



Braintree District Council

Local Plan Examination of Section 2

Main Matter 2 – The Spatial Strategy

June 2021

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Policy LPP 1 Development Boundaries

Is the Spatial Strategy for Braintree justified by appropriate available evidence, having regard to national guidance, and local context, including Section 1 of the BLP?

- 2.1 Yes the Spatial Strategy for Braintree District is considered to be justified by appropriate evidence.
- 2.2 The Spatial Strategy for the BLP Section 2 is set out within paragraph 5.13 of the Plan. It seeks to concentrate development at key areas within the District. These are generally the largest settlements in the District (the market towns of Braintree, Witham and Halstead) and the A12/Great Eastern Mainline corridor.¹ These settlements have been chosen by virtue of their size which means they have more facilities available for new residents, including access to higher order facilities such as employment uses, more than everyday retail, leisure uses and secondary schools, and have good transport links, both by road and public transport.
- 2.3 The Spatial Strategy is accompanied by the settlement hierarchy in paragraphs 5.1 to 5.11 of the BLP Section 2 and the accompanying table. This places settlements into categories based on their relative sustainability merits and the size, function and services that each can offer. Each settlement in the District has been studied in turn by officers who considered the services and facilities that were available in each village or town. This built upon work undertaken in the Rural Services Study 2011 (BDC014 and BDC015), with each settlement being individually considered and updated by officers in consultation with the Parish Councils on the facilities in operation at the time of assessment (2015 – 2017). The settlement hierarchy splits the District into four categories of; Towns, Key Service Villages, Second Tier Villages and Third Tier villages, in declining order of sustainability. All other settlements not listed within the document are considered to be within the Countryside.
- 2.4 Braintree with Bocking and Great Notley are located on the improved part of the A120 close to its junction with the A131. As such it provides both east west and north south connections. It is the largest urban area within the District and is also located in relatively close proximity to the city of Chelmsford where further higher order facilities can be found. Braintree has a good level of public transport provision during the day, including an hourly branch line rail service, but services can be limited in the evening. A network of cycle and footpaths exist in the town and are proposed to be improved as part of ongoing work. These include the Flitch Way popular leisure walking and cycling route. A number of large employment areas are also located

¹ The reference to Garden Communities is proposed to be removed following their deletion from the section 1 Plan (See proposed main modification MM7 in document SDBDC008a)

within the town including the Springwood Drive Industrial Estate to the west of the town, the Skyline120 commercial area to the south of the town and the currently under construction Horizon 120 business and innovation park also located off the A131.

- 2.5 Witham is the second largest town in the District and is located on the main east coast rail line and the A12 strategic route. As with Braintree public transport options are generally good during the day, but poorer in the evenings and it has a network of cycling and walking routes which are fragmented in places. The town also benefits from a number of large employment areas including the Eastways Industrial Estate to the north east of the town. Two growth locations were allocated in Witham as part of the Core Strategy 2011 and are currently being built out. As such more limited new growth is proposed in Witham during this time as the approved applications are built out.
- 2.6 Halstead is the smallest of the three market towns and is situated in a more rural location, although still on the A131 north to south road connection. The town serves a large rural hinterland and includes a range of largely everyday shops and services as well as a secondary school and employment areas. The town is relatively poorly served by public transport, with no rail connection and has much more limited cycling provision, in part due to its topography and size. As such it was allocated less growth within the Local Plan, although a number of planning applications have since been approved on the edges of the town.
- 2.7 The Spatial Strategy also proposes growth for the A12/Great Eastern Mainline rail corridor. As well as Witham there are a number of larger villages located on this route including Hatfield, Peverel, Kelvedon and Feering, which are Key Service Villages. This areas has been proposed for growth because it has the best location in the District for public transport links, via the mainline railway line which links the villages and towns to each other and to other popular destinations including London to the south and Chelmsford and Colchester to the north/east. These villages are also reasonably well served by everyday facilities although travel to larger places may be necessary to meet some needs.
- 2.8 Whilst not specifying exact development levels, the BLP also sets out (paragraph 5.14) that an appropriate amount of development will be brought forward in other Key Service Villages and in Second Tier Villages to support thriving rural communities.
- 2.9 The Spatial Strategy is assessed within chapter 5 of the BLP Section 2 Sustainability Appraisal Report (SDBDC025). This section of the SA considered 6 alternative options for the spatial distribution of homes in the District. These were;
 - Publication: Main Towns, A12/GEML Corridor and Garden Communities (AS6)
 - A: Excluding Large Sites (AS1)

- B: Large Developments Only (AS2)
- C: Sites with high sustainable transport (AS3)
- D: Centred around Braintree (AS4)
- E: Rural Distribution (AS5)

2.10 Each proposed distribution would meet the minimum housing requirement of the Plan and the detail of how that could be met is set out within the table under paragraph 5.3 of the report. Each spatial strategy option is scored against the 16 SA objectives. Detailed explanation of the assessments is found within paragraphs 5.5 – 5.63 of the SA report, with paragraphs 5.64 and Table 5.1 setting out the conclusion on the assessment of each option. Ultimately as set out in Table 5.1 the Council considered the submitted spatial strategy the most appropriate for the reasons set out below;

“Officers recommend this spatial strategy as a balance between constraints and opportunities. All sites are deliverable within the plan period, a housing land supply could realistically be established and key infrastructure will be provided viably”.

2.11 Whilst in considering this option the Council and its Sustainability Appraisal consultants had anticipated some of the development being located at the Garden Communities towards the end of the plan period, it is not considered that the current housing trajectory where planning permission has been granted at alternative sites, deviates substantially from the hybrid option set out within the spatial strategy. This amendment is addressed in more detail of which in response to the next question.

In light of removal of the 2 garden communities from Section 1 of the BLP is Braintree’s spatial strategy supported by robust and up to date evidence and otherwise soundly based?

2.12 In the submitted BLP in 2017, in addition to the main towns and A12/GEML corridor, the spatial strategy sort to also focus development on two Garden Communities located to the West of Braintree and to the east of Coggeshall near Marks Tey (the latter being largely within Colchester District, and known as the Colchester Braintree Borders Garden Community). Both sites were located on the A120 strategic route corridor and a rapid transport system was proposed to provide a high quality public transport system for the new communities and existing residents along the route. Whilst large in overall size, during the Plan period they were proposed to provide a total of 3,650 new homes for Braintree District, around 23% of the number of homes allocated within the BLP.

2.13 Following the examination of the BLP Section 1 the Garden Communities were first reduced in size during the Plan period (proposed to deliver 2,635 new homes for Braintree District) and then removed from the Plan completely. Consequently main modification MM7 in document SDBDC008a proposes deletion of reference to them from the Spatial Strategy.

- 2.14 As set out within Topic Paper 2 - housing numbers, paragraph 5.1, the Council considers it has a more than sufficient supply of homes to deliver the minimum numbers required to in the District between 2013 and 2033. This is in large part due to a number of planning applications which have been submitted and subsequently approved (either by the Council or on appeal) since the BLP was submitted in October 2017.
- 2.15 Those settlements which have had more than 100 additional homes approved since the submission of the BLP (and were therefore not previously included within the submitted housing trajectory are;
- Braintree 551 (plus 250 homes in Cressing which the Inspector granted on appeal and considered to be functionally part of Braintree)
 - Halstead 467
 - Coggeshall 314
 - Cressing Tye Green 238
 - Hatfield Peverel 243
 - Witham 206
 - Earls Colne 143
- 2.16 It follows that Braintree, Halstead and Witham, as the three main towns in the District, have a total of 1,474 additional homes granted to them. This clearly fits with the existing spatial strategy and spatial hierarchy as set out within the BLP which aims to concentrate development at those areas which are most sustainable with reference to access to facilities, services and transport.
- 2.17 The four other areas which have received most new homes by way of planning permission are three of the five Key Service Villages identified within the BLP and Cressing Tye, a village on the main B1018 between Braintree and Witham. Coggeshall, Hatfield Peverel and Earls Colne are identified as Key Service Villages because it is usually possible to meet day to day needs within these larger villages, which often serve a larger rural hinterland.
- Hatfield Peverel is a village on the A12/Great Eastern Mainline and as such is identified within the Spatial Strategy as an area of focus.
 - Coggeshall is a village on the A120 and was to be the nearest large settlement to the Colchester/Braintree borders Garden Community in the Braintree District, as such whilst the boundaries of the sites approved may be different it is considered to broadly accord to the submitted spatial strategy. There is one other small allocation within Coggeshall which is yet to come forward but overall it is considered an appropriate level of growth for a Key Service Village.
 - Earls Colne is a more rural village situated to the east of Halstead and whilst not specifically mentioned within the spatial strategy, its overall level of growth is considered to be appropriate given its Key Service Village Status. All allocations within the village now have planning permission.

- Cressing Tye is a third tier village on the main road between Braintree and Witham and is adjacent to the development boundary of Braintree. Its location adjacent to this main road means that bus and road connections to Braintree and Witham are good, but the Parish itself has few local facilities. However given its proximity to Braintree it is considered that it broadly accords to the spatial strategy as submitted in the BLP.
- 2.18 Although the Garden Communities have been removed from the BLP, there is sufficient additional development which has been directed to other parts of the District to ensure that minimum housing targets are still met. Whilst this has been dealt with through planning applications, rather than by a Plan led review, it is considered that the location of this additional housing is largely consistent with the Spatial Strategy set out within the BLP Section 2.
- 2.19 In addition to this, and as set out within Topic Paper 2 Housing Table 3, of the 15,202 homes allocated within the BLP (excluding the windfall allowance) just 3,251 of those remain without permission or a resolution to grant permission. Approximately 79% of all homes within the Local Plan therefore have already been granted a permission (or have a resolution to grant). This means that very detailed assessments have been made on the impacts of those developments and the locality, services and facilities by both stakeholders, providers and the local planning authority and the impacts have been considered acceptable, subject to the relevant mitigation secured through the planning process.
- 2.20 In order to reflect the updated site trajectory the Council instructed its consultants to undertake an update to the Infrastructure Delivery Plan BDC058. This document can be found within the evidence base. This involved direct conversations with providers of services such as the NHS and highways authority and provides an updated position (in part also due to the passage of time) on infrastructure requirements from each site. There are no fundamental changes within this document from the original IDP, and any amendments to policy requirements have been reflected within the Councils proposed modifications SDBDC008a
- 2.21 The Council therefore considers that despite the removal of the two Garden Communities the BLP Section 2 Spatial Strategy remains soundly based on justified evidence.
- **Are the development boundaries in BLP Section 2 supported by robust and up to date evidence, otherwise soundly based and appropriately drawn?**
- 2.22 The BLP Section 2 includes Inset Maps for all towns and villages within the District which are considered of sufficient size to merit a development boundary. This includes all of the settlements listed within the settlement hierarchy. These development boundaries are intended to provide a clear marker as to the differentiation between the urban or built up area, in which proportionate development is acceptable in principle, and the countryside where new development will be restricted to uses appropriate to a rural setting

(See LPP1). This accords with bullet point 5 of paragraph 17 of the Core planning principles in the NPPF 2012 which says that 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 the thriving rural communities within it'*

- 2.23 During the drafting of the BLP, all development boundaries in the District were reviewed in line with the development boundary methodology (BDC/030). Section 3 on page 3 and 4 of the document sets the criteria under which the development boundaries are proposed and amended. This methodology was approved by members at the start of the BLP process.
- 2.24 In order to assess these criteria both a desk based and in person study were made of each town and village by planning officers. This also included the consideration of various other evidence base documents most notably the Landscape Character Assessment of the District (the suite of documents within BDC/044 – 47). This included individual landscape character assessments of all the edges of the 3 main towns and 5 Key Service Villages. Other evidence base documents which made up a key part of this consideration were;
- BDC049 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment
 - BDC051 Surface Water Management Plan for Witham and Braintree
 - BDC033 Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA)
 - BDC040 Open Spaces Study
 - BDC017 Historic Environment Characterisation Study.
- 2.25 There are approximately 67 development boundaries within the BLP so it is not possible to detail the changes made to each individual boundary within this hearing statement, however broadly the development boundaries were extended for two main reasons;
- To include a new area of built development which has been completed since the last Local Plan Review 2005 or which has previously been excluded from the development boundary.
 - To include a new area of proposed development (large or small) which either has planning permission or is allocated within the BLP.
- 2.26 Where planning permissions have been granted and detailed plans have been drawn or built the boundary may be more finely drawn to, for example, exclude larger back gardens or areas of open space, but in the case of allocations these are drawn around the site boundaries.
- 2.27 Where sites are identified as being able to accommodate 10 or more dwellings they are specifically allocated within the Plan, being marked orange on the Proposals Map and listed within the housing trajectory. Where sites are considered to be under 10 there are unallocated but included within the development boundary.

- 2.28 The modifications as set out in SDBDC008a also propose a new development boundary to be added to houses in High Garrett to the north of Braintree. Modification MP17 proposes a new map Insert 4d, which recognises the large number of homes in this area and which would meet the criteria of a development boundary, a corresponding addition to the settlement hierarchy is also proposed in MM07.
- 2.29 The Council also held open dialogues with the local Parish or Town Council where one exists, or local ward members within Braintree and Bocking where no Town Council exists, to consider their area. This included consideration of the allocations within the Local Plan, as well as the development boundary. These groups were informed of the options available and made suggestions or comments based on their very local knowledge.
- 2.30 Each village development boundary and allocations were then taken to the Local Plan Sub Committee who made individual decisions relating to each village based on an officer report which included consultation responses from the Parish/Town Councils or ward members. Members of the public or interested parties had the opportunity to put forward their views via statements at the meetings and in the 2016 and 2017 public consultation periods. (In 2016 the alternative options for allocations were also shown on maps, given all the opportunity to see what alternative options may be possible). These were then incorporated into the final BLP which was approved for submission by Full Council.
- 2.31 Around 20 responses received in the consultation period to LPP1 were primarily from agents and landowners seeking to add individual sites into the development boundaries, rather than attacking the development boundary methodology per se. However, following the result of a recent High Court judgement, the Council is proposing clarification of the wording of the policy be provided which is proposed in MM9 of SDBDC008a.