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Dear Sir / Madam,

Epping Forest District Local Plan – Proposed Submission Version 2017

These representations to the Proposed Submission Version (Regulation 19) of Epping Forest District Council's (EFDC) Local Plan are made by Anderson Design & Build Limited (AD&B), an operating subsidiary of the Anderson Group, in respect of land at Harlow Gateway.

For the reasons set out within these representations, it is evident that the Pre-Submission Version of the Local Plan does not currently meet the 'tests' of soundness contained at Paragraph 182 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). To ensure that the Local Plan complies with the 'tests' of soundness, it is clear that further sites must be allocated for employment development within Epping Forest over the Plan period (2011-2033). Due to the recognised lack of suitable sites, it is clear that this will necessitate the release of further land currently included within the Green Belt. On this basis, we are pleased to continue to promote land at Harlow Gateway, as identified on the enclosed Site Location Plan, for release from the Green Belt and allocation for sustainably located employment-led development. The development of the site would make an important contribution to the delivery of employment land within the District.

Background

AD&B is an operating subsidiary of the Anderson Group. The Anderson Group was founded in 1987 as a groundworks and civil engineering business. Over the past 30 years, we have grown to become one of the largest privately-owned construction companies in the South East. We continue to undertake major groundworks, civil engineering, and remediation projects within the development sector, including for a number of house builders. We also operate successful and thriving development businesses, trading as 'Constable Homes Limited' and 'Anderson Design and Build Limited', which undertakes residential and commercial developments across London, East Anglia and the South East. The Group specialises in the delivery of complex sites that are considered by most to be undevelopable.

The Site

The Site at Harlow Gateway comprises an area of open land that is predominantly laid out as grass, with an area of hardstanding located towards its southern end. The site is designated as Metropolitan Green Belt. The area of hardstanding that was previously used as a compound / open storage by the Highways Agency covers a significant proportion of the site. An existing egress and

ingress is provided off the A414 London Road which adjoins the western boundary of the site, running in a north-south direction.

Planning History

The Site has an extensive recent planning history. In October 2014, an application for planning permission was submitted to the District Council for the proposed development of land at Harlow Gateway for commercial-led development. The planning permission was refused in August 2015; two reasons for refusal were given.

An appeal against the District Council's decision to refuse planning permission was made to the Secretary of State in January 2016, and a Public Inquiry was held in October 2016. The Inspector dismissed the appeal, even though it was recognised that the site is sustainably located, that it has previously been used as a temporary compound; that it was considered by the District Council itself as a potential site for a waste contractor's depot and scaffolding yard; it was nominated in the now withdrawn Essex Waste Local Plan; and was identified in the Regulation 18 iteration of the District Council's Local Plan as a potential strategic site for employment-led development. The Inspector considered that Harlow Gateway was a good candidate for employment-led development, albeit its location within the Green Belt was considered to be of detriment to the proposal.

Previous Representations

Iceni Projects, on behalf of AD&B, submitted representation to the Regulation 18 iteration of the District Council's Local Plan. A copy of the representations is enclosed with this letter for completeness. In summary, the representations considered that the allocation of Harlow Gateway for employment-led development would, in the first instance, assist the District Council in meeting the economic and employment objectives of its emerging Local Plan. The District Council was therefore asked to give significant weight to the economic, social and environmental benefits that the allocation of the Site would bring about during the Plan period through the creation of much needed jobs, the benefits of which would significantly outweigh any perceived harm to the Green Belt in this location.

Epping Forest District Council

Spatial Development Strategy & Evidence Base

Draft Policy SP2 seeks to provide for the employment needs of the District by, inter alia, allocating 23 hectares of new employment land at locations set out in Draft Policy E1, and promoting new-small scale employment opportunities within mixed-use developments. Draft Policy E1 identifies five new employment allocations. These are Langston Road Industrial Estate (1 hectare); North Weald Airfield (10 hectares); Dorrington Farm (1 hectare); Galley Hill Road Industrial Estate (1 hectare); and land to the north of A121 (10 hectares).

It is not considered that the District Council's strategy of relying on a small number of strategic sites, particularly those at North Weald Airfield and land to the north of A121, is sound having regard to the 'tests' set out in national planning policy. Specifically, it is not positively prepared; justified, specifically that it is not the most appropriate strategy when considered against the reasonable alternatives, based on proportionate evidence); effective or consistent with national policy.

The evidence base to the District Council's draft employment policies essentially comprises the Employment Review (December 2017) and Employment Land Supply Assessment (December 2017).

The evidence base indicates a clear requirement for the first five-years of the Plan period of 6-7 hectares of employment land, with a focus within the north and west sub-area. The evidence is also clear that strong accessibility is the critical driver, specifically to the London markets. Locations with strong road access should therefore be afforded priority.

Having regard to this evidence base, we are concerned with the soundness of the spatial strategy for the District in the context of the employment allocations, and also have concerns regarding the suitability and deliverability of some of them. It is considered that the needs of the area can be better met, and the overreliance on a small number of strategic sites rectified, through the identification of additional employment sites, specifically by way of the release of Harlow Gateway from the Green Belt and its allocation for employment-led development.

In addition, and in our opinion, the Green Belt evidence used to support the Submission Version of the Local Plan does not provide a robust evidence base for Plan-making, and therefore the development choices that have been arrived at are inadequate. Specifically, the Green Belt Stage 2 Assessment is overly reliant on subjective assessment without measurable, transparent and replicable criteria and parameters, and does not clearly define a set of measurable parameters for each of the purposes against which to assess the contribution of a parcel to the Green Belt. On this basis, the evidence base is not considered to be robust.

Summary

We consider the Epping Forest Regulation 19 Local Plan to be unsound, specifically that it does not direct new employment growth to the most appropriate locations as recommended by the evidence base; and that the Green Belt Assessment methodology is fundamentally flawed. Should the Inspector consider that additional employment sites be allocated in order for the Local Plan to be considered sound, we request that Harlow Gateway be released from the Green Belt and allocated for employment-led development.

We ask to be kept informed of the progress with the Local Plan and look forward to further opportunities to engage with EFDC in respect of these representations.

Should you wish to discuss these representations in further detail, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of Tom Pike.

TOM PIKE
PLANNING MANAGER | FOR AND ON BEHALF OF ANDERSON DESIGN & BUILD LIMITED

Encs. Site Location Plan;
Representations to EFDC Regulation 18 Local Plan.