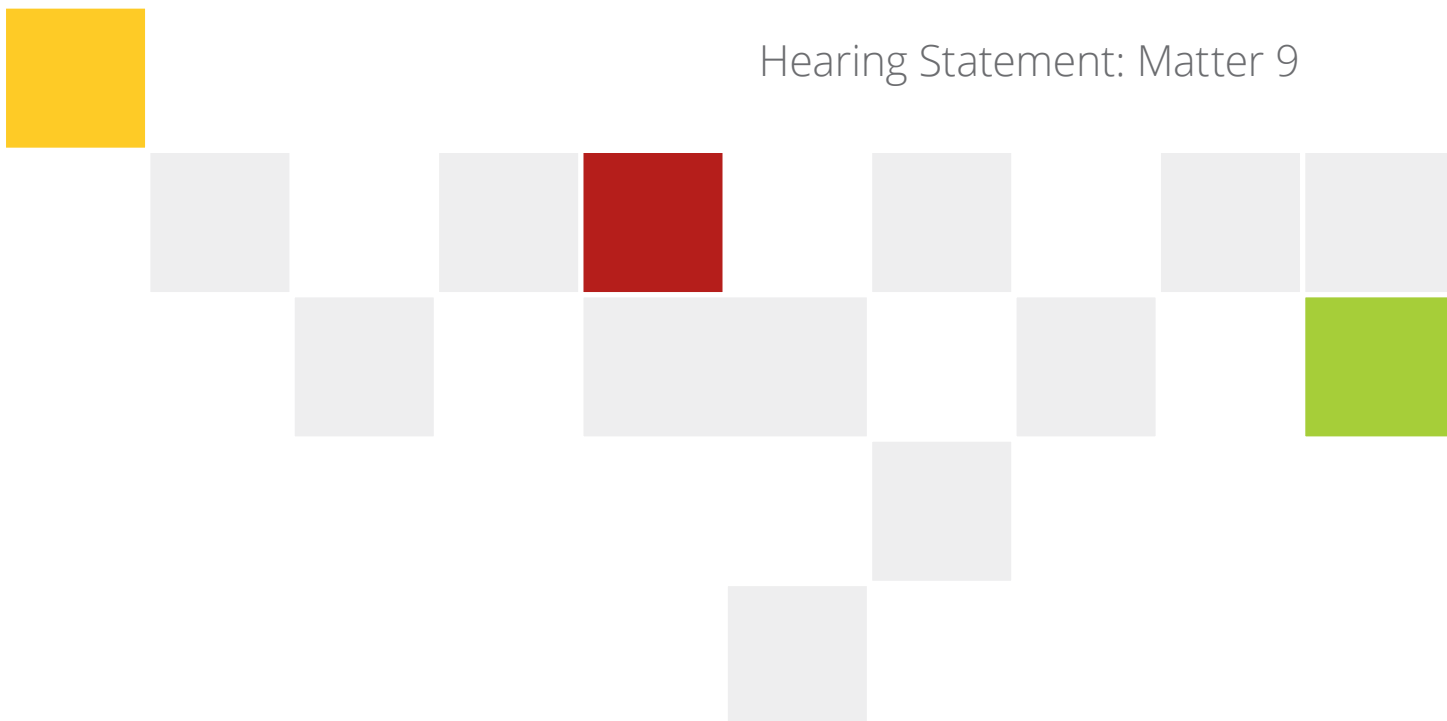


# Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan Examination

Hearing Statement: Matter 9



# Boyer

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This hearing statement has been prepared by Boyer on behalf of the East of England Co-operative Society, in response to the Inspector's questions relating to the Babergh Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan Examination.
- 1.2 East of England Co-operative Society is an independent co-op, owned entirely by over 280,000 members, and with over 120 food stores, more than 60 funeral branches and 500 investment properties across the East of England Region, the Society provides key services at the heart of local communities throughout Babergh and Mid Suffolk and is a significant regional landowner and landlord.
- 1.3 The Society's Headquarters is located just off Junction 56 of the A14, and close to A12/14 interchange at Wherstead Park (within Babergh District), which it owns and operates as a successful business park, conference and events facility.
- 1.4 This hearing statement relates to Matter 9 – Allocation Sites for Housing and Other Development and Settlement Boundaries. It is to be read in conjunction with the earlier representations made by the East of England Co-operative Society in response to Regulation 19 consultation, the principal focus of which related to the Society's operations at Wherstead Park.
- 1.5 East of England Co-operative Society welcome participation in the preparation of the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils (BMSDC) Joint Local Plan (JLP), including the opportunity for involvement in the forthcoming Examination.

## **2. MATTER 9 – ALLOCATION SITES FOR HOUSING AND OTHER DEVELOPMENT AND SETTLEMENT BOUNDARIES**

- 2.1 On behalf of the East of England Co-operative Society, a number of questions from the Inspector's Matters and Questions have been addressed below. For ease of reference, the question number and questions have been provided along with a response.

### **Matter 9 – Allocation Sites for Housing and Other Development and Settlement Boundaries**

**Q9.1 Are the sites allocated for housing and other development in policies LS01(1-90) and LA001 – LA119 soundly-based; are the criteria and requirements set out in the relevant policies justified and effective; and is there evidence that the development of the allocations is viable and deliverable in the timescales indicated in the Housing Trajectory set out at Appendix 01 of the plan?**

- 2.2 Land adjacent to Wherstead Business Park would be a justified and effective allocation for employment uses. The site was previously identified in earlier iterations of the Joint Local Plan and the East of England Co-operative Society supported the inclusion of the site.
- 2.3 The site (which has now been removed from the Joint Local Plan) is in an important location on the edge of Ipswich and has excellent links to the A14 and the Strategic Highway Network. These locational factors are of paramount importance and advantages to the continued support of a strong and competitive economy across the plan period and the wider Ipswich Strategic Planning Area.
- 2.4 Evidence submitted in response to the Regulation 19 stage of the Joint Local Plan demonstrates that a robust and deliverable highway solution can be achieved for the site which ensures that the inclusion of additional land adjacent to Wherstead Business Park would be a justified employment allocation which is deliverable over the plan period.
- 2.5 Without the inclusion of land adjacent to Wherstead Business Park, the employment allocations within the Joint Local Plan have not been “positively prepared” as outlined in the NPPF. The Council's economic evidence which is shared with neighbouring authorities highlights the importance of the A12 and A14 as the Strategic Road Network and the locational benefits sites in these locations bring to the local economy.

**Q9.2 Do the sites allocated for housing and other development in policies LS01 (1-90) and LA001 – LA119 give great weight to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in line with paragraph 172 of the NPPF?**

- 2.6 The Joint Local Plan has identified a variety of allocations in locations within, adjacent to and outside of the AONB designations across the plan area.

- 2.7 The inclusion of allocations for various uses within the AONB parts of the plan area, clearly demonstrates that the Councils do not see the AONB as a barrier to development as this is evidenced within site assessment work and policy requirements.
- 2.8 Across the plan area, opportunities for development which conserve and enhance the landscaping and scenic beauty of the AONB have been taken, but it is still unclear as to why additional land adjacent to Wherstead Business Park has been removed from the Joint Local Plan.
- 2.9 The site adjacent to Wherstead Business Park has the potential to meet economic and highway requirements, but also provide a positive response through landscaping to the adjacent land within the designated AONB.
- 2.10 Paragraph 176 (NPPF 2021) is clear that “development within the setting of the AONB should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas.” The land previously included within the Local Plan, but then removed at Regulation 19 stage provides opportunity for a development proposal for employment uses to be brought forward which is sensitive to the adjacent AONB.
- 2.11 By including a positive employment related allocation for the site, the Joint Local Plan has the opportunity to ensure that development proposals are informed by policy criteria and requirements. Such a policy would respond positively to the Council's Economic Evidence (shared with their neighbouring authorities), transport and highway requirements, landscape requirements adjacent to the AONB and delivery timescales, similar to other allocations and designations within the Joint Local Plan.

**Q9.3 Are any of the sites allocated for housing/other development within the AONB likely to constitute major development and if so are the exceptional circumstances required to permit such proposals, in line with paragraph 172 of the NPPF, likely to exist?**

- 2.12 No comments.

**Q9.4 Are the precise dwelling numbers listed in policy LS01 justified and effective? Would approximate figures be more appropriate?**

- 2.13 No comments.

**Q9.5 Is the “contributions to the satisfaction of the LPA, towards ....xxxx” wording used in many of the LAXXX policies justified and effective? Would “contributions towards ....xxxx, to ensure that the development is acceptable in planning terms” be more appropriate?**

- 2.14 The East of England Co-operative Society is concerned about the wording in policies which require contributions to be to the satisfaction of the local planning authority. The requirement to satisfy the local planning authority does not provide a sound basis on which to make decisions as it will not provide a robust and reliable source for decision making.

- 2.15 Paragraph 35 of the NPPF outlines the tests against which Local Plans will be tested. As currently written the wording “to the satisfaction of the local planning authority” is not considered to be a “justified” strategy and would not be “effective” over the plan period. The political nature of local planning authorities means that their “satisfaction” is likely to change and evolve over the plan period.
- 2.16 As CIL charging authorities, the District Councils of Babergh and Mid Suffolk have CIL Charging Schedules alongside their Local Plan policies. To ensure conformity with the CIL regulations and tests the Local Plan needs to provide clarity and certainty as to what contributions will be used towards.
- 2.17 To ensure conformity with the NPPF and also meet the CIL Regulations, the policy wording within the Joint Local Plan needs to be amended to provide greater clarity, which will inform future decision making and enable all parties to better understand what is acceptable in planning terms.

**Q9.6 Are the settlement boundaries as shown on the policies map justified and effective?**

- 2.18 The East of England Co-operative Society has concerns in respect of the settlement boundaries and allocations adjacent to Wherstead Business Park. As currently seen the Business Park is subject to an allocation which is supported, but as outlined in Regulation 19 representations and at previous consultation stages the land identified as LA101 should be included within the settlement boundary and allocated.
- 2.19 The inclusion of land (previously identified as LA101) adjacent to the existing Business Park and bordered by The Street and the A14 would provide a positive employment allocation to support the local employment opportunities across the plan area in a location well related to the strategic highway network and other economic opportunities in the neighbouring authority of Ipswich.