

**EXAMINATION HEARING STATEMENT
ON BEHALF OF
BARWOOD DEVELOPMENT SECURITIES LTD**

**MATTER ELEVEN:
FIVE YEAR SUPPLY OF HOUSING LAND**

January 2016

Hearing Statements on Matter Eleven

Matter 11 – Five Year Supply of Housing Land

11.1 *Can a five year supply of deliverable housing land (in accordance with NPPF para 47) be currently identified against the plan's stated housing requirement?*

11.2 *Is it realistic that a five year supply of deliverable housing land would be maintained throughout the plan period?*

1. An important caveat to the submission made below is that the Council is yet to publish any updated information regarding housing delivery or land supply – as a result this representation uses as a starting point the information dated from April and November 2014.
2. In any event, the methodology taken to the calculations of land supply against the housing requirements provided in the April 2014 Assessment of Five Year Housing Land Supply are unclear – in particular Table 3 of that document where previous completions appear to feature in several places in the calculations. Significantly, the assessment appears not to take any account of the recognised undersupply to that point, although does apply the NPPF 20% buffer. Therefore, the updated version is awaited with interest, and in particular clarity on how the Council is responding to the historic under-supply of housing. Of particular relevance is the guidance provided in paragraph 035 of the NPPG which states that:

“Local planning authorities should aim to deal with any undersupply within the first 5 years of the plan period where possible.”

3. However, the existing evidence is clear that the Vale has consistently and persistently seen under-delivery of housing. This is true in the context of the (relatively modest) South East Plan housing requirements, as well as in the context of the increased housing requirements based on the updated SHMA evidence base which underpins the proposed Local Plan.
4. Completions data contained in the Council's April 2014 Five Year Land Supply report shows that delivery in the District averaged 417 units per year between 2006/7 and 2013/14. The highest level of delivery in any monitoring year during that period was 548 units in 2013/14. The persistent nature of the shortfall in housing delivery has been fully acknowledged and accepted by the Council who have, in accordance with the requirements of the NPPF, applied a 20% 'buffer' to their 2014 five year land supply assessment and monitoring.
5. The 2014 SHMA (doc ref HOU01) shows an under-delivery or shortfall of 800 units in the Vale of White Horse over the period 2006/7 to 2010/11 against the lower requirements of the South East Plan (which included a requirement equivalent to 578 dwellings per year).
6. The new Local Plan period began in April 2011 (2011/12), and the Council's Objectively Assessed Need (OAN) figure is applied from that date – this requires an average of 1028 dwellings per year. From April 2011 to the end of March 2014 there were 1250 dwellings

delivered (equivalent to 416 dwellings per year on average), and therefore a resultant shortfall of 1834 dwellings against the OAN requirement over that 3 year period. The Council has not, at the time of writing, publically confirmed what completions were recorded for 2014/15 (to March 2015), although 781 units were predicted. That would imply a shortfall over the first 4 years of the plan period of 2081 dwellings by March 2015.

7. However, delivery of 781 dwellings in the year to March 2015 would represent a significant increase in the level of completions typically seen in the District – if delivery remained around the average levels normally seen the shortfall will have been in excess of 2300 to March 2015. This shortfall, plus any further under-delivery since, must be met in the first five years.
8. The Council's updated housing delivery monitoring, and updated 5 year land supply assessment will no doubt provide a source of information for discussion during the Examination process. However, as referred to below, under-delivery - or no delivery at all - has continued on a number of strategic and committed sites; this demonstrates that many of the Council's assumptions have proved to be unrealistic.
9. The Council's strategy assumes delivery on a number of sites which have been allocated, permitted, or have had resolutions to grant permission. Many of these sites have taken, or are continuing to take, a considerable amount of time to come forward for development. Indeed, many appear to be showing little or no signs of coming forward. In this context, it is difficult to see how an appropriate supply of housing land will be maintained, and how sufficient levels of new housing will be delivered quickly enough, without identifying and allocating more sites in the Local Plan.
10. Critical to this, in our view, is an understanding of the difference between footnotes 11 and 12 of paragraph 47 of the NPPF, and whether a site is 'deliverable' or merely 'developable'. The Government clearly intend for a distinction to be made between sites – these differences are expanded upon in the NPPG, but in brief are:
 1. 'developable':
 - 'in a suitable location'
 - '**reasonable prospect** that this site is available'
 - '**could** be viably developed'
 2. 'deliverable':
 - 'available **now**'
 - 'viable **now**'
 - '**realistic prospect** of delivery.'
11. It is important to consider that the context for this distinction, and the main purpose of paragraph 47, is to '**boost significantly the supply of homes**'. It cannot be the Government's intention that Councils rely on a large number of sites which either don't yet have planning permission or where there is no firm commitment to develop, in order to identify a five year land supply. There are clearly a number of developable sites identified in the draft Local Plan,

but it is clear that a proportion of the sites relied upon cannot be considered likely to deliver quickly, or 'now' (they are not 'deliverable').

12. In response to an undefined shortfall in land supply against the OAN the Council has been granting planning permission for housing development in accordance with the NPPF guidance. At the time of writing there is no updated assessment of housing land supply from the Council, but in April 2014 it was reporting a 3.1 years supply against the new requirement (although it appears that this excluded any consideration of the shortfall to that point). The granting of additional permissions in 2015 will have no doubt made a helpful contribution to the land supply position, although it is noted that many sites which received resolutions to grant planning permission early in 2015 are yet to be formally approved. Furthermore, and notwithstanding the lack of an updated formal 5 year land supply position from the Council, officer reports to Planning Committee as recently as December 2015 were reporting a lack of 5 year supply against the emerging Local Plan requirement. In any event, the emerging pipeline of new commitments needs to be considered in the context of the continued lack of delivery on a number of sites which the Council has assumed would be delivering new homes during 2014/15, and/or 2015/16.
13. In the Vale of White Horse District the key example is the 2011 Local Plan allocated site at **Grove Airfield**. Despite the site having been allocated for development in the 2011 Local Plan, a resolution to approve the outline permission in December 2013, and a further positive resolution in March 2015, the outline application for 2500 units has still not been formally granted planning permission (as at early January 2016). The Council's trajectory of November 2014 assumed delivery would begin on the site with 175 units between April 2015 and March 2016 which clearly won't be delivered. A further 175 units anticipated in 2016/17 is also unlikely given the lack of progress to date. Delivery of this key strategic site is clearly significantly behind the Council's trajectory, and alone accounts for a not insignificant additional shortfall in housing delivery in addition to the 2000 dwelling shortfall which the Council had previously predicted would exist by March 2015.
14. The trajectory as contained in Housing Topic Paper 4 also assumes delivery on a number of other sites starting in 2015/16 (i.e. this current year to March 2016) – these assumptions are clearly flawed. A few key examples are:
 - **Crab Hill, Wantage** – **outline** permission was approved in July 2015 for 1500 units; the site was then put up for sale during the summer, and the process of selling the site is ongoing. Delivery of 150 units were assumed in 2015/16, with 150 units in 2016/17 also unlikely in full. Delivery is clearly significantly behind the Council's trajectory.
 - **Land South of Park Road, Great Faringdon** – following a resolution to approve in January 2015 for 350 units in **outline** the application has not yet been formally approved. The trajectory assumed 60 units would be delivered this year, and 80 in 2016/17.
 - **Monks Farm** – an extension to the time limit for a permission for 133 units was approved in August 2015. 40 units are assumed in the Council's trajectory by the end of March 2016.

- **Land east of Drayton Road, Abingdon** – a site originally approved on appeal in 2013 saw a revised scheme for 158 dwellings approved in September 2015. The VoWH trajectory assumed delivery of 40 units by March 2016. No pre-commencement conditions have yet been discharged suggesting delivery is some way behind the trajectory.
15. It would appear that the Council are consistently applying overoptimistic delivery targets on major sites. They are clearly under-estimating the time it takes to agree and finalise S106 agreements; for housebuilders to legally acquire sites; and then for detailed applications to be submitted and consented, and for the general 'gearing-up' to take place to enable development to begin.
16. In advance of updated housing delivery monitoring, and updated 5 year land supply information, the above examples clearly suggest that many large developable sites are failing to contribute towards the '*significant boost*' to housing supply required by the NPPF, and are not making the expected contribution in the early part of the plan-period. Based only on the five sites above, including Grove Airfield, the delivery of housing is likely to be around 600 units lower in 2014/15 and 2015/16 than was assumed by the Council's trajectory.
17. The issues facing the Council in delivering their assumed trajectory are highlighted in the report by HDH Planning of October 2014 (doc ref HOU03). The report was commissioned in response to the Council's recognition of the challenges presented by the increase in delivery rates required by the 2014 SHMA and the OAN. While the conclusions from the HDH report are that there is a '*reasonable prospect*' of delivering the required levels of housing, it is also clear from the report that a number of factors are likely to present challenges to delivery of the assumed trajectory (published in November 2014). On assessing the Council's proposed land supply and trajectory some of the key issues and challenges identified by HDH include:
- *The requirement of 1028 is more than twice the current average rate of delivery over the last 8 years;*
 - *Wider economic factors, beyond the control of the Council, have played a role in constraining delivery over recent years – and this includes the first part of the new Local Plan period;*
 - *An important part of historic supply has been from sites of up to 50 dwellings, with large sites playing a less important role – delivery rates on smaller sites (up to 20) units has slowed over recent years, and is unlikely to significantly increase, although remains an important source of supply over the plan-period;*
 - *Strategic (large) sites of 300 units or more are important but will not deliver the need for housing over the first five year period alone given the delays in 'mobilisation', and considerations of market capacity (finance) and competition.*
18. The report refers to the importance of ensuring an adequate development land supply as one key part of the development process which the Council can control, and describes the

identification of a range of sites as key to “*maximise delivery*”. It seems clear that delivery in the Vale area remains well below requirements, and also below Council expectations as set out at the time of the HDH report.

19. Therefore, in our view more needs to be done to maximise the likelihood of adequate levels of housing delivery through the Local Plan. As the prospects of securing the required levels of increased delivery are uncertain further land is required to ensure not only that housing requirements might be met, but also to ensure the ‘*significant boost*’ to delivery required by the NPPF. In addition to a heavy reliance on existing commitments, including previous Local Plan allocations, the strategy leaves 1000 dwellings unallocated (in addition to an allowance of 900 windfall units). We believe this approach is unsound in the context of the historic challenges in delivering housing quickly enough in the District. Sites should be found to allocate all or part of this residual strategic requirement in the Local Plan to increase the likelihood of development at the required rate. It would also provide more certainty for both communities and developers.
20. Allocating additional smaller strategic sites would be an appropriate response to deliver a boost in the supply of deliverable sites within the first 5 year period. Such sites are often easier to deliver quickly due to the reduced infrastructure requirements and costs involved, as referred to in the HDH report (HOU03). Taking such an approach would be more positive, and provide greater certainty, than the proposed approach of leaving 1900 units to Part 2 of the Local Plan, Neighbourhood Plans, or windfall sites.
21. During Stage 1 of the Examination Hearings, the Council’s position was that the existing broad spatial strategy of allocating development across the settlements within the District was sufficiently robust and flexible to be able to respond to changing circumstances, including a need for additional housing land. The clear implication was that were there a need to identify additional land for development the Council would not need to revisit the strategy overall, but would simply ‘*do more of the same*’ within the context of the existing spatial strategy, allocating sites in the market towns, service centres, and larger villages.
22. The site proposed by Barwood to the east of East Hanney (discussed under Matter 8) would be a deliverable, sustainable site for allocation to boost the supply of deliverable housing land. It formed part of the Council’s proposed and preferred strategy until late 2014, and remains a sound a deliverable site. The site’s suitability and sustainability was recently recognised by the Council’s officers who recommended approval of a planning application for up to 200 units on the site. Part of the justification for the recommendation at the November 2015 Planning Committee was the Council’s lack of a 5 year supply of housing land. The allocation of this site, now, would help to address the current land supply shortage and make a much more positive contribution to meeting the Council’s housing requirement.