted that there are no heritage evidence base documents published on the examination page for assessment as part of this process. It is also noted that there is an extensive list of documents, that covers a broad range of topic areas, including climate change and flood risk and the natural environment, but noting relating to the historic environment. We would expect that the Plan would be informed by a suite of heritage related evidence base documents, but these have not been made available for scrutiny as part of the examination process. The Council are urged to publish this information as soon as possible.

Q81: Are the non-strategic housing allocations deliverable and/or developable in accordance with the timelines set out in the housing trajectory? In particular, are they:

- a) ***confirmed by the landowner involved as being available for the development proposed?***

- b) supported by evidence to demonstrate that safe and appropriate access for vehicles and pedestrians can be provided?**
- c) deliverable, having regard to the provision of the necessary infrastructure and services, and any environmental or other constraints?**

11. It is noted that some of the details of whether a site is considered deliverable or developable, particularly in the context of land ownership and site constraints are set out within the Non-Strategic Sites Proposed for Allocation within the Draft Leicester Local Plan document (Doc. Ref: SD/19), albeit it only provides a brief synopsis of each site that has been selected for allocation. The Co-op has, however, been involved in the promotion of Site 715: Land North of Gartree Road, and, from this direct experience, we can confirm that the Council has engaged with us as a promoter to demonstrate deliverability of Site 715.
12. It is also noted that further details on the proposed allocations are set out within EXAM 9, which provides additional details of the housing allocations and commitments, through a Deliverability and Developability Schedule.
13. In terms of the specific questions posed at a), b) and c) above, it is anticipated that submission would have been made on behalf of the respective landowners as part of the call for sites process and beyond, as has been the case with the Co-op's land interests. This information however does not appear to be publicly available and so it is unclear what basis the Council has formed its view on all of the above, beyond the information available in EXAM 9 and SD/19.
14. It is possible to provide commentary on behalf of the Co-op to the questions above in respect of its land interests.
15. In respect of point a), we have made submissions on behalf of the Co-op to the Council as part of the emerging Plan process to confirm that Site 715 is available for development. The Co-op is the freehold owner of the site and has previously commented that the site would be marketed for development as soon as possible after it was allocated for development within an adopted Local Plan. The Co-op has also confirmed that soft market testing has been undertaken in order to understand the attractiveness of the site to the market, and the likely housing mix. This is all documented within EXAM 9.
16. In respect of point b), submissions to the Council in respect of Site 715 included highway evidence and access plans, which demonstrated that a suitable access for the site could be delivered to facilitate its future development. Again, this is reported within EXAM 9.
17. Finally, with regard to point c), submissions to the Council for Site 715 included technical evidence in relation to site constraints as well as an indicative masterplan which demonstrated how the site could be developed having regard to those constraints which, in this case, include a gas main easement, ecological matters and culverts. The submitted evidence has demonstrated that a high quality development could be achieved on the site having regard to technical matters and constraints.

Q82: Are there any updates to the information contained in the Housing Allocations & Commitments - Deliverability and Developability schedule [EXAM 9] on the delivery status of any of the non-strategic housing allocations?

18. This is a question which the Council is best placed to answer in terms of the wider allocations within the Plan. However, in the case of Site 715, the information contained within EXAM 9 remains pertinent, and the Co-op would reiterate its commitment to working with the Council to ensure the

swift delivery of new family homes (including affordable homes) following the site's allocation within an adopted Local Plan, as it has done previously in the case of other land in the area.

Appendix 6 Sites – North East and South East Areas

Site 715: Land north of Gartree Road

Q136: Is the allocation of land north of Gartree Road for housing development of 35 dwellings justified and appropriate, having regard to its current role as part of a Green Wedge, the purposes of which in Policy OSSR01 are to prevent settlements merging, provide a green lung into urban areas and act as a recreational resource?

19. Yes. The proposed allocation of Site 715 has been informed by an appropriate level of technical evidence submitted to the Council by the Co-op, which has demonstrated that the future development of the site would be acceptable both in terms of its principle, but also from a technical perspective. This must also be considered in the context of a pressing requirement for new homes, and an impetus placed on significantly boosting the supply of homes by the Government (paragraph 60, NPPF).
20. In terms of the Green Wedge considerations, the Co-op has made submissions, as part of the emerging Local Plan in September 2021 and February 2023, which demonstrate that the development of this modest parcel of Green Wedge would be appropriate in the context of a pressing need for new housing. The former of these submissions included a detailed Green Wedge assessment which assessed the site against the functions of the Green Wedge, ascribed by the adopted Local Plan policy. This assessment concluded that the site performs poorly against the prescribed Green Wedge purposes. Furthermore, it is evident that the future development of the Site would not impede the wider Green Wedge from continuing to perform well against the aforementioned criteria. In the context of a clear and pressing need for the Council to identify sites for development, including greenfield sites, it is reasonable that one would look to Green Wedge sites that perform poorly against its purposes, in order to preserve and strengthen the function of Green Wedge areas that perform well. This is the case for Site 715.
21. Noting that the Green Wedge is a local designation that is afforded less permanence as the Green Belt, it is essential that the Green Wedge policy is kept under review and is not used in the same way as Green Belt as a mechanism to constrain development. Particularly when it can be demonstrated that land in such locations in question performs poorly against its purposes, is available for development and is otherwise sustainable.
22. The future development of Site 715 would adhere to the requirements of OSSR01, in that it would not adversely affect the predominantly open and undeveloped character of the Green Wedge, noting that the site is relatively modest and that the area to the north of the site would remain undeveloped, and protected as part of the emerging Local Plan.
23. It is also important to add that, beyond its openness, the site is private land which offers no benefit as a recreational resource. This would need to be balanced against a local and national impetus for the delivery of new homes.

Q137: How will this allocation and the loss of open space that would result help to promote healthy, inclusive and safe places, as set out in paragraph 92 of the NPPF?

24. The site is privately owned land with no public access and so it is not considered to offer any public benefit, other than as an area of undeveloped grassland. The future development of the site would

offer a number of social, economic and environmental benefits, through the provision of market and affordable housing, quality public realm and biodiversity net gain. It is considered that the future development of the site would represent sustainable and accessible development, and would accord with the provisions of the NPPF.

Q138: Given the location of this site within Flood Zone 2, does its allocation for housing satisfy the Sequential Test in paragraph 162 of the NPPF?

25. The suggestion within Q138 that the site is located within Flood Zone 2 is not correct. The Environment Agency's Flood Map for Planning indicates that the entire site is located within Flood Zone 1, i.e. within the lowest flood risk category. This position is consistent with the Council's Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA), which, within the relevant interactive map, as appended to the SFRA (Doc. Ref: EB/CC/21/10-13), also indicates that the Site is not located within Flood Zones 2, 3a or 3b.
26. Notwithstanding, any future planning application for the site would be accompanied by an appropriate flood risk statement and drainage strategy to demonstrate the acceptability of the development in this respect. It is not expected that flood risk will be a constraint to development of the site. Indeed, Appendix H to the SFRA (Doc. Ref: EB/CC/2h) confirms that the Site is located within Flood Zone 1 but that surface water maps indicate a potential flow route across the site. Later within this document, it is stated that any future development proposal for the Site should incorporate appropriate mitigation for this.

Q139: What account has been taken of potential effects of the proposed allocation on heritage assets, including the Scheduled Monument Moated site to the north, and the nationally important archaeology at the site?

27. The suite of information that has been submitted to the Council through the emerging Local Plan process has had regard to all known site constraints, including heritage considerations. There are no designated heritage assets within the site and any future planning application will be accompanied by appropriate heritage and archaeological assessments to ensure that any concerns in this respect are appropriately addressed through the planning process. The Scheduled Monument is located approximately 400 metres to the north of site, separated from the site by Leicestershire Golf Course and Shady Lane Arboretum. As a result, there is unlikely to be any harm resulting from the development of the site. From an archaeological perspective, the Co-op has experience of promoting land within the area – such as its land at Stoughton Grange to the east, in OWBC area, which is currently being developed – and is therefore aware of the sensitivities of archaeology locally and the need for it to be thoroughly assessed at the planning application stage. Notwithstanding this, from our experience locally, archaeology is unlikely to preclude or impact upon the development of the site.

Q140: If, according to the evidence in EXAM 9, house building on this site is expected to take around 18 months to complete, is the projected build out rate of all 35 dwellings in 2029/30 accurate?

28. Yes. At 35 dwellings, an 18-month build-out timeframe is considered reasonable. Assuming that the Local Plan is adopted within the first half of 2025, this would allow approximately 3 years for the sale of the site, the preparation and subsequent determination of a planning application for the site, as well as allowing sufficient time for any planning conditions to be subsequently discharged. The site is of a sufficient scale as to be able to make its way through the planning system and towards development swiftly (unlike larger, strategic sites). As such, and as confirmed above, the contents of EXAM 9 in relation to site 715 are considered to remain accurate in the assessment of the site's delivery.