HS033

Boyer

Chelmsford Local Plan Examination: Matter 3

Hill Residential Ltd

Prepared on behalf of Hill Residential Ltd | October 26

Boyer

REPORT CONTROL

Project:	Chelmsford Local Plan Examination: Matter 3
Client:	Hill Residential Ltd
Reference:	25.9004
Document and revision number	Document No. IMS-F-18, Revision 4
File Origin:	Matter 3
Primary Author	WS
Checked By:	LT

Issue	Date	Status	Checked by
1	13/10/26	Draft	LT
2	16/10/26	Client Review	LT
3	19/10/26	Final	

Boyer

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. **Introduction** 3

2. **Response to Matter 3: Strategic Priorities, Development Requirements and Spatial Principles** 4

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Boyer has prepared this Hearing Statement on behalf of Hill Residential Ltd ('Hill') in response to the Inspector's Issues, Matters and Questions for Focused Hearing Sessions ('MIQs'). This is in relation to Chelmsford Council (the 'Council') and the examination of the Council's Local Plan ('the Local Plan' / 'the Plan').

1.2 Boyer has prepared this document in response to Matter 3: 'Strategic Priorities, Development Requirements and Spatial Principles' as identified in Examination Document IN03 - Inspectors' Matters Issues and Questions.

1.3 Hill are promoting land at Ongar Road, Writtle for up to 240-280 homes (site refs: CFS213 and CFS214).

1.4 Hill have previously submitted representations to the Council's Regulation 19 Consultation in relation to the above site (Representator number 1380379).

Boyer

2. RESPONSE TO 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

Q.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?

2.1 No, the strategic priorities do not provide a sound basis for the draft Local Plan and are **not positively prepared, effective or consistent with national policy**.

Strategic Priority 4 - Ensuring sustainable patterns of development and protecting the Green Belt

2.2 Strategic Priority 4 ('SP4') fails to be positively prepared or effective in meeting local development needs and fails to provide a sufficient supply and mix of sites to accommodate the areas assessed housing need (Paragraph 69, NPPF, 2023). The pre-submission Local Plan (LP) is heavily reliant on significant development within the garden communities identified at North East Chelmsford (totalling 5,580 dwellings) and East Chelmsford (totalling 3,000 dwellings). This strategy concentrates nearly half (around 49% of the Plan's Local Plan allocations) within these two garden communities. This presents significant challenges for the delivery of the Plan as proposed, as those communities depend on the provision of required infrastructure, funding, and legal agreement, which remain subject to material uncertainty.

2.3 Further exacerbating this uncertainty, the delivery of housing is subject to current market conditions, and the current demonstrable slowdown in the house-building industry may lead to further delay. As set out in Lichfields' Start to Finish 3 (2024), for sites of 2,000 or more dwellings, the median period between validation of the first planning application and completion of the first dwelling was 6.7 years, with average annual build-out rates falling within the range of 100-188 dwellings per annum. More recent evidence from the National House Building Council ('NHBC') (May 2026)[1] also records a 6% decline in new homes registrations in Q1 2026, versus Q1 2025.

2.4 SP4 also identifies that 34% of the Council's area is constrained by designation as Green Belt ('GB'), with development proposed to be focused at settlements outside of the GB, and to be informed by the proposed Settlement Hierarchy. It is clear that the Council have not considered reasonable alternative sites, including those within the GB, which is inconsistent with key recent Ministerial Statements (HCWS673 and HCWS480). The Council's latest evidence says that Green Belt and Green Wedge site options were not included in the alternative spatial strategy options because the Council considered sufficient and suitable land to be available outside those designations. The Additional Sites exercise also selected sites in the top three tiers of the settlement hierarchy, but outside the Green Belt and Green Wedge. As a result, the

[1] NHBC (2026) New home registrations down in Q1 as house builders face 'perfect storm' of rising costs and falling demand, NHBC reports

proposed spatial strategy which excludes higher order settlements within the Green Belt is not the most appropriate strategy when considered against reasonable alternatives, particularly where the deliverability of the preferred strategy is itself in issue.

2.5 As drafted, there is significant uncertainty as to whether the new communities will be delivered before the end of the plan period. The Council must reconsider the approach to site selection and Green Belt restraint. Strategic policy SP4 therefore appears not **positively prepared, effective, or consistent with national policy.** The point made in Hill's Regulation 19 representations is that the Plan should promote sustainable patterns of development and that reasonable alternatives involving Key Service Settlements within the Green Belt should have been assessed before the Council fixed its preferred distribution development.

Strategic Priority 8 - Delivering new and improved strategic and local infrastructure

2.6 Strategic Policy 8 (SP8) identifies that, due to growth within Chelmsford, pressure has been placed on strategic and local infrastructure, and in particular the transport infrastructure required to accommodate planned housing growth.

2.7 The Council's Response to Inspectors' Initial Questions (**Document CC01**) (September 2026) reports that funding arrangements for the Beaulieu Access Package have been agreed in principle, which is anticipated to be finalised by the time of the Hearing sessions. The response also identifies that further detailed modelling and design work was required to assess the implications of additional growth at East Chelmsford Garden Community ('ECGC').

2.8 Given the ongoing work to finalise funding arrangements, and any associated delay in determination due to the required additional detailed modelling and design work, concern is raised regarding whether the anticipated timings for the provision of the Beaulieu Access Package (required to enable the ECGC).

Strategic Priority 5 - Meeting the needs for new homes

2.9 The risks identified above pose knock-on impacts and further uncertainty with regard to the Council's ability to meaningfully address Strategic Priority 5 ('SP5') and the identified "*significant demand for affordable housing*". Without identifying sufficient small- to medium-scale sites to accommodate housing delivery and ameliorate risk associated with the delay of large- and strategic-scale allocations, it is likely the available supply of affordable housing will worsen. Delays to large strategic allocations would slow the delivery of market and affordable housing associated with those sites. A more diversified portfolio of deliverable sites would provide greater resilience in meeting housing needs across the Plan period.

2.10 Therefore, it is considered that SP5, due to the underlying uncertainty proposed by the draft local plan, is not **effective** in securing adequate measures to provide affordable housing.

Issue 2 – Spatial Principles

Strategic Policy S1

Q3.3 Does the policy provide the right approach to the distribution of development? &

Q3.4 Does it provide a clear set of spatial principles that are in accordance with national policy including in relation to the Green Belt?

2.11 As established, the distribution of development is too heavily reliant on the proposed two new garden communities of North East Chelmsford (around 5,580 homes) and East Chelmsford (3,000 homes) to be delivered over the Plan period. This approach is fundamentally flawed due to its overemphasis on protecting the GB, which undermines the Plan's promotion of the most sustainable patterns of development within the district. The distribution of development as proposed is not sound, as; a) the Spatial Strategy at Policy S7 is not based on a review of all reasonable alternative sites, and is therefore **contrary to national policy**, and b) to be found sound, the Plan and its evidence base must assess the release of Green Belt land around Key Service Settlements as a spatial scenario.

2.12 Hill's previous representations at the Regulation 19 stage identified the risk in over-reliance on those garden communities, with concern relating to the fact that delivery of those sites depends on complex planning, infrastructure and phasing arrangements, which poses risk and uncertainty regarding the effectiveness of the housing trajectory (risk being reinforced by **Document PostS002**).

2.13 As drafted, the local plan does not take the right approach to the distribution of development. To ensure the Plan is **positively prepared**, **effective**, and **justified**, the realistic delivery assumptions for those sites should be tested, and the Plan should provide appropriate headroom through the consideration of additional allocations and sites at sustainable locations such as Key Service Settlements.

2.14 Moreover, as identified in the previous Regulation 19 representations, the Council has not assessed the release of sustainable settlements within the GB. The Plan's spatial strategy has been arrived at based on a political direction that no GB land in Chelmsford can be released. The Council's submitted evidence now confirms that GB locations were excluded from the spatial alternatives because sufficient land was considered to exist elsewhere. However, the availability of sufficient land outside the GB does not, in itself, demonstrate that excluding GB locations from the reasonable alternative spatial strategies results in the most appropriate and sustainable distribution of development. Assessment of reasonable alternative sites must include assessment of the sustainability criteria for all sites, including those within the GB.

Q3.6 Does it provide flexibility to achieve sustainable development through a range of site types and sizes?

2.15 The draft Plan does not provide flexibility to achieve sustainable development through a range of site types and sizes and is **not effective** or **positively prepared**. A sound strategy for the delivery of housing should not be contingent upon every major allocation achieving its total anticipated trajectory.

2.16 As identified within the Framework (2023) (Paragraph 70); "*Small and medium sized sites can make an important contribution to meeting the housing requirement of an area, and are often built-out relatively quickly*". The importance of identifying sufficient supply and mix of sites to meet or exceed the housing requirement is reflected by the updated Framework (2026), which should form a key material consideration. **To be effective, aligned with national policy,** and mitigate the risks identified in this statement, the draft Plan should reconsider available small and medium sites.

Q3.7 Is the Policy approach effective and justified in addressing speculative development proposals?

2.17 Hill considers that an effective Plan should identify a sufficient range of deliverable housing sites to meet and exceed the housing requirement of the Plan period. The evidence provided concerning the Beaulieu Access Package reinforces the importance of preparing a resilient allocation strategy by allocating a range of types and sizes of sites, alongside an appropriate headroom in deliverable housing land supply.

2.18 Due to the uncertainty regarding the anticipated delivery of the infrastructure requirements of the two new garden communities, and the impact upon the realistic housing trajectory, significant concern is raised regarding the Council's future ability to safeguard against unplanned speculative development.

Q3.8 Will the policy be effective in meeting the needs of Chelmsford and accommodating unmet need from neighbouring authorities? &

Q3.9 Will the Policy be effective in addressing any identified additional housing needs?

2.19 It is noteworthy that the Council did not consider that exceptional circumstances were apparent to warrant the review of GB boundaries as part of the Plan review. It is, however, highlighted that Council were approached by three local authorities in Essex unable to meet their housing need within their own Plan areas, this also during a period of housing crisis, as declared by Government and Chelmsford City Council.

2.20 The Council should have recognised this as a clear indication of exceptional circumstances, warranting the consideration of Green Belt release. The Plan is therefore not **positively prepared, ineffective** and **not consistent with national policy** as it has failed to address additional housing needs.

Issue 3 - Whether the Plan makes adequate provision for housing

Strategic Policy S6

Q3.10 Is the housing requirement of 1,210 dpa justified, evidence-based and consistent with national policy? &

Q3.11 Do the potential implications of using the higher Standard Method figure justify the lower figure in Policy S6?

2.21 Hill's principal concern is that the housing strategy must be supported by a realistic and deliverable supply of housing over the Plan period. The Council's justification for a lower dwelling per annum ('dpa') figure is based upon the transitional arrangements within the 2023 Framework and upon options testing for a higher dpa figure being unfavourable, due to greater resource use, strategic highway capacity constraints, and greater uncertainty with delivery.

2.22 However, it is reiterated that options testing was based on a spatial strategy that did not wholly consider the release of GB. Release of GB land for housing need would align with the direction of travel established within Ministerial Statements (ibid) and the updated Framework (2026). Given the national ambition to accelerate delivery of housing and the evident risk in the current spatial strategy, the Plan must consider reasonable alternative sites to meet, and aim to exceed, the assessed housing need. The declared housing crisis in combination with the infrastructure and funding dependencies at the Chelmsford Garden Community increase the importance of that assessment. For those reasons, it is considered that the housing requirement figure **is not consistent with national policy**.

2.23 As the potential spatial strategy options available to accommodate a higher housing figure have not been appropriately assessed, it is unclear how the Council can unequivocally state that a higher housing figure could not be achieved. While the Council tested a higher growth option of 1,406 dpa, the alternatives used for that assessment did not include a scenario involving development at Key Service Settlements within the Green Belt. The Council's conclusion that the higher figure performs less well is therefore influenced by the range of spatial options it chose to test.

Q3.12 Are there any risks to the delivery of housing as a result of the supply buffer?

2.24 It is acknowledged that the supply buffer provides some level of protection against under-delivery. However, there is clear risk associated with the **effectiveness** of the buffer if its underlying trajectory is based on unrealistic assumptions. Notably, for the completion of the two new garden communities.

Q3.13 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?

2.25 Hill considers that the Plan must identify alternative development sites if housing supply falls short of the anticipated trajectory. This should include an assessment of reasonable alternative sites, which should include a focus on the availability of small and medium sites.

2.26 The main constraint is created by the proposed spatial strategy itself. The Council has excluded GB locations from its spatial alternatives and from the Additional Sites exercise. This reduces the range of locations capable of responding if major strategic allocations underperform.

Q3.15 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?

2.27 It is considered that sufficient evidence has not been made available to demonstrate that unmet need from neighbouring authorities cannot be accommodated in Chelmsford. As previously noted, neighbouring authorities had approached the Council identifying that they were unable to meet their own housing requirements. This was not considered an exceptional circumstance by the Council. The Plan and supporting evidence base should clearly document the discussions undertaken, the volume of any unmet need identified, and the reasons why that need cannot be accommodated within Chelmsford.

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

Q3.17 Is this approach justified, soundly based and consistent with national policy?

2.28 Hill broadly agrees with the principle of prioritising previously developed land. However, as the Plan is currently proposed, there appears to be significant risk in the reliance of significant amount of the Council's housing need being accommodated by the two new garden villages, with uncertainty regarding key infrastructure and funding arrangements.

2.29 It is questioned whether the supporting evidence has adequately tested alternative sites, particularly sites around Key Service Settlements that were screened out because of their Green Belt status. The evidence confirms that GB locations were excluded from the spatial options because the Council considered non-Green Belt capacity sufficient. That does not address Hill's Regulation 19 concern as to whether a different distribution involving sustainable Key Service Settlements could provide a more resilient and sustainable strategy. It is therefore determined that this approach is not soundly based**, justified,** or **consistent with national policy.**

Q3.18 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?

2.30 Hill Residential considers that the Plan has not demonstrated sufficient flexibility and resilience to address potential underperformance of its strategic allocations. The Regulation 19 representations highlighted the reliance on the two new garden communities accounting for approximately 49% of the allocated housing, and associated risk.

2.31 The ongoing work to finalise funding agreements and associated delays owing to the preparation of additional detailed modelling and design work (identified as required by **CC01**) raises uncertainty regarding the assumed housing trajectory for the 6,250 homes to be delivered as part of the East Chelmsford Garden Community.

2.32 Given these uncertainties, the Plan should therefore demonstrate that its housing trajectory reflects realistic delivery assumptions regarding the delivery of the two new garden communities and identify how shortfall will be addressed if strategic sites underperform. As proposed at the Regulation 19 stage, additional work should be undertaken by the Council to identify additional sites, such as at sustainable Key Service Settlements, which would diversify

the supply of housing. In particular, it is strongly recommended that small- and medium-scale sites are assessed due to their ability to be built out relatively quickly and ameliorate impacts of underperformance in the short term.

Q3.19 What alternative approaches were tested in the preparation of the Plan?

2.33 Hill Residential's Regulation 19 representations questioned whether the preparation of the Plan sufficiently tested alternative spatial strategies involving sustainable Key Service Settlements within or affected by the Green Belt.

2.34 It appears that Green Belt sites were discounted at an early stage without full assessment of their sustainability. The Council tested five growth spatial options at the Regulation 18 'Issues and Options' consultation stage, all based on non-Green Belt locations, together with lower and higher growth options. The Council also completed consultation on Additional Sites (Regulation 19), which compared a package of smaller sites with one or two larger strategic sites and selected the smaller-site approach partly because of its deliverability within the first five years.

2.35 The Council should identify the alternative sites assessed, explain the criteria used to exclude sites and demonstrate how the relative benefits and impacts of development at settlements were considered. This is important to establish that the selected strategy represents a justified and sustainable response to the assessed housing need.