

NEWS ANALYSIS

"PLANNING" MAGAZINE
14TH DECEMBER 2012
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NPPF homes test prompts local plan concerns

By Susanna Millar and Jamie Carpenter

Planning inspectors have warned two councils that they have serious concerns over whether the draft plans they have drawn up comply with the National Planning Policy Framework's housing requirements.

East Hampshire District Council is considering whether to request a suspension of its local plan examination after an inspector raised serious concerns over its housing target.

Meanwhile, Rushcliffe Borough Council in Nottinghamshire has warned it may have to allocate land in the green belt for housing after a planning inspector expressed "serious concerns" over its draft local plan, particularly in respect to housing.

In East Hampshire, the authority has been warned by an inspector that its joint core strategy with South Downs National Park Authority may not have sufficient evidence to justify its housing target.

The strategy proposes 8,500 new homes up to 2028, but inspector Anthony Thickett said that evidence suggests a need for 11,308 to 11,700 new homes. He said the council has failed to produce an up-to-date strategic housing market assessment, which makes it difficult to fully assess needs in line with the NPPF.

East Hampshire District Council said in a statement: "We will be

working with our partners, the South Downs National Park, in the coming weeks to plan how to take forward the joint core strategy."

Matthew Spry, director at planning consultancy Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners, which produced some of the evidence on housing requirements for the council, said: "The council's decision to provide for less than the evidence suggested means it has fallen foul of the provisions in the NPPF."

Inspector Jill Kingaby has told Rushcliffe Borough Council that she also has serious concern over its draft plan, particularly in respect to housing.

In an exploratory note, Kingaby said that the draft plan does not appear to meet a requirement in the NPPF for local planning authorities to use their evidence base to ensure that the local plan meets the full, objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing in the housing market area.

She said: "The core strategy aims to provide a minimum of 627 dwellings per annum on average, which appears to be insufficient to meet the full, objectively assessed need."

Kingaby added that the numbers in the draft strategy fell "well short" of the NPPF's requirement to identify a five-year housing land supply.

The council's leader Neil Clarke said that the authority would provide a "robust" response. He warned that



Housing: Framework requires councils to annually identify and update their five-year housing land supply

the council "could be forced ... to undertake the very difficult task of allocating more land, which will probably have to be in the green belt."

Fears over compliance with the NPPF's housing requirements have also prompted a third authority – Harborough District Council in Leicestershire – to announce that it is

to prepare a new local plan just over a year after the strategy was adopted.

A report to Harborough councillors said that a study carried out by consultants after the adoption of its local plan in November 2011 had "clearly demonstrated a higher need than that currently being planned for by the core strategy".

The council warned that the March 2013 end of NPPF transitional arrangements, which allow decision-makers to give full weight to relevant policies in plans adopted since 2004 even if there is a limited degree of conflict with the framework, would reduce its ability to determine applications in accordance with local

WHAT THE NPPF SAYS ON HOUSING

Paragraph 47 of the NPPF says local planning authorities should:

- Use their evidence base to ensure that the local plan meets the full, objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing in the housing market area, including identifying key sites
- Identify and update annually a five-year housing land supply against the housing requirements
- Identify a supply of sites or broad locations for growth, for years 6-10 and, where possible, for years 11-15
- Illustrate the expected rate of delivery through a housing trajectory for the plan period and set out a housing implementation strategy to maintain delivery of land to meet the housing target
- Set out a local approach to housing density

Source: National Planning Policy Framework

circumstances, unless it produced a new plan.

Elsewhere, St Albans District Council has halted progress on its draft local plan after a row over green belt proposals. It has now decided to carry out an independent green belt boundary review and a further assessment of housing need.