



Homes &
Communities
Agency

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STATEMENT

Matter SC6B – Policy SS/7 Northstowe
Extension

Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire
Local Plan Review

February 2017

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South Cambridgeshire Local Plan, Chapter 3, Strategic Sites, Policy SS/7

1 General Policy

i. Is there a realistic prospect that the reserve land to which the policy relates would be required for development within the Plan period? If so, should this be reflected in Figure 3 of the Plan (Housing Trajectory)?

Reserve Land

The Government has outlined its support for delivering housing in the recent Autumn Statement and the Housing White Paper (February 2017), and to increase the pace of house building through the use of accelerated delivery. The Homes and Communities Agency plays a significant role for example through Accelerated Construction - diversifying the market through partnering with SMEs and others as development partners and contractors and the Home Building Fund -providing short-term loan finance targeted at SMEs, custom-builders and innovators long term loan funding for infrastructure and large sites.

The HCA is committed to delivering the vision of Northstowe as a New Town in South Cambridgeshire. Both Phases 1 and 2 now have planning permission and the HCA is preparing to start conversations with the local planning authority on an agreed planning strategy for Phase 3 to deliver the remaining 5,000 dwellings in the near future. As the promoter of Phases 2 and 3, it is the intention of the HCA to 'stagger' the approach to residential development meaning that Phase 3 is highly likely to start on site before Phase 2, or indeed Phase 1, is complete. Significant investment has already been and will be made to ensure housing on Phase 2, as well as Phase 3, at Northstowe will come forward as quickly as possible.

As confirmed by the HCA in the SHLAA development on the reserve land could come forward within the first five years of the Plan period. This is still our position, which is further sustained by the fact planning permission having been granted on Phases 1 and 2. However, the 2015 Housing Land Supply report amends the classification of the reserve land from 'deliverable' to 'developable'. The HCA questions this re-classification which conflicts with the information contained within the 2013 SHLAA and the Agency's aspirations for the delivery of Northstowe.

It is the Agency's view that the reserve land, as compared with other allocations in the Plan, represent the most deliverable of its type and size and as such support the council's proposals for allocation in the Local Plan. The reserve land is not subject to any absolute constraints which might limit development: the upgrade of A14 is underway with completion expected in 2020, and the Local Plan confirms that any other infrastructure constraints can be overcome with S.106/CIL.

Whilst large sites can be affected by delays due to the vast upfront costs in providing infrastructure, these sites also provide reliable and steady development once the initial time and cost outlays have been made. The HCA is investing significant amount of enabling infrastructure as part of Phase 2, which will help to unlock development potential at Phase 3. This means that development on site, and completions of residential units, will be more straightforward on Phase 3 as compared to, for example, Phase 2.

Housing Trajectory

The HCA questions the assumptions made in the Housing Trajectory as outlined in the AMR 2016 and the 2015 Housing Land Supply report:

- a) that Northstowe as a whole will be delivered at 250 dwellings per year;
- b) that completions on Phase 2 won't come forward until 2023/24, and;
- c) that no completions on Phase 3 have been taken account of

Whilst the HCA acknowledges that the AMRs provide only an indicative trajectory, and as stated in para A.37 (2016 AMR) "There are no controls on the rate of delivery of Northstowe, so more than 250 dwellings can be delivered in a years there are no planning policy barriers to that", it is nevertheless important that the council's assumptions on the build-out rate at Northstowe is based on informed analysis.

The HCA signed a Statement of Common Ground with SCDC in March 2015¹ in support of Main Matter 8 Housing Delivery of the Local Plan Examinations which agreed that a rate of 400 dwellings per annum can be delivered in a sustainable way, and is both a realistic and reasonable for Phase 2 and future Phases of Northstowe. Once sustained delivery is under way, the scale of development at Northstowe will effectively operate as two or more major sites. With around 250 dwellings being reasonable for a major development, the maximum average delivery rate of 400 dwellings a year is considered realistic over the long term and the site as a whole. Northstowe is one of five government pilots announced in January 2016 for direct commissioning/accelerated construction to fast-track building of affordable homes on publicly owned land.

Furthermore a housing completions trajectory of 400 dwellings per year was attached in Appendix 1 to the Northstowe Joint Development Control Committee report recommending approval of Phase 2 Outline Planning Application, 29 July 2015, which also confirmed that HCA is committed to delivering its first houses in 2019, which is significantly earlier than the assumption made in the AMR. Indeed, this trajectory informed the approach to delivering the community elements of the approved S.106 along with the provision of the Education Campus on the site.

The HCA is proposing to commenced development of phase 2 in Autumn 2017, with first occupations to be achieved in Spring 2019.

Finally, as indicated above, the HCA is bringing forward Phase 3 at an accelerated pace and will stagger/overlap the delivery of housing on Phase 2 and 3. As such, any housing trajectory informing the council's understanding of developments coming forward in the plan period should take this into account.

In conclusion, the HCA firmly believes that the reserve land presents a deliverable site which is suitable for development, achievable, and importantly available in the early stages of the Plan period. The exclusion of Phase 3 of Northstowe and the allocated reserve land from the housing trajectory in the 2016 AMR is an oversight, and the rate of 250 per annum underestimates what is achievable and desirable at Northstowe as it will effectively operate as two or more major sites.

ii. Has the aim to meet the Northstowe Area Action Plan (2007) [AAP] target of at least 4,800 homes by 2016 as set out in the Objective D3/a and Policies NS/7 and E3/c of the document, and the Housing Trajectory for Northstowe 2007- 2016, been achieved?

¹ <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/rd-scg-260.pdf>

A: As outlined above in response to question i) the HCA proposes a return in any housing trajectory calculations to the figure of 400 from the year 2019 as originally outlined in the Local Plan Housing Trajectory Figure 3, and the Statement of Common Ground in 2015. Whilst the target as set out in Objective D3/a and Policies NS/7 and E3/c has not been achieved due to the passage of time, it has no overall effect on the aims for the site to deliver up to 10,000 homes, of which around half would be delivered within the plan period. Whilst the delay is unfortunate there is now a high degree of confidence in the delivery of homes on Phases 1 and 2.

iii. Should the policy refer to 10,000 homes in order to be consistent with the 2006 Plan, the AAP and the Northstowe Development Framework Masterplan?

A: The HCA supports the policy referring to 10,000 as per the Northstowe Area Action Plan.

iv. Would Objective D9/a of the AAP relating to the development of an Archaeological Strategy directly apply to the reserve land?

A: The HCA has no issues with the application of Objective D9/a on the reserve land.

v. Will the policies in the AAP be subject to review to ensure that no out of date policy requirements (e.g. Policy D13/b) are applied to development proposals on the reserve land?

A: The HCA would not support a wholesale review of the Northstowe Area Action Plan, NAAP, (2007). The document continues to play an important role in the shaping of further phases of Northstowe and in doing so ensuring that future developments are natural extensions of what has gone before, and that taken together they deliver the vision of the town as a whole. It provides a comprehensive vision of the town, its character and needs. Furthermore, the NAAP policies were key to the shaping of both Phases 1 and 2 which now have planning permission, and it is right that the NAAP continues to influence the development of Phase 3, and any other phases. It is clear however that parts of the NAAP have become obsolete because of changes to legislation and national policies having overtaken them. As far as reasonable, the NAAP should continue to constitute a material consideration, and that any future planning decision will be taken in line with the relevant development plan policies in force at that time.