

Sheffield Local Plan – Spatial Options

Briefing Note

17/01/2022

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Introduction

Sheffield City Council consulted on the Sheffield Plan Issues and Options document in September / October 2020. At the time, Sheffield's housing need was around 2,185 additional homes per year, or a total need of 40,000 homes over the period 2020-2038.

Since this consultation, the Local Development Scheme (LDS) for the Sheffield Plan was revised and sets a timetable for producing a draft Plan with adoption by December 2024.

In addition, the Government has changed the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) for calculating future housing needs, and now provides for a 35% uplift of the Sheffield housing need figure, which increases its requirement to over 53,500 net additional dwellings between 2021 and 2039 (or 2,973 dwellings per year).

Sheffield City Council has now prepared a series of revised Spatial Options (outlined below), and the Climate Change, Economy and Development Transitional Committee, on the 13th of January 2022, determined to recommend **Option 3** to the Council's Co-Operative Executive.

Demographics & jobs growth

Considering these changes, the Council commissioned external consultants to review the implications of the 35% uplift on population and jobs growth. The conclusion of the modelling suggests that Sheffield's population would increase by almost 97,000 over the period to 2038. This figure is over double the rate currently forecast.

The review concluded that it would **not** be necessary to deliver the number of homes suggested by the Government's housing need figure (including the 35% uplift) to support the jobs growth target in the Sheffield City Region Strategic Economic Plan (SEP). Their view is that between 1,994 and 2,323 additional homes per year are needed to align with the jobs growth target (compared to 2,923 additional homes as would be required under the NPPG).

The Council's land supply suggests that around 37,335 homes could potentially be accommodated on suitable brownfield land within the existing urban areas including 21,000 homes within the Central Area, and an estimated 5,000 homes on windfall sites. Based on the Government's standard method, including a 35% uplift and replacement allowance (53,514 homes to 2039), there would be a shortfall of 16,179 homes.

Employment land need & supply

The Council estimates that 11.5 hectares of employment land is needed per year to meet the level of jobs growth proposed in Sheffield City Region's Strategic Economic Plan (SEP). This equates to 207 hectares of land to meet employment land needs between 2021 and 2039.

The updated employment land review concludes that there is currently about 147 hectares of deliverable employment land on suitable sites within the existing urban areas. This shortfall could, potentially, be further exacerbated as the employment land requirement would increase if planned housing numbers were greater than is needed to support the jobs growth identified in the SEP.

Consultants have noted that the need for housing should be carefully balanced with the need for employment land, and it will therefore be important to safeguard key employment sites against proposals for residential use which may create issues in terms of supply.

The Council's approach

The Council states that meeting the full housing need to 2039, as calculated using the Government's standard method, could only be achieved if land is released from the Green Belt and allocated for development. The Very Special Circumstances test for releasing land from the Green Belt boundary is particularly important because it can imply that other, reasonable options should be considered first, including prioritising the use of brownfield land.

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The Council has proposed a sequential approach for allocating sites, including the reuse of brownfield sites within existing urban areas; the use of previously undeveloped land within the urban areas; consideration of whether any unmet needs can be met in neighbouring districts; and release of Green Belt land, with priority to previously developed (Brownfield) land in Green Belt areas.

Accordingly, the Council proposed five spatial options for accommodating future development as follows:

Option 1: An urban capacity-led approach – brownfield only

Under Option 1, the housing supply would be limited to the number of homes that could be accommodated on suitable brownfield sites within the urban area, with a maximum of around 2,075 homes per year.

Option 2: As Option 1 but with previously undeveloped land within the urban area also allocated where this is considered sustainable

The Council defines 'previously undeveloped land' as land within the existing urban areas that has not previously been built on, including land that was previously allocated for development in the UDP; farmland; disused sports grounds and some informal green spaces. If this land is included as allocations, the housing figure is considered to potentially increase to a maximum of 2,240 homes.

Option 3: Option 1 or 2 plus release of sustainably located brownfield sites in the Green Belt

The Council identifies two large brownfield sites in the Green Belt that adjoin the existing urban area. Together, these could have capacity for up to 1,100 to 1,200 homes which would increase the housing supply by up to 2,305 homes per year.

Option 4: As Option 1, 2 or 3 plus release of sustainably located greenfield (previously undeveloped) sites in the Green Belt

There are a number of sites in the Green Belt where there may be site-specific circumstances to justify

altering the Green Belt boundary, even if it is not accepted that a strategic case exists to justify Green Belt release. The housing supply under this Option would be less than 2,973 homes per year.

Option 5: As Options 1, 2, 3 or 4 plus release of sufficient greenfield (previously undeveloped) sites in the Green Belt to meet the full housing need figure

Under Option 5, sufficient land would be provided to enable the delivery of around 53,500 homes between 2021 and 2039 (an average of 2,973 homes per year), as calculated using the Government's standard method. This could mean building more than 16,000 homes on land that is currently designated as Green Belt.

Conclusion

The Council has expressed concerns over the levels of in-migration implied by the Government's housing need figure and its relationship with its employment / job's strategy. If the Council were to decide to deliver considerably less homes than required by the Government's standard method this could raise concerns about the soundness of the Council's Plan.

The Council, based upon the external work it has commissioned, has concluded that it is a difficult decision whether to consider allocating previously undeveloped land in the urban area and/or Green Belt land for development. If development were to be limited to brownfield land only (Option 1), the City's green spaces would be protected, and more sustainable patterns of development would be promoted.

This approach however would limit housing supply, especially the support for more affordable housing as economic viability remains a problem on brownfield land. However, development on previously undeveloped land in the urban area and/or Green Belt land is seen as potentially undermining urban regeneration, increase commuting from suburban areas and cause harming the environment.

Nevertheless, the approach being recommended to the Co-Operative Executive is to pursue **Option 3**.

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