

HARLOW DISTRICT COUNCIL: Examination of the Harlow Local Development Plan, 2011 – 2033.

Essex County Council () Examination Hearing Statement

Matter 5: Employment and Retail Issues

Also

Matter 7: Development Management Policies

Are the development management policies in the plan positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy? This includes some specific questions in bullet point form.

Inspector's Question

- 5.1 Is the requirement for up to 20 ha of employment land in Policy ED1 justified by the evidence? Is it based on an adequate assessment of the employment needs of the area, and is it in an appropriate balance with the likely workforce generated by the proposed level of housing development?

ECC Response

1. In response to the question above, Essex County Council (ECC) acknowledges that Harlow Council will provide the main response to this question. ECC can confirm that the evidence base source on which the proposed 20ha. of employment land allocated by Policy ED1 is based, is the West Essex and East Herts Assessment of Employment Needs 2017 (HEBP7)¹. This work is considered robust for its intended purposes by ECC; please refer to Figure 4.8 Total Estimated Future Sites and Premises Requirements (hectares unless stated) 2016 - 33. This shows that that HC has responded to the available evidence and allocated the requisite extent of extra employment land in line with its district-level identified requirements. This matter has been discussed between ECC, HC and Epping Forest District Council as part of wider discussions on all of ECC's representations. ECC has pointed to the current absence to date of a spatial economic assessment for the whole Harlow Gilston Garden Town, although ECC can advise that this work is currently in the process of being commissioned by the HGGT partner authorities. If that assessment identifies deficiencies in employment land allocations for the Garden Town or related issues, this could be a matter for the Garden Town local planning authorities to consider in the context of the new NPPF requirement (in paragraph 33) for carrying out a review every five years of whether Local Plans and their policies or strategies need updating.

Inspector's Question

- 5.6 Are the other Economic Development and Retail Strategy Policies in the plan justified and would they be effective in achieving their aims?

ECC Response

2. The NPPF (2012) at paragraphs 42 and 43 confirm the role and importance of high-speed broadband technology. This also requires local planning authorities to support the expansion of electronic communications networks. ECC submitted a representation to HC for the HLDP, in response to proposed Policy ED2, expressing

¹ See: <https://www.harlow.gov.uk/evidence> - Prosperity section

support for HC's aspirations of protecting Neighbourhood Service Areas and encouraging the provision of smaller start-up units, shared spaces and workhubs in these areas. This representation also suggested that in doing so, it would be necessary to also ensure that any resulting B1 class uses that are developed in these locations are adequately served by suitable broadband infrastructure (with consideration given to a minimum speed requirement).

3. In the interests of fostering positive and successful economic growth, ECC recommended adding text to Policy ED2 to ensure that as a minimum, adequate broadband provision is ensured to meet modern business needs. ECC offered to work collaboratively with HC to discuss and agree appropriate detailed wording for this.
4. This matter was discussed between ECC and HC but no agreement has been reached. This was because HC did not consider it appropriate to include revised wording on this in Policy ED2 and instead considered that Policy IN4 would be sufficient for these purposes, in relation to Broadband requirements. ECC has given consideration to this proposition. ECC would not wish to give rise to duplication of the Policy IN4 requirements. However, ECC does not agree that Policy IN4 (Broadband) would meet these purposes fully. This is partly because Policy IN4 only requires high quality broadband provision to serve new major developments and it might be the case that proposals of the kind envisaged and promoted by Policy ED2 would not always constitute 'major developments'.
5. The supporting policy text for Policy IN4 (see Justification, at paragraphs 17.26-17.27) makes clear how important Broadband provision is. This text is welcomed and supported, including its reference to the need for Superfast Broadband to be considered and provided at the outset of development, this being much easier to implement than retrospective measures. A review of Policy IN4 itself (see Appendix 1) however, has led to an ECC view that the HLDP infrastructure requirements in respect of Broadband are limited in scope and extent. These are set out within part 1 of the policy. Therefore, the considerations in the supporting text do not appear to have been translated successfully into the terms of the policy itself.
6. In these ways, it is considered that Policy ED2 in itself is not ineffective, although Policy IN4 is and by consequence, this serves to undermine the otherwise welcome provisions and aims of Policy ED2.
7. In conclusion, the Inspector is respectfully requested to uphold this representation and ensure that the Plan is sound by strengthening the two policies as currently proposed to set out clear and comprehensive requirements around Broadband provision in respect of Policy ED2 and for all relevant developments through Policy IN4. ECC offers to work with HC to agree an appropriate form of wording should the Inspector take the view that the HLDP does not address superfast broadband infrastructure requirements adequately.

IN4 Broadband and Development

1. Broadband Provision in Major Development

Major development should contribute towards the provision of infrastructure suitable to enable the delivery of high-speed broadband services across the Harlow area.

2. Broadband Infrastructure Development

Broadband infrastructure development must be accompanied by a report which meets the following criteria:

- (a) any adverse impacts on the natural and built environment and communities have been minimised;
- (b) opportunities of sharing infrastructure between utilities have been addressed in order to minimise disruption, reduce installation costs and increase the viability of service provision.

Justification

17.26 The development of high speed broadband technology and other communications networks play a vital role in enhancing the provision of local community facilities and services. High quality communication is also essential for sustainable economic growth and to help attract businesses to the district. The Council is working with Essex County Council to roll out 'Superfast Essex', a programme which will see 95% of Essex having access to high-speed broadband networks by 2019, thereby boosting the economy of the County and enabling businesses to work more effectively in new ways and reach out to new customers.

17.27 'Superfast Essex' does not cover new build properties and therefore Harlow Council needs to ensure that Superfast broadband in new developments is considered at the outset along with other important utility infrastructure provision such as water pipes and gas mains. This is easier to implement during the construction phase rather than retrospectively. The purpose of this policy is to secure the delivery of fibre broadband as part of new developments.

Implementation

17.28 Major developments will need to provide a strategy that can demonstrate that fibre optic connection can be achieved to the site proportionate to the size of the development.