

# Dacorum Borough Council Core Strategy Examination in Public 2012

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AMEC on behalf of The Crown Estate (ID: 211068)

Hearing Session: Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> October, 10.00

## Issue 6 Providing Homes

*Question 6.1 (part). Are the housing policies consistent with national guidance and supported by clear and robust evidence?*

1. The Core Strategy is clearly unsound with respect to both planning positively for objectively assessed housing needs as required by the NPPF (para. 47), failing to comply with the duty to cooperate (s33A of the 2004 Act) and a lack of justification regarding alternative options when making housing allocations (para. 182 of the NPPF). This representation demonstrates fundamental issues with regarding the Core Strategy's compliance with these key national policies.

### Planning positively for objectively assessed housing needs

2. The Council has not set out how it will contribute to meeting the “*full, objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing in the **housing market area***” (emphasis added), as required under paragraph 47 of the NPPF. The Council accepts that land east of Hemel Hempstead (The Crown Estate's Gorbambury proposals<sup>1</sup>) is a logical ‘longer term’ option to meeting Dacorum's housing needs<sup>2</sup>, but given the level of demand and time horizon of the Core Strategy through to 2031 this option should clearly be considered and planned for now. This is summarised in more detail in paragraphs 12-15 of this representation.

### Failure to demonstrate the duty to cooperate

3. The Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA, examination doc. HG 12) identifies the relevant housing market area (para. 3.5) as a sub-group of six authorities (Dacorum, St Albans, Hertsmere, Three Rivers, Watford and Welwyn Hatfield). Together these six authorities comprise the London Commuter Belt (West) HMA.
4. Hertsmere, Three Rivers and Watford are planning for annual housing growth which aligns broadly with the SHMA's findings<sup>3</sup> and commensurate with Policy H1 of the East of

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<sup>1</sup> See examination reference OT 10 and Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 to The Crown Estate's representation to Issue 1.

<sup>2</sup> Para. 4.18 Statement of Compliance with the Duty to Cooperate (examination reference SUB 8).

<sup>3</sup> Hertsmere is planning for 266dpa against the SHMA figure of 257dpa (Main Modifications to their Core Strategy, currently out for consultation). Three Rivers has a 2011 adopted Core Strategy which plans for 180dpa against the SHMA figure of 180dpa. Watford is currently consulting on Main Modifications to their Core Strategy which plans for 260dpa against the SHMA figure of 257dpa.

England Plan<sup>4</sup>. Whilst the relevant policy was quashed for the remaining authorities in the HMA (Dacorum, St Albans and Welwyn Hatfield) there is still an objectively assessed housing need that needs to be met, as explicitly required by the NPPF.

5. The implication of Dacorum failing to plan for its own level of housing need (see para. 13) has to be considered in the context of the HMA as a whole. By failing to plan for Dacorum's needs, what impacts will this have on other authorities in the HMA? Will they need to plan for additional growth to accommodate Dacorum's shortfall? This issue cannot be avoid and has fundamental impacts on the soundness of the plan. The issue is further exacerbated when considering that neighbouring St Albans City and District also intends to provide for significantly less than their objectively assessed housing needs, as set out in their latest housing target paper<sup>5</sup>.
6. In order to ensure a sound plan, the Council needs to undertake more effective engagement with other authorities in the HMA so that there is a clear strategy as to how the full, objectively assessed needs of the HMA as a whole will be met in accordance with paragraph 47 of the NPPF.
7. To resolve this issue both Dacorum and St Albans need to ensure a more positively planned approach regarding how to help meet the full objectively assessed housing needs for the HMA as a whole in the absence of robust evidence to justify why this demand cannot be planned for. The Council accepts that land east of Hemel Hempstead (The Crown Estate's Gorhambury proposals<sup>6</sup>) is a logical 'longer term' option to meeting Dacorum's housing needs<sup>7</sup>, but given the level of demand and time horizon of the Core Strategy through to 2031 this option should clearly be considered and planned for now.

#### Lack of justification regarding site allocations

8. In paragraphs 10-11 of this representation we set out why the Council's approach to the allocation of sites at Hemel Hempstead is unjustified, by failing to consider reasonable alternatives, namely land east of Hemel Hempstead<sup>8</sup>.

#### ***Question 6.1 (part). Is the identification of strategic sites and local allocations appropriate and is the status of the SS and LA policies clear?***

9. The Core Strategy is unsound in this regard because there has been an inadequate consideration of reasonable alternatives to growth at Hemel Hempstead. Green Belt land is

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<sup>4</sup> All of these figures are *broadly* (+/- 10dpa) commensurate with what is required under Policy H1 of the East of England Plan.

<sup>5</sup> The St Albans City and District Strategic Local Plan: A Local Housing Target; Affordable Housing; Housing Type/Size/Mix, September 2012 (examination reference REG18). This document sets out that the Council intends to plan for just 250dpa, against a SHMA figure of 500dpa and 2008-based household projections which show a need for 688dpa.

<sup>6</sup> See examination reference OT 10 and Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 to The Crown Estate's representation to Issue 1.

<sup>7</sup> Para. 4.18 Statement of Compliance with the Duty to Cooperate (examination reference SUB 8).

<sup>8</sup> See examination reference OT 10 and Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 to The Crown Estate's representation to Issue 1.

released to the west of the town (LA1, LA2 and LA3) but without a Green Belt review to support this. The need for a Green Belt review is clearly set out in our response to Issue 2 and fundamental evidence required to support the plan.

10. In addition, the Council's SA is flawed, by failing to consider the merits of the eastern expansion of Hemel Hempstead, leaving this for St Albans to undertake as part of their LDF process. Paragraph 4.14(d) of the Council's statement regarding the duty to cooperate (examination reference SUB 8) shows that St Albans have no plans to deliver this in response to the north eastern neighbourhood options identified by The Crown Estate<sup>9</sup>.

***Question 6.4 (part). Is the overall housing provision based on a sound assessment of supply and demand? In particular:***

***(a) will the Core Strategy meet the full objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing in the Borough?***

11. The Core Strategy is unsound because it will clearly not meet the full objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing in the Borough.
12. In determining the overall level of demand for new dwellings (Selecting the Core Strategy Housing Target, June 2012), the Council accepts that 2008-based household projections are the starting point and also considers the findings of the 2008 London Commuter Belt (West) Strategic Housing Market Assessment. CLG's 2008-based projections show a housing requirement of 540 dwellings per annum (dpa) and the 2008 SHMA a requirement for 557 dpa.
13. The Crown Estate supports the use of the SHMA and CLG's household projections as the basis for determining the Borough's housing requirement. These sources of information are widely accepted as the starting point for understanding the objectively assessed needs.

***Question 6.5 (part). Bearing in mind the significant need for housing in the Borough, why was the higher growth option discounted?***

14. Two of the Council's main reasons for discounting the higher growth options relate to it requiring difficult policy decisions and the constraint presented by Green Belt.
  - a) *"Difficult policy decisions would need to be made in order to bring forward additional housing land under the demand-led scenario, either affecting the strategy at particular places (and the character and infrastructure at these settlements), or requiring acceptance of growth by another authority"*<sup>10</sup>.

This is a significant failing of the Core Strategy and demonstrates that the Council is avoiding one of the most significant issues affecting the future of the Borough and wider HMA. That a policy decision is difficult does not mean it should be put off; in the interests of good planning these decisions need to be made now, particularly when considering the time horizon of the Core Strategy running through to 2031. In any case,

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<sup>9</sup> Appendix 2 to The Crown Estate's response to Issue 1

<sup>10</sup> Para. 3.50, Selecting the Core Strategy Housing Target, Dacorum Borough Council, June 2012 (examination reference HG 16)

The Crown Estate's Gorhambury Concept shows how a significant level of additional growth (6,000-7,000 dwellings) can be delivered, but until now this option has not been properly considered as part of the Core Strategy process when the Council considers that it is a logical longer term option to meet Dacorum's needs<sup>11</sup>. Our view is that the case exists to bring this land forward now as part of the Core Strategy given the level of demand and time horizon of the plan through to 2031.

- b) *"It is difficult to see how full demand (for housing) can be achieved satisfactorily given the Green Belt and other environmental constraints in the Borough"*<sup>12</sup>.

To conclude that one of the reasons housing demand in the Borough cannot be met is because of the Green Belt is unjustified in the absence of a robust Green Belt review. As set out in The Crown Estate's response to Issue 1 this line of argument has already been dismissed by the Inspector assessing the Hertsmere Core Strategy. The exceptional circumstances (NPPF, para. 83) clearly exist for the Council to review their Green Belt boundaries, particularly meeting the demand for both housing and employment growth. The Crown Estate's Gorhambury Concept<sup>13</sup> clearly shows how new housing and employment can be delivered.

## Conclusions

15. The Core Strategy is unsound with respect to its housing policies for the following reasons:

- a) The Council does not planning positively for objectively assessed housing needs as required by the NPPF (para. 47).
- b) The Council does not comply with the duty to cooperate (s33A of the 2004 Act), particularly with respect to considering what impact planning for a lower level of growth could have on the HMA as a whole.
- c) There is a clear lack of justification regarding alternative options when making housing allocations at Hemel Hempstead (para. 182 of the NPPF). The Crown Estate's land east of Hemel Hemstead should clearly be considered.

**Word count: 1,496**

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<sup>11</sup> Para. 4.18 Statement of Compliance with the Duty to Cooperate (examination reference SUB 8).

<sup>12</sup> Paragraph 5.5, Selecting the Core Strategy Housing Target, Dacorum Borough Council, June 2012 (examination reference HG 16)

<sup>13</sup> See examination reference OT 10 and Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 to The Crown Estate's representation to Issue 1.

