MATTER 3: STRATEGIC PRIORITIES, DEVELOPMENT REQUIREMENTS AND SPATIAL PRINCIPLES

Issue 1 – Whether the Plan will be effective in addressing the Strategic Priorities for the climate, growth and place

3.1 Do the Strategic Priorities (climate; growth; and place) provide a sound basis on which to underpin the strategic policies in the Plan in order to deliver its vision? The Plan period is 2022 to 2041. What is the Council's anticipated date of adoption?

HBF have no comments to make on the strategic priorities. With regard to the anticipated date of adoption in our experience a local plan where there are no significant delays will take between 12 and 18 months to be adopted from the point of submission. HBF would therefore expect this local plan to adopted no earlier than June 2027.

3.2 Would the strategic policies of the Plan look ahead over a minimum of 15 years from adoption as required paragraph 22 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework)? Is the approach justified, effective and consistent with national policy?

If the Plan is adopted in June 2027 the plan will only look ahead for 14 years and will not be consistent with paragraph 22 of the NPPF. While this is most likely a result of the delays to submission the Council should have considered extending the plan by a year to ensure that it was considers with national policy.

Issue 3 – Whether the Plan makes adequate provision for housing

Strategic Policy S6

The Council has set out in its answer to our Initial question on housing need, the reasons it has used to justify the housing requirement figure of 1,210 dwellings per annum (dpa). That justification is, in part, based around the transitional arrangements in the Framework. In February 2022, the Council declared a housing crisis in Chelmsford.

3.10 Is the housing requirement of 1,210 dpa justified, evidence-based and consistent with national policy?

HBF welcome the Council decision to plan for more homes than that required by NPPF23. However, the only reason CBC appears to have chosen the figure of 1,210 dpa is that is allows the Council to move forward under the transitional arrangements. No other evidence appears to have been provided on housing needs as to why this is the correct number of homes to be planning for. Therefore, while the requirement is consistent with the number of homes needed to ensure the plan could be examined under NPPF23, HBF are of the opinion that once the Council had decided to plan for 80% of the new standard method it had accepted that the higher figure required under NPPF24

was the level of housing need to be planned for, and it should have looked to address that level of need in full.

3.11 Do the potential implications of using the higher Standard Method figure justify the lower figure in Policy S6?

In the Council's response to the Inspectors initial questions (CC01) the Council outline on page 2 that it has assessed the broad implications of a higher figure in the Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) which tested a potential requirement figure of 1,406 dpa. The outcomes of that assessment where that the lower figure of 1,210 dpa over the plan period was the most sustainable approach when compared to the higher figure in option 3. Option 3 was considered to have performed more poorly in relation to resource use, impact on highway capacity and greater uncertainty over delivery. However, these are not reason for not meeting identified needs from the 2024 NPPF once it was concluded that the Council were planning to go beyond that required by NPPF23.

As set out above, it must be concluded from the Council's decision to plan for a requirement of 1,210 dpa that they have accepted that needs are higher than that required by NPPF23. By setting this at circa 80% of assessed needs using the 2024 NPPF the Council must also have accepted that the needs of Chelmsford align with those set out in NPPF24. Therefore, in seeking to meet those needs the Council should have considered whether the adverse impacts of planning to meet the higher level of need would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits. This is not the exercise undertaken by the IIA which simply outlines where option 3 performs less well than the Council's preferred approach in relation to the sustainability objectives and there would appear to be no detailed consideration elsewhere in the evidence of the adverse impacts of planning for the full amount required NPPF24 nor the benefits of this higher figure. As such the outcomes of the IIA do not on their own justify the lower figure set out in S6.

The Council also state in CC01 that the local plan is at an advanced state of preparation and to meet needs in full would require significant delays and extra costs to the Council. However, this is not a reasonable justification for not seeking to meet the higher level of need required by NPPF24. The Council had the opportunity to identify sites to meet those needs when it revisited its housing supply post the regulation 19 consultation in March 2025. As part of this process the Council's housing supply increased to over 24,000 homes and an average delivery rate across the plan period of 1,311 dpa. It is evident that further work could have bene undertaken at this point to identify more sites that would have meet housing needs as required by NPPF24 in full.

HBF recognise that the inspectors may want to take a pragmatic view with regard to this local plan. If that is the case, then HBF would consider it necessary for them to require an immediate review of this plan in order to ensure housing needs are met in full.

3.12 Are there any risks to the delivery of housing as a result of the supply buffer?

The additional sites have increased the buffer in supply from 1.4% to 8.4% over the requirement in the submitted local plan. This is welcomed but HBF do not consider this to be sufficient given the reliance on strategic sites. As part of the regulation 18 consultation the Council considered a buffer of over 20% to be necessary in order to provide the necessary flexibility and HBF consider this still to be the case.

3.13 Are there particular constraints to identifying additional sites within the Plan period in the event of housing and employment development not coming forward as envisaged?

For Council.

3.14 Is the Plan consistent with national policy in relation to housing developments on sites no larger than one hectare?

The Housing Topic Paper states in paragraph 4.167 that as of April 2026 1,398 homes are expected to be delivered on small sites of one hectare or less. Figure 22 then provides more detail stating that 631 of the homes are expected to come forward on windfall sites. The NPPF defines windfall as being sites that are not identified in the local plan. As such, windfall cannot be considered as meeting the requirements of paragraph 70a which states that local planning authorities should "*identify*", in the development plan or brownfield register land to accommodate at least 10% of their housing requirement on sites no larger than one hectare. Therefore, the Council have identified sites of less than one hectare that will deliver 737 homes – 1,562 fewer than the 2,299 required by national policy. If the Council is not meeting this key requirement of National policy, it will need to allocate additional sites of less than one hectare or provide comprehensive evidence that it has done all it can to identify such sites.

3.15 Is there robust evidence to demonstrate that unmet need from neighbouring authorities cannot be accommodated in Chelmsford? What discussions have taken place with neighbouring authorities?

The justification for not meeting needs is summarised in the statement of common ground with CPBC as being that there is no capacity in Chelmsford and makes reference to the IIA and other evidence. In a similar vein to our response to question 3.11 the Council should have considered any requests to address unmet needs in relation to paragraph 11bii of the NPPF and whether the adverse impacts of meeting some of those needs significantly and demonstrably outweighed the benefits. From the submitted evidence it would appear that such an exercise was not undertaken by the Council and without it the assumption that the unmet needs of another are cannot be met is unsound. As for the discussions that have taken place on this matter this is for the Council to answer.

3.16 Does the Plan provide a robust approach to the provision of sites for Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople in accordance with national policy?

No comment.

Issue 4 – The Spatial Strategy

Strategic Policy S7

The overriding strategy in the Plan is to first make use of previously developed land within Chelmsford Urban Area and then to allocate land for development in:
a. Sustainable Urban Extensions (SUEs)
b. two new garden communities, underpinned by Garden City Principles
c. expansion of existing established employment sites

3.17 Is this approach justified, soundly based and consistent with national policy?

The broad approach of focussing on previously developed land and the proposed allocations is not considered

unsound. HBF's concerns are that the Council have not gone further in allocating sites through this strategy to meet the level of need required by NPPF24 in full. HBF are also disappointed that the Council have not looked to allocate more small sites to meet the requirements of paragraph 70 of the NPPF23.

3.18 Given the Plan's reliance on meeting development needs in the SUEs and new garden communities and taking into account their scale, is there sufficient flexibility and resilience built into the Plan to deliver the housing growth envisaged, in the event of any underperformance of these allocations?

No. HBF consider more flexibility is required to ensure that housing needs will be met over the plan period.

3.19 What alternative approaches were tested in the preparation of the Plan?

For Council.

Mark Behrendt
Regional Planning Manager – SE and E