

Examination of the Bristol Local Plan

Matter 18: Housing Trajectory and Housing Land Supply

On behalf of Watkin Jones (Consult ID: 437)

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. This Hearing Statement has been produced by Pegasus Group on behalf of our client, Watkin Jones. It focuses upon the Inspectors Matters, Issues and Questions which relate our client's previous representations.
- 1.2. It is understood, due to the transitional arrangements set out within paragraphs 234 and 235 of the December 2024 NPPF, that the plan will be examined against the September 2023 version of the NPPF. All following references made to the NPPF are to the September 2023 version, unless otherwise stated.
- 1.3. Our client wishes to ensure that the emerging Bristol Local Plan is prepared in a robust manner that passes the tests of soundness contained in paragraph 35 of the 2023 NPPF, namely that the plan is:
 - Positively Prepared;
 - Justified;
 - Effective; and
 - Consistent with national policy.
- 1.4. Our client submitted representations to the various stages of plan production including the 'Submission (Regulation 19)' version.
- 1.5. Watkin Jones has a number of interests in Bristol across several key regeneration areas. Our client considers that the plan requires significant modifications to ensure it is found to be sound.
- 1.6. Our client has an excellent track record of delivering high-quality sustainable developments within this area.

2. Response to the Inspector's Matter 18 Issues and Questions

2.1. We welcome the opportunity to comment on the Inspector's Matters, Issues and Questions (MIQs) and provide the following responses to selected questions. Our client reserves the right to respond to specific issues raised by the Council and other parties within the hearing session in so far as they relate to our previous representations.

Issue 18.1: Whether the plan will provide for a sufficient housing land supply to deliver the planned scale of housing growth over the plan period and whether a deliverable five-year supply of housing will be available on adoption.

Q18.1. What is the most up to date 5-year housing land requirement and supply position?

2.2. The Council's latest published position is set out within the April 2023 Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (2024 SHLAA, exam ref: EVEH01). This is nearly two-years out of date and should be updated to ensure that the examination is informed by clear and up to date evidence. Should the Council provide such updated evidence our client reserves the right to comment upon this during the hearing session.

2.3. Utilising a base date of 1st April 2023 the 2024 SHLAA identifies a 6.59-year supply (table at paragraph 6.9). This is, however, based upon an incorrect calculation of the 5-year housing land supply as it fails to include the buffer required by paragraph 74 of the NPPF.

2.4. The size of the buffer is dependent upon the most recent Housing Delivery Test (HDT) results. The 2023 HDT measurement was published on 12th December 2024. This identifies that Bristol delivered 75% of its requirement over the preceding three years. In accordance with paragraph 74(b) of the NPPF this represents significant under-delivery and as such a 20% buffer is required to be added. Notwithstanding our objection to the housing requirement the appropriate five-year requirement, on 1st April 2024, is set out below:

- Emerging housing requirement – 1,925 dwellings,
- Five year's worth of housing requirement – 9,625 dwellings,
- 20% buffer – 1,925 dwellings,
- **Five-year housing land requirement – 11,550**

2.5. The 2024 SHLAA (table at paragraph 6.9) suggests a deliverable housing supply of 12,682 dwellings between 2023 and 2028. Taking account of the correct five-year requirement this would reduce the number of years supply to 5.49-years. A potential buffer of 1,132 dwellings above the five-year requirement. This is, however, based upon the Council's assessment of its supply.

2.6. To be included within the five-year housing land supply sites must be deliverable. The NPPF Annex definition of a deliverable site is that (our emphasis):

*"...sites for housing should **be available now**, offer a suitable location for development now, and be achievable with a realistic prospect that housing will be delivered on the site within five years. In particular:*

a) sites which do not involve major development and have planning permission, and all sites with detailed planning permission, should be considered deliverable until permission expires, unless there is clear evidence that homes will not be delivered within five years (for example because they are no longer viable, there is no longer a demand for the type of units or sites have long term phasing plans).

b) where a site has outline planning permission for major development, has been allocated in a development plan, has a grant of permission in principle, or is identified on a brownfield register, it should only be considered deliverable where there is clear evidence that housing completions will begin on site within five years."

- 2.7. This is difficult to assess because the details of the sites that make up the five-year supply within the 2024 SHLAA are not clearly set out. It is noted (table at paragraph 6.1) that 4,229 dwellings are anticipated to be delivered from 'Areas of growth and regeneration' in the five-year period. This makes up over a third of the identified supply yet it is unclear on the planning status of these dwellings. Given there is a source of supply labelled 'planning permissions' it is presumed these sites do not yet benefit from a detailed consent. If this is the case without clear evidence they should not be considered deliverable.
- 2.8. Paragraph 6.4 of the 2024 SHLAA notes that:
- "It is difficult to forecast the take-up of windfall opportunities or the build-out rates for permissions, development allocations and areas of growth and regeneration with absolute certainty."*
- 2.9. This casts further doubt upon the ability of these areas to deliver 4,229 dwellings during the five-year period.
- 2.10. In addition the 2024 SHLAA provides little clarity upon the status of the 7,953 dwellings with planning permission be these in outline or benefitting from detailed consent or the 500 dwellings identified in Green Belt locations. This is unsatisfactory and the existing evidence does not allow a proper assessment of the five-year housing land supply position of the Council to be made.
- 2.11. The Council also does not provide an annual trajectory, rather it is based upon 5-year tranches. This makes an assessment of delivery more difficult. Whilst our client has not undertaken a detailed review of all sites within the SHLAA it is notable that it provides some highly aspirational delivery assumptions, with little supplementary evidence. For example in the five year period (2023–2028) the 2024 SHLAA suggests:
- Site DS2: Bristol Temple Quarter – anticipates delivery 1,271 homes in the five-year period, and
 - Site DS13: Lockleaze – anticipates the delivery of 825 homes in the five-year period 2023–2028.
- 2.12. Given the inadequate evidence currently available it is not possible to conclude that the Council is able to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply upon adoption.

Q18.2 *Would the Council be able to demonstrate a 5-year supply of deliverable housing land on adoption of the Plan? Are assumptions on deliverability appropriate, justified and consistent with national policy?*

2.13. No, as discussed in response to Q18.1 it is not possible to conclude that the sites within the Council's dated five-year housing land supply assessment are deliverable sites as defined by the NPPF annex.

2.14. The Inspector within the MIQs has requested that the Council ensure the most up-to-date trajectory of the supply is provided. Our client reserves the right to respond to the trajectory during the hearing session.

Q18.3 *Does the Plan identify a supply of development sites, or broad locations for growth, for years 6-10 and, where possible, years 11-16 of the Plan, from the point of adoption?*

2.15. The Council's 'Housing Need and supply topic paper' (TPC004) table 2 identifies a total supply of 39,798 dwellings over the plan period to 2040, providing a 15% headroom over the disputed housing requirement. The 2024 SHLAA (EVEH01) identifies potential capacity for 14,073 dwellings in years 6-10 with a further 9,306 in years 11-16. This exceeds the proposed housing requirement over years 6-10 but falls marginally short in years 11-16.

2.16. The Council's supply is made up from a wide range of potential sources as identified by the 2024 SHLAA. This includes sites where there has been no planning application to date and in some cases where existing uses are still in operation. There is, therefore, uncertainty with regards to delivery from some of these sources. This is acknowledged within the Council's response to Inspectors' Document IN2 (EXA024) in PQ66, which states:

"It is not possible to guarantee that every dwelling of the SHLAA capacity will come forward within the plan period."

2.17. It is not clear how many dwellings the Council's uncertainty extends to and as such the degree to which this may impact upon delivery of the plan as a whole. It is also notable that the capacity for sources such as 'Areas for growth and regeneration', 'urban potential' and 'small windfall sites' are necessarily based upon estimates. Whilst it is acknowledged that in relation to the 'Areas for growth and regeneration' this is based upon available information during the development of the relevant development frameworks this creates further uncertainty about actual levels of delivery.

2.18. Within our clients comments upon the Publication version of the plan it is argued that restrictions placed upon student accommodation through policy H7 and the lack of clear support for Build to Rent may stymie supply in some of these locations. However, both forms of accommodation would be appropriate for many locations and can also make significant contributions to local housing supply as a high number of units can be constructed within a relatively short space of time. The inclusion of greater flexibility and support for such developments would undoubtedly aid supply over the plan period.

Issue 18.2 *Whether the Plan identifies specific, developable sites or broad locations for growth, for years 6–10 and, where possible, for years 11–15 of the Plan.*

Q18.4 *Is the Plan consistent with paragraph 68b in terms of the identification of a supply of development sites, or broad locations for growth, for years 6–10 and, where possible, years 11–16 of the Plan, from the point of adoption?*

2.19. The NPPF, paragraph 68 (b), identifies that local plans should identify specific, developable sites or broad locations for growth, for years 6–10 and, where possible, for years 11–15 of the plan. To be considered developable the NPPF annex identifies sites:

“...should be in a suitable location for housing development with a reasonable prospect that they will be available and could be viably developed at the point envisaged.”

2.20. This is a lower bar than required for the first five–years. There is, however, a clear expectation that sites are available at the point envisaged and can be viably delivered at that point in time.

2.21. Some 63% of the identified dwellings (8,845 dwellings) in years 6–10 are from ‘Areas of growth and regeneration’. Although unclear within the 2024 SHLAA it is presumed that these are on sites which do not currently benefit from planning permission. To do otherwise would presumably double count against the capacity from the ‘planning permissions’ source within the table at paragraph 6.1 of the SHLAA.

2.22. Appendix A of the SHLAA provides a brief summary of each of the ‘Areas of growth and regeneration’. It is notable that many of these areas include constraints relating to a wide range of issues including significant areas suffering from high levels of flood risk. In addition several are reliant upon existing businesses or other uses being relocated. It is unclear whether these issues will be overcome by 2028 and as such whether the sites will be available at this point in time and whether they can be viably delivered at the point envisaged.

2.23. Without this information it is impossible to conclude that the sites identified to deliver within years 6–10 and 11–16 can be considered developable or whether the Council simply consider them to be suitable given the proposed plan strategy.

Town & Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)
Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

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