

Representations on Epping Forest District Draft Local Plan (2016)

On behalf of Croudace Homes

In respect of Land East of Epping Road, Roydon

December 2016



1. These representations on the Epping Forest District Draft Local Plan 2016 (DLP) are submitted by Strutt and Parker on behalf of Croudace Homes and in relation to land east of Epping Road, Roydon.
2. Land east of Epping Road, Roydon is identified as sites SR-0306 and SR-0890 as part of Epping Forest District Council's (EFDC) plan-making process. Site SR-0306 comprises the site in its entirety, whereas site SR-0890 considers the western portion of site SR-0306.

Approach to objectively assessed housing need

3. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is clear on the importance of housing delivery, and on the need for planning to deliver objectively assessed housing needs. This is illustrated by the fact the core planning principles set out in the NPPF include the following statement:

“Every effort should be made objectively to identify and then meet the housing, business and other development needs of an area, and respond positively to wider opportunities for growth. Plans should take account of market signals, such as land prices and housing affordability, and set out a clear strategy for allocating sufficient land which is suitable for development in their area, taking account of the needs of the residential and business communities” (NPPF paragraph 17).

4. This point is reinforced at paragraph 47 of the NPPF, where it is stressed that Local Plans should ensure objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing are met. Further, it is reflected in the express requirement – as per paragraph 182 of the NPPF – for Local Plans to be based on a strategy which seeks to meet objectively assessed development and infrastructure requirements, including unmet requirements from neighbouring authorities where it is reasonable to do so and consistent with achieving sustainable development.
5. It is clear that meeting housing need is of paramount importance if the Local Plan is to be sound. As such, there are a number of issues in respect of the Draft Local Plan that give rise to concern.
6. Firstly, it is unclear whether the West Essex and East Hertfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA, 2015), from which the District's housing need has been derived, has accounted for projected increased out-migration from London.
7. The South Essex SHMA (2016) notes that Greater London Authority (GLA) projections assume that the outflow of migrants from London to neighbouring authorities will increase beyond the level implied by the 2012 SNPP, reflecting more closely pre-recession trends. These projections formed part of the evidence underpinning the Further Alterations to the London Plan (FALP). The South Essex SHMA (2016) addresses the administrative areas of Basildon Borough, Castle Point Borough, Rochford District, Southend Borough and Thurrock. It noted the relationship between these areas and London, and concluded the projected increased out-migration from London necessitated an uplift in housing need for South Essex. It is clear from the DLP and the evidence that underpins it that there is a similarly strong (if not stronger) relationship between Epping Forest District and London. As such, the objectively assessed housing need should account for this, and be subject to an appropriate uplift.

8. Secondly, it is unclear whether the DLP proposes to meet what the Council consider its objectively assessed housing need to be. The DLP reports that the SHMA (2015) identified a need for the housing market area (East Herts, Epping Forest, Harlow and Uttlesford) of 46,100 dwellings between 2011 and 2033, of which 11,300 are for Epping District specifically (equating to 514 dwellings per year). However, in August 2016 Opinion Research Services (ORS) updated the overall housing need to take into account more recent information, including more up-to-date household projections, and identified a revised objectively assessed housing need for the housing market area of 54,608 between 2011 and 2033. The update goes on to state that the objectively assessed housing need for Epping Forest District is 13,278 dwellings in Epping Forest (equating to 604 dwellings per year).
9. Further to the above, we would draw EFDC's attention to a recent report to Uttlesford District Council's Cabinet on the DLP consultation on 1 December 2016. The Cabinet was informed that Uttlesford had a Planning Inspectorate Advisory Visit on 1 November 2016, during which the Inspector's informal recommendation was that the Housing Market Area and respective Districts should be working to the more up-to-date, 2014 Sub National Housing Population Projections as a starting point for determining objectively assessed housing need.
10. The DLP does not address the District's objectively assessed housing need of 13,278 dwellings. It proposes a total of a mere 11,400 dwellings, and refers – incorrectly, in light of the SHMA update – to this exceeding need.
11. It is relevant to note that the NPPF not only requires the Local Plan to ensure the District's development needs are met in full, but also that the unmet needs of housing market areas or neighbouring authorities are considered and addressed where it would be sustainable to do so. Whilst the DLP notes at paragraph 3.16 that a Draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between East Hertfordshire, Epping Forest, Harlow and Uttlesford has been produced, it is unclear whether any unmet development needs of other neighbouring authorities has been accounted for.
12. In setting out how it has responded to objectively assessed housing needs, the DLP claims at paragraph 3.35 that the maximum number of dwellings that can be accommodated in the housing market area is 51,100 dwellings.
13. The Sustainability Appraisal of Strategic Spatial Options for the West Essex and East Hertfordshire Housing Market Area (SA of SSO) (2016) is purported to provide the justification for this ceiling of 51,100 dwellings for the housing market area.
14. However, it is far from clear that the SA of SSO does indeed support this view. For example, at page 34 it states:

“With respect to the overall quantum of c. 51,100 new homes, this reflects the furthest **the authorities consider** that they can reasonably go in delivering the most recent advice from ORS regarding housing need, i.e. 54,608 homes to 2033, in light of the available evidence. Critically, the figure of c. 51,100 significantly exceeds the formal OAHN of 46,100 established through the SHMA and represents strong progress towards the revised figure. The **critical issue** in determining the overall quantum is the level of development that can be accommodated in and around **Harlow on suitable sites** during the plan period.” (Emphasis added).

15. The above indicates that the stated capacity of 51,100 dwellings for the housing market area is not driven by empirical evidence in relation to environmental capacity, physical constraints, etc. but rather local authorities' views on potential deliverability. It also suggests that the SA of SSO considers this quantum of 51,100 to be positive in respect of a total objectively assessed housing need of 46,100, when in fact this figure has been superseded by a more up-to-date calculation. Further, there would appear to be a focus on sites in and around Harlow, rather than across the housing market area as a whole.
16. The above extract from the SA of SSO implies the capacity is driven by the total deliverable capacity from suitable sites (the "critical issue"), suggesting that if additional suitable sites were to be identified there would be no intrinsic objections to the figure of 51,100 dwellings be exceeded.
17. Transport impact has been cited as an area of concern, and one which justifies development within the housing market area to be limited to 51,100 new homes between 2011 and 2033. However, it must be recognised that, as confirmed through the SA of SSO, that transport modelling is said to suggest growth of between 14,000 and 17,000 new homes in and around Harlow can be accommodated in terms of impact on highways. However, again this is focussed on Harlow and does not consider potential growth in other settlements, an issue which is particularly pertinent if such settlements benefit from sustainable transport opportunities.
18. In summary, it is unclear whether projected increases in out migration from London have been taken into account, as required, in the calculation of objectively assessed housing. In any case, the DLP fails to seek to meet objectively assessed housing need. As such, if the Local Plan were to be continue to be based on such a strategy, it would be contrary to national policy and would be unsound. The purported justification for a limit of 51,100 additional homes between 2011 and 2033 dwellings across the housing market area is not robust. Rather than supporting a limit of 51,100 dwellings across the housing market area, the evidence suggests that if there are sufficient suitable and deliverable sites to meet housing need in full, then Local Plans should facilitate their delivery.

Housing delivery and accounting for shortfall

19. Appendix 5 of the DLP sets out the housing trajectory that the DLP is proposed to enable delivery of. It also reports the number of dwelling completions since 2011 (the point from which the objectively assessed needs assessment for the District has been calculated).
20. This shows a total of 1,173 dwelling completions between 2011 and 2016. The housing need during this period (based on the 2016 update of need) totalled 3,020 dwellings. As such, the total shortfall in housing provision during this period was 1,847 dwellings.
21. There are two potential approaches to addressing this shortfall in housing land supply. The first, the 'Liverpool approach' is where the shortfall is spread across the remaining Local Plan period and is sought to be met over this period. The alternative, the 'Sedgefield approach', seeks to make up the shortfall within the first five-year period.
22. The PPG is clear that the Sedgefield approach should be applied where possible, stating:

"Local planning authorities should aim to deal with any undersupply within the first 5 years of the plan period where possible. Where this cannot be met in the first 5 years, local

planning authorities will need to work with neighbouring authorities under the 'Duty to cooperate' (PPG, Paragraph: 035 Reference ID: 3-035-20140306).

23. Applying the Sedgefield approach, the initial calculation of housing need for Epping Forest District for 2016-21 is 4,867 dwellings. The NPPF requires that a buffer of (at least) 5% is applied to this figure. Adding a 5% buffer gives a total requirement for the District for 2016-21 of 5,110 dwellings.
24. However, Appendix 5 of the DLP suggests the current proposed strategy will only deliver 3,541 dwellings between 2016 and 2021. This entails a shortfall of 1,569 homes against the requirement.
25. Furthermore, we are concerned that even the figure of 3,541 dwellings represents an optimistic assessment. It includes 1,186 dwellings to be provided through existing commitments. It is unclear what the status of these commitments is, and whether a lapse rate of 5-10% (as established as being appropriate for sites with planning permission / resolution to grant planning permission¹) has been applied. There is a reliance of 163 dwellings placed on windfall. If EFDC is to make an allowance for windfall, it is required to demonstrate that there is compelling evidence that such sites have consistently become available and will continue to provide a reliable source of supply. However, no such evidence appears to have been provided. It is also noted that the DLP's stated housing delivery rate assumes completions from 2017/18 from sites proposed to be allocated. This is considered to represent an extremely optimistic view, the feasibility of which we would question given likely timescales for planning-making, planning applications and the development process.
26. Having regard to all of the above we are concerned that the DLP will deliver fewer dwellings than Appendix 5 suggests it will.
27. Even if this DLP's stated housing trajectory were to be realised, this would still represent a significant shortfall when assessed against need, rendering the Local Plan contrary to national policy and unsound.
28. Accordingly, it is imperative that the next iteration of the Local Plan is amended to include additional small and medium-sized sites for residential development – sites that are capable of contributing relatively quickly towards the current and acute housing need.

Draft Plan objectives

29. DLP objective B is to make provision for objectively assessed market and affordable housing needs within the District, but includes the caveat: "to the extent that this is compatible with national planning policy".
30. It is unclear why this caveat has been added, as the NPPF is clear that Local Plan should be prepared on a strategy that seeks to meet objectively assessed housing need in full. This caveat should be removed.

¹ Appeal reference APP/J3720/A/14/2217495

Draft Policy SP2

District-wide

31. Draft Policy SP2 proposes a total of 11,400 dwellings are delivered in the District between 2011 and 2033. As set out elsewhere within this representation, the objectively assessed housing need for the District for 2011-2033 is 13,278 dwellings. Policy SP2 does not propose to meet objectively assessed need. The policy as currently proposed is therefore contrary to national policy and cannot form part of a sound Local Plan.
32. In addition, it is critical that the Local Plan enables the delivery of housing to meet need in the short, medium and long term; and that policies are sufficiently flexible to ensure a constant supply of housing, regardless of unforeseen circumstances. The NPPF requires Local Planning Authorities to maintain delivery of a five-year supply of housing land to meet their housing target (paragraph 47), and to produce Local Plans which are flexible in this respect, stating:
- “Local Plans should meet objectively assessed needs, with sufficient flexibility to adapt to rapid change” (NPPF, paragraph 14).
33. It is noted that Draft Policy SP2’s proposal to deliver 11,400 dwellings is predicated on the DLP’s view that there is a need for Epping Forest District to accommodate approximately 11,400 new homes between 2011 and 2033. A strategy which seeks to delivery exactly the number of dwellings that is considered to be required cannot be said to be flexible. Such an approach leaves the District’s housing supply in a very precarious position and introduces a considerable level of uncertainty as to whether development needs will be met.

Roydon

34. Draft Policy SP2 states that Roydon will accommodate 40 additional homes between 2011 and 2033.
35. The Local Plan is required to be the most appropriate strategy, when considered against the reasonable alternatives, based on proportionate evidence (NPPF paragraph 182).
36. However, there is no justification as to why growth of Roydon is proposed to be restricted to 40 dwellings.
37. Roydon is an established rural community benefitting from a range of services including primary school, convenience store, post office, pharmacy, restaurants, public houses, and village hall.
38. It is important that the Local Plan directs sufficient growth to rural settlements, to ensure rural communities are sustained and that rural facilities and services remain viable and thus continue to perform an important role for the existing community. The NPPF makes clear that one of the core planning principles that should underpin both plan-making and decision-making is the need to support rural communities:

“Planning should.... take account of the different roles and character of different areas, promoting the vitality of our main urban areas, protecting the Green Belts around them,

recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and **supporting thriving rural communities within it**". (NPPF paragraph 17, emphasis added).

39. The NPPF also requires planning policies to support economic growth in rural areas through ensuring retention and development of local services and facilities in villages, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship (paragraph 28).

40. Further to the requirements of the NPPF, the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) explains how Local Planning Authorities should support sustainable rural communities. This states (at paragraph: 001 Reference ID: 50-001-20160519):

"It is important to recognise the particular issues facing rural areas in terms of housing supply and affordability, and the role of housing in supporting the broader sustainability of villages and smaller settlements."

And

"A thriving rural community in a living, working countryside depends, in part, on retaining local services and community facilities such as schools, local shops, cultural venues, public houses and places of worship. **Rural housing is essential to ensure viable use of these local facilities.**" (Emphasis added).

41. Having regard to the above, it is important that a level of housing growth is directed towards Roydon through the Local Plan, in order to sustain this community.

42. Other settlements identified within the DLP as being at the same level within the settlement hierarchy, such as Thornwood and Fyfield, are proposed to accommodate a significantly greater quantum of homes through Draft Policy SP2. However, the justification for this is unclear.

43. It is suggested that a starting point for the consideration of a suitable level of growth to be directed to Roydon would be a proportionate level of growth having regard to its current size. The population of Roydon Parish is 2,828. This represents 2.3% of the District's total population. 2.3% of the District's housing need of 13,383 dwellings equates to 308 homes. If one were to consider the total figure of 11,400 the DLP proposes to deliver, 2.3% of this is 262 homes.

44. It is recognised that it is important for the Local Plan to not adopt an overly prescriptive approach to the distribution of housing based on the proposed settlement hierarchy and each settlement's existing size. This would result in an overly simplistic approach, which would fail to direct development to the most sustainable locations, and could result in more suitable and sustainable opportunities being overlooked.

45. In this respect we would draw the Council's attention to the comments of the Planning Inspector appointed to examine the 2014 Uttlesford Local Plan Submission document, who stated the following in relation to the settlement hierarchy:

"Where it can be justified by relevant economic, social and environmental factors a case can sometimes be made to direct a greater or lesser amount of development to a settlement

than would reflect its strict place in the settlement hierarchy. Some of the factors discussed during the hearing (eg locally identified demographic and other needs, local constraints and opportunities, patterns of bus services, and inter-relationships between particular settlements) can be relevant to such decisions and can be considered in taking the plan forward” . (Paragraph 3.25 of the Inspector’s Examination Conclusions 19 December 2014).

46. In respect of the above, the proposed strategy towards distribution of housing and the approach towards Roydon, we note that Roydon is the only settlement in the District which benefits from a national railway station. The NPPF is clear that Local Plans should seek to exploit opportunities for the use of sustainable transport modes, and development should be located where there is access to public transport facilities (paragraph 35); and states that actively managing growth to make the fullest possible use of public transport, focussing development in locations which are sustainable in this respect, is one of the core planning principles.
47. The above all suggests that a significantly greater proportion of the District’s growth should be directed to Roydon than proposed through the DLP, which currently suggests a mere 0.35% of the District’s housing growth be accommodated there.
48. Appendix 5 sets out the housing trajectory that housing policies within the DLP would engender. This suggests that no homes would be delivered in Roydon between 2020 and 2033. As such, unless the Local Plan’s strategy is amended in subsequent iterations, it will only delivery a total of 40 dwellings to the community of Roydon over the entirety of the plan period; including no additional homes post 2019/20. This is not considered to represent the sustainable development of Roydon – this lack of growth would have negative social and economic implications for the village, and undermine the vitality of the community.

Chapter 5 – Places: Roydon, and Draft Policy P9

49. As set out above, the NPPF and PPG are clear that it is important for Local Plans to direct sufficient growth to rural settlements, to ensure rural communities are sustained and that rural facilities and services remain viable and thus continue to perform an important role for the existing community.
50. The DLP’s vision for Roydon includes that it will continue to serve the convenience needs of the local community. This further illustrates the need to ensure this settlement is able to grow sustainably over the plan period, ensuring local services that are clearly important to the local community continue to be supported.
51. We also note fears that expansion of the settlement would risk coalescence of Roydon and Harlow. The importance of ensuring that development does not give rise to fears of coalescence, and that the settlement is able to retain its own distinct identify, is recognised. The potential for development to engender coalescence should be considered on a site-specific basis, to ensure that development which would not undermine this function of the Green Belt are unjustifiably discounted.
52. Policy P9 should be amended to facilitate a greater level of growth for Roydon. As explained below, sites SR-0306 and SR-0890 are suitable, available and achievable for residential development. The next iteration of the Local Plan should support the development of site SR-

0306 (including SR-0890) for in the region of 180 homes, for the reasons explained in detail below.

Sites SR-0306 and SR-0890, and their consideration through the site selection process

- 53. Land to the east of Epping Road, Roydon is being actively promoted for development by Croudace Homes, an established house-builder with a track record of delivering quality development in the region. For the purpose of submissions to the Council, the land was divided into two: Area A to the west; Area B to the east. The site and these areas are illustrated in **Appendix 1** of this submission.
- 54. The site lies within the arc of two elements of Roydon: to the north and west is existing residential development. The site projects no further eastwards or southwards than the existing settlement.
- 55. The site totals approximately 14 hectares, is an essentially flat, greenfield site, and is currently arable farmland. The site is not subject to any restrictions that prohibit its development, other than its current planning allocation as Green Belt.
- 56. For the purposes of consideration by EFDC, Area A and Area B combined were assessed as site SR-0306; separately, Area A was assessed by itself as site SR-0890.

SR-0306	Area A + Area B
SR-0890	Area A

- 57. As has already been noted within this representation, in order for a Local Plan to be sound, the NPPF requires it to be based on the most appropriate strategy, when considered against reasonable alternatives, based on proportionate evidence. In short, the Local Plan is required to be justified.
- 58. Furthermore, in order to be legally compliant, the Local Plan is required to meet *inter alia* the requirements of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (SEA Regulations). This requires that all reasonable alternatives be considered and assessed to the same level of detail as the preferred approach; and that the reasons for the selection of preferred alternative, and the rejection of others, be made set out. Sites SR-0306 and SR-0890 evidently represent potential sites for allocation, and have been considered through EFDC’s site assessment process – an iterative process through which sites are appraised, and rejected or progressed through to further consideration.
- 59. Site SR-0306, i.e. Areas A and B combined, was rejected at Stage 2 of the site assessment process.
- 60. The rationale given for this is that the site is part of a strategic option which was “judged to be a less favourable growth direction”; and “would be most sensitive in Green Belt terms, risking the coalescence of Roydon and Harlow”.
- 61. It is not clear what is meant by “less favourable growth location”. It is recognised that the site is not within a proposed strategic growth location for Harlow (Policy SP3). However, this clearly

does not make it necessarily unsuitable as a housing location for Roydon. For the reasons set out elsewhere in this representation, Roydon is a sustainable, suitable location for additional homes, and one which national policy encourages a proportion of housing growth to be directed towards. Whilst the proposal to restrict growth in Roydon to 40 additional homes may have been informed by the Community Choices exercise undertaken in 2012 (though it is far from clear from the published information that this is purported to justify the proposed limit of 40 homes) it must be recognised that this exercise was undertaken in very different circumstances to those which the Local Plan must now address. Such changes in circumstances include the need to deliver a much greater number of new homes to meet need. It is pertinent to note that housing numbers cited in the Community Choice exercise included those that related to the now revoked East of England Plan, which proposed considerably fewer new homes in the District than needed now.

62. Development of site SR-0306 would not risk coalescence of Roydon and Harlow. This has been clearly demonstrated through a detailed and robust Landscape and Green Belt Assessment, a copy of which accompanies this representation as **Appendix 2**.
63. The Green Belt Assessment notes that the EFDC Green Belt Stage 1 Review considered various, large parcels of land and provided a broad scale assessment of the District's existing Green Belt, but at a scale that would not allow for a field-by-field assessment of sites' contributions to the Green Belt. The Green Belt Assessment prepared in respect of this site and submitted alongside this representation does consider the fields that comprise site SR-0306 / SR-0890 in detail.
64. In summary, the Green Belt Assessment concludes that site SR-0306 (Areas A and B) and the western part of this site which the Council has separately considered as site SR-0890 (Area A) make a low contribution to including land in the Green Belt.
65. Area A is assessed as making a weak contribution to the five purposes of including land in the Green Belt; and Area B as making a relatively weak contribution.
66. The Green Belt Assessment found that Area A is well enclosed and not visually significant in the wider landscape. Area B is less well enclosed but is still of limited significance in the wider landscape.
67. Further, the assessment concludes that Area A in isolation has the potential to accommodate development with little mitigation. Area B would require a higher level of mitigation, but could nevertheless be developed without undermining the purposes of the Green Belt.
68. Accordingly, the screening out of site SR-0306 through the site assessment process is unjustified.
69. In respect of site SR-0890 (the western portion of site SR-306), the site assessment review process concludes that part of the site is suitable, available and achievable for development, and this area is not rejected in the way site-SR0306 as a whole has been. The site assessment starts by considering the indicative baseline position of 247 dwellings for this site, reduced to a net capacity of 15 dwellings, with the assessment stating that development should be limited to the property fronting Epping Road.
70. There is no justification for the assertion that development should be limited to the property fronting Epping Road, and the site capacity reduced to 15 dwellings.

71. The detailed Landscape and Green Belt Assessment which was undertaken in respect of site SR-0306 (including site SR-0890) (Appendix 2 of this representation) identifies that, having regard to landscape impacts and the strategic purposes of the Green Belt, areas Area A and B have net development areas of 3 ha and 4 ha, respectively (see drawing PR-0007 of the Landscape and Green Belt Assessment). Drawing PR 0007 within the submitted Green Belt Assessment provides a landscape led development strategy – informed by the findings of the assessment – which evidences 7 ha of site SR-0306 can be developed without undermining the purposes of the Green Belt. 4 ha of this is within in site SR-0890.
72. As such, the development capacity of site SR-0890 (Area A) is considerably greater than 15 dwellings. Based on 30 dwellings per hectare, the capacity of SR-0890 (Area A) would be 120 dwellings.
73. The Landscape and Green Belt Assessment recommends that area Area B (the eastern part of site SR-0306) (be developed at a lower density to Area A. At 20 dwellings per hectare, Area B could accommodate 60 dwellings.
74. As such, it is clear that, based on a detailed, site-specific assessment of landscape and Green Belt considerations, 180 dwellings could be accommodated on site SR-0306 (Area A and Area B combined).
75. Sites SR-0306 and SR-0890 are not subject to any environmental, ecological, physical or heritage constraints that would prohibit their development. Detailed work has been undertaken which accompanies this representation that demonstrates that the sites are capable of being developed through a comprehensive, landscape-led development that will not undermine the purposes of including land in the Green Belt.
76. As confirmed through previous submissions to the Council, an access appraisal has been undertaken which confirms a suitable vehicular access can be provided to the land via Epping Road. An access has been designed and agreed in principle with Essex County Council.
77. Neither site SR-0306 as a whole, or the part of the site identified as SR-0890, are subject to any achievability or availability constraints, and are being actively promoted by an established house-builder. If allocated through the Local Plan SR-0890 / SR-0306 will be able to make a contribution towards meeting the current and acute housing need, helping to address concerns in this respect set out earlier within this representation. Once Green Belt is considered at a site-specific level, it is clear that site SR-0890 in particular can be developed without undue harm to the Green Belt. Whilst greater mitigation is required in respect of the development of the wider site of SR-0306, this too can be achieved through a Green Belt and landscape led proposal, as demonstrated through the Green Belt Assessment.
78. The sites and their potential development should be viewed within not only the context of a District-wide need for housing; but also a need to direct additional growth to Roydon.
79. It is clear that Roydon is a suitable settlement to accommodate growth, and site SR-0306 (in particular the western element of it, identified as site SR-0890) is a suitable site to help meet the District's housing needs.
80. To clarify, site SR-0890 is deliverable alone. The continued assessment of site SR-0890 separately from SR-0306 through the plan-making process is the most appropriate way of

properly assessing all reasonable alternatives. We trust that EFDC will objectively consider the implications of the allocation of either site, including in relation to the scale of growth each represents. The assessment of SR-0890 should not be influenced by any conclusions made on the larger SR-0306 site. However, given the District's current acute housing need, the suitability of Roydon to accommodate additional growth, and the deliverability of site SR-0306 through a landscape and Green Belt impact led development (as set out above), allocation of the site SR-0306 (alongside suitable development management policies) would be justified, effective, and consistent with national policy; and would help ensure the Local Plan is positively prepared.

SEA / SA

81. The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (SEA Regulations) (2004) require *inter alia* all reasonable alternatives be considered and assessed to the same level of detail as the preferred approach.
82. In this respect, we are concerned that only the preferred options appear to have been subject to sustainability appraisal as part of the site assessment process. The Council's published Report on Site Selection states that Stage 5 of the process was Sustainability Appraisal/Habitats Regulation Assessment of Candidate Preferred Sites, and that this established the impact of the candidate Preferred Sites alone and in combination.
83. It is also relevant to note that Regulation 13 of the SEA Regulations states:

“Every **draft** plan or programme for which an environmental report has been prepared in accordance with regulation 12 and its accompanying environmental report (“the relevant documents”) shall be made available for the purposes of **consultation** in accordance with the following provisions of this regulation.” (Emphasis added).
84. At 2(b, c and d) of Regulation 13 it sets out how consultation must involve taking appropriate steps to bring relevant documents to the attention of affected person, informing them how to make representations, and inviting them to express opinions.
85. The Council's approach in respect of all of the above is unclear. The Sustainability Appraisal (SA) published alongside the Draft Local Plan appears to suggest it is only an interim and the “legally required” SA Report will be published at the Regulation 19 submission stage, alongside the submission draft Local Plan (as stated at paragraph 2.1.1 of the SA (the second of two paragraphs 2.1.1)). Conversely, at paragraph 2.1.2 of the SA (the first of two paragraphs 2.1.2) it acknowledges that SEA Regulations require the publication of an SA Report alongside the Regulation 18 Preferred Options draft. It is not clear if the published SA seeks to meet this requirement. If it does, then this raises the issue as to why it has not itself been subject to consultation, and has not appraised all potential alternatives to the same level of detail as the preferred options. If the SA published alongside the DLP is only an interim report and does purport to be the relevant report for the DLP as required by the SEA Regulations, then it raise the question as to how EFDC has met this requirement.
86. We are concerned that these possible failures in respect of the SEA Regulations have prejudiced our client's interests in respect of sites SR-0306 and SR-0890 and their potential development, and reserve the right to raise this issue again at a future date if EFDC were to fail to take steps to cure such defects as the plan is progressed.

Overview

87. There are concerns that the extent of objectively assessed housing need for Epping Forest District is greater than stated. In any case, the DLP does not plan to meet the figure that has been identified. If the Local Plan were to continue to be based on such a strategy it would be contrary to national policy and unsound.
88. Roydon is a sustainable location to accommodate a proportion of the additional homes required to be provided in the District between 2011 and 2033. National policy and guidance is clear that planning should direct sufficient growth to such settlements to sustain their vitality and ensure the facilities and services that provide an important function for local residents are sustained. The DLP's proposal for Roydon to accommodate a mere 40 homes between 2011 and 2020, and none after 2020, is considered disproportionately low for a settlement of Roydon's size and characteristics, and represents a strategy that will have negative social and economic implications for the community. In short, the DLP's approach to Roydon is not sustainable and the strategy should be amended to enable a significantly greater number of dwellings to be delivered for the village.
89. The importance of ensuring that the growth of the settlement does not risk the coalescence of Roydon and Harlow is recognised. It should be noted that the development of land to the east of Epping Road, Roydon (sites SR-0306 and SR-0890) would not give rise to such a risk.
90. Site SR-0306 has been unjustifiably discounted from allocation. The site assessment's conclusion that Sites SR-0890 has a capacity of 15 dwellings is unjustified.
91. Evidence submitted to the Council demonstrates that both SR-0306 and SR-0890 are deliverable sites, development of which through a comprehensive, landscape-led proposal would not undermine the purposes of including land in the Green Belt. Accounting for impact on landscape and the purposes of including land in the Green Belt, site SR-0306 has a total net development area of 7 ha, 4 ha of which is within site SR-0890. The allocation of SR-0306 for residential development within the Local Plan would be justified, effective and consistent with national policy; and would help ensure the Local Plan provides sufficient homes to meet objectively assessed housing need.
92. As set out within this representations, we have concerns that the current direction of the Local Plan is such that it will not be sound and legally compliant, and as such will not be capable of adoption. Amendments to the Local Plan to ensure a greater number of homes are provided in the District as a whole, including through the allocation of site SR-306 /SR-0890, will assist in addressing such concerns and ensuring a sound Local Plan which will deliver sustainable development for Epping Forest District.