
EXAMINATION OF THE GREATER NOTTINGHAM STRATEGIC PLAN

RESPONSE TO HOUSING REQUIREMENT AND STRATEGIC DISTRIBUTION NOTE (GNC30) ON BEHALF OF HORTONS' ESTATE

1. This note has been prepared to respond to the Housing Requirement and Strategic Distribution note (GNC20) of the Greater Nottingham Strategic Plan examination.
2. Having reviewed the proposed amendments to Policy 5 within the note we write to broadly support the principle of the changes but have further concerns and observations regarding to the proposed wording.
3. We welcome the removal of the text "*Wherever feasible, rail accessibility for storage and distribution uses should be utilised;*" from a) of Policy 5. As set out in our Hearing Statement towards Matter 2 our view is that the emphasis placed on rail connectivity for strategic distribution sites in the GNSP artificially introduces an over-reliance on rail-based logistics sites.
4. Whilst the principle of supporting rail freight and modal shift is understood, the strategy wholly underestimates the delivery risks associated with these sites and the plan's ability to cater for the varied demands within the logistics market. This creates the risk that the supply of strategic distribution/logistics land proposed in the GNSP area will not provide sufficient flexibility, choice or competition in the market over the plan period. Delivery of rail-connected employment sites is complex, requiring very significant upfront infrastructure and investment, regulatory approvals and commercial commitments from rail operators and users, in addition to a significant critical mass of floorspace to achieve commercial viability. Therefore, the Policy should not place such an emphasis on rail connected strategic distribution sites. As previously set out, the GNSP does not respond to or even acknowledge that rail-served and road-based logistics facilities serve different markets and operational requirements.
5. A justified strategy should recognise the complementary roles of rail and road freight, and the Policy should seek to provide a range and choice of sites capable of meeting differing operational requirements. This is important because a lack of variety in the market deters investment and jobs as new occupiers or those looking to expand will go elsewhere geographically if insufficient land is made available to the market. The consequence of this suppressed demand is constrained investment and economic growth in the plan area. As discussed during the hearing sessions, it is also worth pointing out that the Bennerley Coal Disposal Point allocation does not include any rail connections in the planning application or SoCG between Harworth Group and Broxtowe Borough Council which further illustrates how it is the correct decision to remove this wording from the policy.

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6. We also welcome the addition of g) to Policy 5. Our hearing statements questioned whether the GNSP was able to demonstrate whether the quantity of land allocated for strategic distribution purposes within the GNSP area represents an appropriate contribution towards meeting identified need and suggested the inclusion of a criteria-based policy. We heard during the hearing sessions how the GNSP does not apportion the need identified within the Icen report of the study area to the plan area and, therefore, this leaves the very real possibility that objectively assessed needs will not be met and unmet need for strategic distribution will remain even once the plan is adopted. For these reasons, we welcome the introduction of this criteria-based policy which provides a route to planning permission for suitable strategic distribution sites provided they can demonstrate an unmet for this type of development. We note that this policy aligns with paragraph 86 d) of the NPPF for planning policies to be flexible enough to accommodate needs not anticipated in the plan and to enable a rapid response to change in economic circumstances.
 7. We also welcome the decision not to include a trigger mechanism in the wording of this policy. Our hearing statements touched on the importance of the logistics industry to the economy and supporting jobs / investment. Unmet need should be sought to be met as soon as is practical such that need does not become overwhelming and urgent. Furthermore, our Hearing Statements touched on the delivery risks associated with these sites and seeking to meet the residual need by such a small number of allocated sites. This position further points towards the need for flexibility regarding future delivery and this criteria-based policy, and also why a trigger mechanism is not justified given how the residual need is proposed to be met in the GNSP.
 8. Although we are aware that the GNSP is being assessed against a different version of the framework (NPPF) it is worth recognising that including a trigger mechanism into the policy goes beyond the draft policies (S5 & E2) of the consultation version of the new NPPF and regardless there is no reasoned basis for such a trigger mechanism suggested by the Councils.
 9. Although we support the principle of the criteria-based policy, we question why the policy specifies development having to make a significant contribution to the unmet need at i). Our view is that if there is unmet need then placing restrictions on which sites can contribute towards meeting this need is not justified, provided that they are of a scale capable of delivering units suitable for strategic distribution.
 10. We also note that the text at iii) *“where possible, rail freight infrastructure”* although we note the ‘where possible’ inclusion does not necessarily prohibit sites without a potential rail connection from coming forward given that the potential for rail connection has otherwise been removed from Policy 5 we question whether the inclusion of this text is justified and suggest it is removed entirely.

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11. Separate to the note on strategic distribution, we also note that Appendix 44B – Supply of Sites within Study Area has recently been updated to reduce the capacity of strategic distribution uses on the Bennerley Coal Disposal Point allocation by 40,000 sqm. We appreciate that the scope of the hearing sessions was not to consider including additional site allocations but this reduction in capacity of an allocated site is further evidence that points towards the need for strategic distribution land not being met in full across the plan period and that the inclusion of additional site allocations should be considered. In addition to this, the proposed deletion of the rail accessibility requirement from Policy 5 represents an acknowledgment that rail connectivity should no longer be regarded as a defining characteristic of strategic distribution provision within the GNSP. It is our view that the reduced emphasis now placed on rail connectivity further supports the need for a flexible approach to meeting strategic distribution requirements. When considered alongside the recent reduction in the anticipated capacity of the Bennerley allocation, this demonstrates that assumptions underpinning the strategic distribution strategy have already evolved since the Plan was prepared. In these circumstances, it is essential that Policy 5 retains sufficient flexibility to allow additional suitable strategic distribution proposals to come forward where unmet need can be demonstrated, thereby ensuring that the Plan remains effective throughout the plan period.
12. It is also worth pointing out that through the site selection process the GNSP stated that the potential to connect to the rail network would be a “significant advantage” when selecting preferred sites. This was clearly a very important consideration in the site selection process given that both allocated sites were initially chosen due to this potential ability to deliver rail freight. As discussed during the examination hearings, this brings the site selection methodology into question, and it should bring back into focus other potentially suitable sites which were discounted on the basis that they could not provide a potential rail access. To illustrate the point, the Councils’ own assessment of the land at Nuthall site concluded that it is potentially suitable for strategic distribution but was not selected as a preferred site due to the absence of potential rail access. For these reasons, it is our view that the site selection process should be revisited to address these inconsistencies in the selection of allocated sites which in our view amount to matters of soundness.