

## East Herts Strategic Sites Deliverability Advice

### Notes on ATLAS role, tasks & general approach

The Advisory Team for Large Applications (ATLAS) has been asked to provide advice and support to assist East Herts District Council (the Council) in progressing their District (Local) Plan. This was confirmed through the District Planning Executive Panel on 25th July (Item 5. Update Paper & Essential reference paper D),

The work that the Council are undertaking to prepare their Plan is complex and involves many themes and workstreams. ATLAS support is not being provided to consider the general approach to plan making, or the robustness of technical aspects of the evidence base. The scope of support has been targeted at the key infrastructure and site deliverability considerations of the largest and most complex potential strategic sites only.

Subsequent to the Panel meeting, a Project Engagement Plan has been set out to establish the operating principles, role and tasks of ATLAS. This includes the following tasks:

- 1 Draw knowledge from comparable projects and experiences, in particular where other Local Authorities have been considering similar issues relating to large scale growth.
- 2 Provide advice on infrastructure deliverability and plan making to help inform the Councils approach to these matters, reflecting upon the current available information and potential requirements of the plan making system.
- 3 Support partners to find ways forward to consider key infrastructure and site deliverability issues. This includes reviewing available information of particular significance and working directly with relevant public and private sector key stakeholders to find ways forward.

ATLAS have undertaken a desk-top review of key information and have been provided with copies of material that was submitted in response to landowner-developer questionnaires issued by the Council in summer 2012. The main objective of this review has been to highlight issues which may be worth further consideration and testing to see if further evidence could be made available to inform decision making, and see if there are opportunities to establish any necessary ways forward. The intention of the review process was not to consider the particular robustness of specific technical material, but to flag areas where there could be scope for greater clarity.

ATLAS made the judgement as to which sites were of value for further consideration through this process and which parties may need to be approached directly for further information. The key criteria influencing this judgement were:

- Sites needed to be of sufficient scale where specific on or off site infrastructure would be required (such as new schools, substantial alterations to on/off site highways, etc);
- Sites that were particularly significant to the actual delivery of such infrastructure either by way of their scale or specific location (such as likely to act as the main access point to the development or likely to be the main funder of any such works);
- Sites fitting the above criteria where the developer submissions were sufficiently detailed to indicate that the promoters may have further information that could assist with decision making; and
- Sites which were not as yet already substantially progressed through live planning applications or ongoing appeals.

## East Herts Strategic Sites Deliverability Advice

### Approach to meetings involving site promoters

Following the review of the developer submissions, ATLAS considered it to be valuable to attempt to seek clarification on certain points and test whether further information could be made available. Of key significance in this process are the specific site promoters, who will ultimately be responsible for bringing forward land and schemes to delivery. Much of the key evidence relating to deliverability relies upon the work and approach of the site promoters and developers concerned.

The promoters will have their own view on what may be considered necessary or appropriate and therefore ATLAS considered it valuable to open a structured dialogue to review and discuss the information that had been made available to date.

As such ATLAS arranged meetings with a small number of developers and promoters, based upon the criteria referred to earlier and consideration of the material made available to date, Where meetings have been held with promoters, they have followed a common format and agenda. This agenda considered the following main items.

- Explanation of the purpose & scope of the ATLAS work;
- Review of landowner aspirations & overview of project status;
- Discussion on plan making, levels of associated evidence and any preferred approach of the promoter concerned;
- Review & discussion on potential key deliverability considerations subject to the context of each site and level of available information. This included matters such as the approach to masterplanning, confirmation of site capacity, extent of collaboration with relevant key parties, proposed programme/build out rates, key infrastructure requirements, project viability & position on planning obligations, approach to delivery;
- Identification of any further information that could be made available to assist decision making.

Notes of each meeting were prepared and made available to the Council. Any subsequent information provided by the promoters in light of the meetings likewise was to be sent over to the Council to support local decision making. There was recognition by all concerned that any such information would be treated transparently and likely to be made publically available.

It is important to recognise that this process has not been exhaustive in terms of reviewing all aspects of the wider evidence base, or requirements of the plan making system related to 'soundness'. However the developer submissions and background discussions with officers at the Council has provided a reasonable starting point to consider the key issues and current position directly with specific promoters. It should therefore be noted that there will undoubtedly be other relevant material and further considerations influencing the position to date. The process undertaken has also been influenced by the amount of time available for site promoters to compile further information and respond.

Of key importance to the process overall is that decision making on the necessity for and robustness of the full evidence base will ultimately be a matter of debate and testing via the next stages of formal plan making, consultation and any subsequent Examination in Public.

The outputs of the ATLAS tasks should therefore be considered within that wider context.