

# **Examination into the Welwyn-Hatfield Local Plan 2013-2032**

## **Stage 9 Hearings Inspector's observations**

1. Between 4 and 17 March 2021, I held a series of Hearings into sites that could make a contribution towards meeting the Local Plan's housing need. For the convenience of participants, the Hearing sessions were arranged on a settlement basis and I will follow that format in this note.
2. In response to my Interim Report of 16 October 2020, the Council submitted proposals for residential development at 19 sites to the examination. These would in total contribute about 1700 dwellings to the housing requirement.
3. However, these dwellings, even if all are found to be sound, would not have provided a housing supply to meet the Borough's then Full Objectively Assessed Housing Need (FOAHN). I therefore examined 16 sites that had successfully passed the Council's site selection process but had not been formally submitted to the Examination. Additionally, because of the absence of any proposed housing development in Digswell and only limited provision at Oaklands/Mardley Heath, which is contrary to the strategy, I examined one site in Digswell and three in Oaklands/Mardley Heath. These had been submitted and assessed in response to the "Call for Sites" exercise. However, they had not successfully completed the site selection process.
4. Some sites that were outstanding from the Council's Regulation 19 submission and which had been previously considered, were also re-examined. A decision as to their soundness had previously been deferred, pending the receipt of further information and/or evidence. Additionally, in the case of some Green Belt (GB) sites, I was unable to make a proper consideration of their relative merits, in the context of exceptional circumstances to remove land from the Green Belt, until all of the potential sites could be compared.
5. I set out my considerations as to the soundness of individual development proposals below. All sites outside of the GB should be developed in preference to GB sites unless there are sound reasons for not so doing. In these cases, I have therefore been able to indicate which sites are sound, which sites are likely to be found sound following amendments to the policy criteria and which are not or are unlikely to be found sound.

6. With regard to the additional sites, formally submitted by the Council and within the GB, I have indicated which sites are likely to be found sound subject to discussed adjustments to the policy criteria, which sites are unlikely to be found sound and which could be found sound if a comparative assessment with other GB sites justified exceptional circumstances to support their release from the GB.
7. I have not concluded on the sites that have not been formally submitted to the Examination by the Council. I have however discussed, where appropriate, my findings on the evidence base, including the representations and hearing discussions, concerning these sites.

## **Welwyn Garden City**

### **2020 urban sites**

8. Subject to amendments to the Policy criteria discussed at the Hearing and in some instances subsequently, the following sites are sound;

Han40a, Town Centre North Campus  
Pea102, Bio Park, Broadwater Road  
Pea 104, YMCA 90 Peartree Lane  
Hol 23, Hollybush Lane

9. Four sites

Pea97, Norton Building, Bridge Road  
Pea103, 29 Broadwater Road  
Pea106, 73-83 Bridge Road East  
Pea105, 61 Bridge Road

are located within designated area EA1. This is an employment area where development (including changes of use) is for Class B and associated land uses only. Proposals to use these sites, some of which have buildings that are currently used for Class B or related uses, for housing would be contrary to Policy SP8 and Policy SADM 10, both of which have already been found to be sound.

10. Additionally, in order to strengthen the implementation of this policy, in 2020 the Council introduced an Article 4 direction to remove recently introduced permitted development rights that could allow such changes of use without planning permission. It is therefore not appropriate to allocate sites within this area, for residential

development unless there are sound planning reasons that are specific to the site.

11. The delivery of any sites in this area that already have prior approval for change of use from employment to residential, should be considered in the context of them being potential commitments, if there is evidence to demonstrate that they will be implemented. Some of these sites and indeed others in this area, could well be brought forward as sites for residential development, through the planning application process and during the plan period. However, they should be assessed at that time and in the context of the adopted policies. If given planning permission post plan adoption, then their development would contribute towards the delivery of the windfall allowance that has been increased and included in the housing trajectory.

### **Regulation 19 Green Belt sites**

#### **SP 18 SDS1 North East of Welwyn Garden City (Panshanger)**

12. The principle of major development in this area has already been found to be sound and I consider there to be exceptional circumstances to remove land from the GB in this location. Discussion at the hearing and subsequently has centred around the extent of the built development and the new GB boundary. Built development could extend beyond what was originally proposed, westwards to Hens Lane, utilising land to the south-west of the woodland that partially fronts that road. It could also extend eastwards to the borough boundary, providing appropriate GB screening can be achieved on land immediately to the east. The northern boundary of built development should be in a position that enables sufficient landscaping to be implemented, to totally screen the built development in views across the GB to the north, from vantage points, in and around Tewin. The new GB boundary should be located in a position that meets the principles in the "Treatment of Green Belt Boundaries" report.

#### **SP 19 SDS2 South East of Welwyn Garden City (Birchall Garden Suburb)**

13. In my Interim report I concluded that it would not be a sound outcome to allocate the fields to the immediate north of the A414 for residential development, because of the impact such development would have on the visual openness of the wider GB area and the consequent experience of users of the open countryside to the south, as well as the potential harm to the setting of heritage assets.

14. It is, nevertheless, still necessary to appropriately screen the reduced development area from the wider GB to the south. The land slopes southwards from the revised southern boundary to the A414. Additionally, this boundary is not all in the same alignment, there being a central section of hedge to the north of the eastern and western sections. All three east-west sections contain mature trees, the north-south elements do not. Consequently, a boundary located on the northern side of the existing hedgerow, other than in the central section, would maximise the potential to screen this site from the south at an early date.
15. An assessment should be made of the required height of screening bunds to obscure views of the development from the open countryside to the south of the A414 at an early date and the results incorporated into the policy criteria. The bund should extend to the north of the Burnside site, incorporating the necessary acoustic requirements. It could extend eastwards of the public bridleway, to the nearby copse, if a meaningful development area to its north could be created and views of it obscured from the south by appropriate mounding and planting.
16. The reduced area only has capacity for about 650 dwellings. There was discussion at the hearing into the desirability of providing a new primary school (PS) on the site. The Appellant pointed out that there was already a PS, immediately west of the site, at Commonswood and that children from the development could be accommodated at that school if pupils from areas further west, currently sending pupils to that school, could be accommodated in the PS system elsewhere, with or without changes to capacity.
17. The Education Authority did not support such an outcome. However, it also pointed out that it no longer supports one form entry PSs. The pupils generated by the revised SDS2 proposal would not support a two-form entry PS. There is clearly doubt as to whether a two form entry PS could be funded in this location, without a significant financial contribution from the Education Authority.
18. The number of dwellings now proposed in Welwyn Garden City and its distribution is greater and locationally different to that submitted in the Regulation 19 plan. It is therefore appropriate to review the proposed education provision on a city-wide basis in order to achieve an optimum solution. If that distribution necessitates some provision at SDS 2, then land should be reserved through the policy criteria for a PS, its size being determined by the deliverable funding. If it could be achieved by expansions or a new school elsewhere, that is better located to meet the overall needs of Welwyn Garden City, then that should be the outcome.

19. The policy criteria require the provision of a small neighbourhood centre to meet the day to day retail needs of new residents. The site promotor argued that the reduced population would not justify any retail provision whatsoever. That may be so but the same argument that suggests children from the development could attend Commonswood School because of proximity, applies to residents living immediately north and west of Commonswood School in the context of retail facilities. If suitable pedestrian links were provided and the location was appropriate, they could find it more convenient to use a retail facility within the SDS2 development than the existing facilities that are further away.
20. The Policy criteria could be reviewed at the time of a planning application, when the actual number of dwellings to be accommodated within the development would be better known. An up to date viability study could also be submitted at that time to more accurately determine whether or not the provision of a retail outlet within the development would be viable. In such circumstances the requirement of a small neighbourhood centre should be retained in the policy criteria.

## **HS2 Creswick**

21. This Regulation 19 site has already been found to be sound in principle. The Council is to reassess its extent and capacity in the context of providing screening to the development from the GB to the south and in a way that does not conflict with the overhead electricity power lines along the southern boundary.

## **Hatfield**

### **2020 urban sites**

22. Subject to amendments to the Policy criteria discussed at the Hearing, the following sites are sound;

HC08, Lemsford Road  
HC11, Meridian House, The Common  
HE17, Link Drive  
HSW92, Minster Close  
HSW94, College Lane

## **Regulation 19 Green Belt sites**

### **SP 22 SDS5 North West Hatfield**

23. This proposal has been found to be sound in principle and was discussed in my Interim Report (IR). The northern part of the site forms a part of the critical gap that separates the built-up areas of Hatfield and Welwyn Garden City. It was classified as most essential GB in the Land Use Consultants (LUC) stage 3 GB study, due its critical location in maintaining the perceived separation of Hatfield from Welwyn Garden City.
24. The Key Diagram indicates that this area would be kept open and probably used for school playing fields. The development of the area immediately to the south, upon which it is notionally suggested that the school building complex could be located, is considered to cause high harm to the GBs purposes. This interface should be given further consideration.
25. Unlike most other GB proposals, there would be no screening between the built development and the adjacent most essential GB. A masterplan, setting out the quantum and distribution of land uses is a policy requirement and the protection of the adjacent GB would be a consideration in its preparation. However, at this stage it is crucial that the potential capacity of the entire site is not exaggerated. If it were, then the amount of development proposed could only be achieved by harmfully impacting upon the area of high harm and perhaps compromising the openness of the critical gap between an expanded Hatfield and Welwyn Garden City.
26. The Council has been asked to satisfy itself that the site's capacity and the disposition of uses, as shown on the Key Diagram, are appropriate and that the northern part of the development would not be unacceptably harmful to one of the most critical areas of GB within the Borough, including the perceived separation of its two main towns.

### **HS11 Land at South Way**

27. Following a hearing in July 2020, I invited the principle parties to meet together to discuss a modified proposal for this site. That discussion and its conclusions were to consider infrastructure viability matters as well as the amount and location of education facilities on this site and in the wider New Barnsfield area. Additionally, I asked the parties to consider the extent of the land adjacent to the cemetery that it would be necessary to remove from the area of proposed built development, in order to prevent the development having an impact on the wider GB.

28. A revised masterplan that includes changes to the area proposed for built development, together with other changes that resolved the above and other matters, was submitted to the Examination in December 2020 by James Blake Associates (EX230K). The revisions shown on Figs 3 and 4 accompanying that letter resolve the matters that were discussed in July 2020, providing there is reference in the policy criteria to the need to re level the area adjacent to the cemetery, in order to avoid the development being visible from the wider GB to the west. In principle but subject to the demonstration of exceptional circumstances to remove the site from the GB, this site is sound.

## **Woolmer Green**

### **Regulation 19 Green Belt site**

#### **HS15 Land East of London Road**

29. This proposal has already been found sound in principle but subject to a demonstration of exceptional circumstances to remove the entire site from the GB. In this context I have expressed concerns about the use of land in the critical gap between Woolmer Green and Knebworth to provide a vehicular access to the site from London Road.

#### **2020 urban site**

#### **WE100 51-53 London Road**

30. This site is located within designated area EA10. This is an employment area where development (including changes of use) is for Class B and associated land uses only. Proposals to use sites in such areas, some of which have buildings that could be reused for B or related uses, for housing, would be contrary to Policy SP8 and Policy SADM 10, both of which have already been found to be sound.
31. It is therefore not appropriate to allocate sites within this area for residential development in the Local Plan, unless there are sound planning reasons that are specific to the site or location.

#### **2020 Green Belt site not formally submitted**

#### **WGr3 52 London Road, Knebworth**

32. At the hearing, the Council and the promotor clarified that they were agreed that the site should be considered on the basis that the built development would not extend any further south than that on the last property on the eastern side of London Road. The reduced site would accommodate about 25 dwellings. The southern part of the site

would be provided as amenity space and parts of it, adjacent to London Road, could be used to further screen the development from views by persons travelling northwards along London Road.

33. The Stage 3 GB study classified this site, along with other land on either side of London Road between Woolmer Green and Knebworth and between the railway line and New Road, as an area of very high harm. Nevertheless, the individual parcel (P) assessment, which extended to the south of the existing built development, indicated that its development would only cause moderate harm to the purposes of the GB. The proposal is now a reduced site that does not intrude into the gap between the northern extent of the built-up area of Woolmer Green and the corresponding southern extent of Knebworth.
34. The site is up to two metres lower than London Road, in the vicinity of that Road and it slopes westwards to the large railway embankment, which at about five metres in height, dominates the western boundary. Most of the London Road frontage to the proposed developed area is heavily screened by trees and evergreen shrubs, such that even in winter views of what can be seen of the wider GB to the west and above the railway embankment, by persons travelling south, are heavily filtered by vegetation. I can see no reason to dispute the finding of moderate harm to the GB. In the context of the clear need to release land from the GB that has a higher harm rating, GB and related matters are not therefore a valid reason to reject this site.
35. The site is within walking distance of shops and other facilities as well as Knebworth railway station, which has frequent train services. There are also bus services at fifteen-minute intervals to Stevenage, Welwyn Garden City, Hatfield and St Albans. I agree with the highway authority that from a movement perspective, this is a sustainable location for development. The site could also make a modest contribution to the five-year supply of housing land.

## **Oaklands and Mardley Heath**

### **2020 Green Belt sites not formally submitted**

#### **OMH6 Land East of Danesbury Park Road**

#### **OMH9 Land to the rear of 19-23 The Avenue**

36. Although the stage 3 GB study notes that about half of the wider parcel, within which these sites are located, is occupied by detached residential dwellings, the whole parcel is classified as making a moderate-high harm contribution to the purposes of the GB. This is despite the study accepting that it does not make a strong contribution to any GB purpose. The justification for the rating appears to be the



breach of the strong GB boundary that the A1M provides but this does not reflect a GB purpose or a consistent approach. Additionally, Danesbury Park Drive, which being a historic highway, has a demonstrated sense of permanence and could equally be a satisfactory permanent GB boundary.

37. For the most part, the undeveloped part of the parcel largely slopes, in a north-easterly direction, towards the northern part of the parcel, which is heavily built up. Panoramic views, over the north-eastern part of the GB parcel from public footpath (PF)39, display few characteristics of visual openness. Nevertheless, whilst the GB report says that the release of the parcel would not weaken the contribution that the remaining GB land between it and Welwyn provides, that fails to recognise the separate relationship of the part of site OMH6 that is located to the west of the public footpath. This area is physically related to the area to the south-west that slopes towards Welwyn and Codicote. Its loss from the GB would be far more harmful to GB purposes than the area north-east of PF39.
38. Both sites have access problems in that The Avenue, although for the most part of adequate width, is not adopted, neither is Danesbury Park Drive, which is noticeably narrower. The Avenue does not have footpaths on much of its length beyond the A1M and Danesbury Park Drive has none. Nevertheless, there is sufficient space along most of The Avenue to rectify this.
39. Assuming that the minimum width of the access to OMH9 is 4.5m, then the highway authority has confirmed that a development with a shared pedestrian/vehicle surface could accommodate a development of up to 25 dwellings. If integrated or a separate pedestrian/cycle access can be provided, then the number could increase to 100.
40. It is not clear whether or not an access that meets minimum standards could be provided via Danesbury Park Drive. Nevertheless, there are other opportunities to provide an appropriate access to this backland area from The Avenue, with or without the removal of a dwelling. Consequently, there is no access reason why a comprehensive development proposal, that included all of the land north-east of the public footpath and north of the wildlife site and which achieved an appropriate access solution, could not be viable and achievable within the next 15 years.
41. Nevertheless, as the highway authority comments, the area currently presents a range of challenges and barriers to sustainable travel and this is further hindered by the distances and topography. Although the sites are technically walkable to the bus stops on Great North Road, where there is a frequent bus service, the absence of

footpaths for most of the distances west of the A1M would be a deterrent to walking. The nearest schools are beyond a walkable distance and although the local facilities are cyclable, they are beyond the distance that most people would walk.

## **Welwyn**

### **2020 Green Belt sites not formally submitted**

#### **Wel1,2, 6 and 15 Land at Fulling Mill Lane and Kimpton Road**

42. The hearing was told that the development of any of these sites, which are located to the west of Fulling Mill Lane, would require the construction of a new bridge over the river Mimram and improvements to the adjacent junction with the B656. The costs of this are such that the development of any of the sites in isolation is not viable and some or all of site WE1 would have to be included in any viable development that involved one or more of the other sites. The owners of Wel1, 2 and 15 are promoting their sites in combination in order to achieve a viable development. The promoter of Wel6 is not involved, so there could be delivery issues if that site was chosen in preference to one of the other three.
43. The area has been assessed as contributing moderate-high harm to the GB's purposes. LUC also considered that the individual parcels would have the same rating if individually assessed. Nevertheless, the assessment only found that the parcel made a significant contribution to safeguarding the countryside from encroachment and assisting the area's urban regeneration. The latter assessment applies to all sites and these sites made limited or no contribution to three of the five purposes.
44. Whilst I note the Council's observations on the openness of the area between Welwyn and Codicote, the distance between the built-up areas along the B656 is well over 1km. The consultation responses suggest that although in North Hertfordshire District, the Oakhill area is socio-geographically a part of the wider Welwyn community, rather than that focussed on Codicote. The inclusion of any of these sites in a Green Gap policy would not be consistent with the advice in paragraphs (paras.) 76-78 of the Framework.
45. On average the sites are about 400m from bus stops that have a regular bus service and are only a little further from a wide range of retail and other facilities. However, the actual walking distance from the western parts of WE1 is nearly 1km. Additionally, the walking distance to the PS, is about 1km from most of the area and even

further from Wel6. Whilst some older children could cycle to it, most would probably not, and few small children would walk this distance on a twice daily basis. Wel2 and 15 and the eastern part of Wel1 are nevertheless, overall, in locations that could enable a successful encouragement of the use of more sustainable means of travel.

46. Whilst the sites are close to Welwyn Conservation Area and the local wildlife site at Singlers Marsh, any potential harm to these sites could be appropriately mitigated. Historic England have commented that a partial development of Wel15, if sensitively designed, could preserve the settings of the adjacent conservation area and listed buildings. Any archaeological remains that are found, could be mitigated. The Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust have not objected to the proposal from an ecological perspective.
47. There was discussion at the hearing about the impact of the proposals on Singlers Marsh. The promoter of the three sites has submitted a scheme that involves the construction of a new bridge over the river Mimram and the widening of Fulling Mill Lane. There is no evidence to suggest that the construction of a new bridge would be detrimental to the river's water quality, or to the southern part of Singlers Marsh, quite the reverse.
48. Observations on my site visit suggest that beyond the bridge, a new road could be constructed through the three sites to Kimpton Road beyond WEI1, obviating the need to widen much of Fulling Mill Lane, if that is not the preferred option overall. However, the construction of a new bridge, together with a widening of Fulling Mill Lane into the edges of the southern part of Singlers Marsh, as well as the necessary improvements to the B656 junction, present opportunities to introduce filtration systems that would improve the quality of highway drain water entering Singlers Marsh and/or the river Mimram. The latter is an important chalk stream where water quality is critical to its ecosystem and any improvements that could be achieved through development mitigation would be of great value to it.
49. The southern part of Singlers Marsh, which is close to sites Wel2 and 15, although designated as a wildlife site, is maintained and used as a public recreation ground. There is evidence of regular extensive dog walking and the site is used as a venue for village events. None of this is likely to foster an environment that is conducive to the comprehensive enhancement of wildlife. Overall, the evidence suggests that the presence of Singlers Marsh should not be an impediment to these sites being developed if there are not alternative sustainable GB sites, with a lower harm rating that could meet the housing needs of the wider Welwyn area.

50. It may be that the housing requirement at Welwyn does not justify the release of all of this land, which could potentially accommodate up to 250 dwellings. If only some is required, then consideration should be given to removing the most appropriate area for contributing to the long-term development needs of Welwyn from the GB and safeguarding that which is not required for development during this plan period.

## **Digswell**

### **2020 Green Belt site submitted in response to the call for sites that did not complete the site selection process.**

#### **Dig 1 East of New Road**

51. The site is located on rising ground to the east of properties in New Road. It extends to PF34b, which descends the crest of a ridge from which there are views across the open countryside to the east. It abuts residential gardens on three sides and much of the site is contained by the topography, preventing any visual interaction with the wider countryside to the east. However, development immediately to the west of the public footpath would be clearly seen in the wider countryside landscape unless appropriately screened.
52. LUC assessed the site as having a moderate rating in its initial assessment, in contrast to a wider parcel extending further east into the open countryside that was rated moderate-high. This was subsequently reviewed to be a typo, although that does not explain the reasoning behind its notation as moderate on the "Assessment of Potential Harm" map. Nevertheless, the proposed development area consequently has a moderate-high rating in common with the rest of parcel 17. However, despite this, the commentary points out that development up to the ridge crest would be consistent with the existing settlement form. LUC point out that there is no distinction between the arable farmland within the site and the expanse of arable land beyond. It also emphasises the lack of tree containment that characterises the boundary to the existing settlement. Nevertheless, it fails to consider the extent to which mitigation in the form of screening could further divorce the site from the wider countryside and ignores the fact that the parts of the site, immediately east of New Road properties, are not visible from PF34b.
53. Historic England asserts that whilst the site lies outside of Tewin Water registered park and garden, it does form a part of its setting, making a positive contribution to its significance. It points out that the site consists of open countryside rising northwards from the river and overlooks the registered park and garden, there being views of the site from the park's access road. However, that is not the case. The site as a whole does not rise northwards from the river but eastwards from

New Road. The northern boundary of the park is composed of mature deciduous trees, interspersed in a hedge characterised by holly and hawthorn, with belts of mature shrubs immediately to the south. On a site visit in winter, views through this hedge, from the park's access road, of the south facing slopes between PF34b and Public Bridleway (PB)50 were very limited. The existing properties to the north-east of the site, that are clearly visible from PF35 and PB37, were also not visible. Indeed, these properties are not visible across, the open fields north of PB37, for most of its length to the east of PB50. This is immediately to the north of the park's boundary hedge. If these cannot be seen, then neither would built development on the lower slopes of the proposed development site.

54. The proposed access would pass close to the northern boundary of the park. The site promotor indicated at the Hearing that built development was not now proposed in this area. It is a matter of judgement as to whether the construction of an access road across this land would have any harmful impact on the registered park and garden itself, but it could not be substantial. As the Council points out, the built development could be restricted to the area below the ridge crest. If accompanied by appropriate mounding and planting, it could be appropriately screened from the wider countryside GB and the historic park.
55. Historic England is also concerned about the impact of the proposal on the Grade II listed Welwyn viaduct. The Council points out that the only long views of the eastern side of the viaduct that highlights its full length, are from PF37b, adjacent to the site. However, as Mr Brooker's photographs 4a, 7 and 8 (Appendix 2) clearly demonstrate, the full-length views of the viaduct are from PB 50 further east and not PF 34b. The views from PF34b are obtuse and broken by intervening vegetation, even in winter. Development on the site could be located in a way that did not infringe upon the limited extent to which the site is a part of public views of the viaduct. Additionally, there are also much clearer and extensive direct views of the viaduct from within the registered park itself and from other vantage points within the Mimram valley to the east of the viaduct.
56. Furthermore, there is no suggestion that the harm to either asset would be substantial. Whilst para. 132 of the Framework says that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation, para. 134 also says that where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing

its optimum viable use. It is not clear whether this balance has actually been carried out.

57. The local PS, which is within a walkable distance of the site, has capacity to accommodate children generated by the development. No severe highway impacts are anticipated. The village convenience store and station are considered to be within walking distance and the Knightsfield retail and community facilities are within a cyclable range. The route to this centre is currently being improved for the benefit of pedestrians and Cyclists. Whilst there is also a bus service to this and Welwyn Garden City centres, it is not regular. However, the use of an access beyond the southern part of the area now proposed for built development reduces the site's permeability with the existing settlement. It significantly increases the distances to the station and local facilities beyond those measured along a direct connection via New Road, such that most residents in the northern part would be unlikely to walk.
58. A more permeable and sustainable development could be achieved if there was a direct footpath or highway link to New Road. Such a solution appears to be viable and feasible during the plan period using opportunities at a number of New Road properties or even through the removal of a dwelling.
59. Whilst the whole 6.0h site could potentially accommodate 180 ds, an absence of built development from the area immediately to the north of the registered park and to the west of PF34b would reduce this somewhat. The Council estimates 130ds on 4.3h of the site. Even if this assessment is over optimistic and the access as proposed is undesirable, there would be scope to accommodate a sizeable development without causing unacceptable harm to the wider GB or the heritage assets.

## **Lemsford**

### **2020 Green Belt sites not formally submitted**

#### **StL 13 Land at Roebuck Farm**

60. This site, on land within the village of Lemsford that was assessed as only making a moderate contribution to GB purposes, could accommodate about 30 dwellings. The Council considers that new planting along the southern boundary could create a robust and defensible GB boundary.
61. The site is close to the village school and there are community facilities, including several public houses, within the village. The site is

about 1km from local shops at Handside, suggesting that few residents would walk regularly to them. An hourly bus service passes the site providing links to Welwyn Garden City and places to the north-west as far as Luton. There is an adjacent listed building, but the Council considers that any potential harm could be appropriately mitigated.

62. The Lemsford Mead Wildlife site is located to the south-east. Although not immediately adjacent, concern was expressed about the potential for domestic animals to impact upon this site, causing harm to the wildlife. However, the majority of the site is on the other side of the river Lea. Nevertheless, the north-western boundary of the site has historically been enclosed with chain link fencing, suggesting that animal trespass has been an issue. However, this fence is in a poor state of repair and ineffective as a barrier to the movement of animals between the existing village and the wildlife site. Appropriate mitigation, as a result of development, could restore and improve the overall protection provided to the wildlife site.
63. The site could be delivered within five years.

## **Stanborough**

### **2020 Green Belt sites not formally submitted**

#### **StL 1 Land to the north of New Road**

64. This site includes land that is surrounded by built development on three sides. It was assessed as only making a moderate contribution to GB purposes and could accommodate about 80 dwellings. The northern boundary has no development, but its hedge could be strengthened and accompanied by other landscaping to create a clear GB boundary.
65. Lemsford school is a little over 0.5km away and there are bus stops serving three bus routes a similar distance to the south. There are more than four buses per hour towards Welwyn Garden City, as well as to Hatfield, during daytime hours. To that extent the site is in a location that could enable a successful encouragement of the use of more sustainable means of travel.
66. However, Stanborough no longer has a convenience store. The nearest shop selling food is probably the Hatfield Tesco, which being 1.5km away and partly necessitating the use of footpaths adjacent to a major road, is unlikely to be a destination that many people would walk or cycle to. There is however a bus connection. Whilst a neighbourhood centre is proposed within site SDS5, North East of Hatfield, with pedestrian links to Stanborough, it would be a walk of more than 1km and unlikely to attract much sustainable travel from

Stanborough. The site promotor has indicated a willingness to provide a convenience store on New Road but there is no assessment to demonstrate that its catchment population, following the implementation of this and other acceptable development at Stanborough, would make such a facility viable.

67. The site could be delivered within five years.

### **StL15 Land to the East of Great North Road**

68. The site is sandwiched between the former A1 and the A1M. Having assessed the need for attenuation measures to reduce the noise and air pollution from the adjacent motorway, to acceptable levels, the Council only considers that it has a capacity to accommodate 8 dwellings. It is one of a very few sites whose release from the GB would cause low harm to the GB's purposes.

69. The site is about 1km from Lemsford PS so it is unlikely that pupils would walk. It is otherwise slightly closer to facilities and the public transport network than site StL1 but they generate similar sustainability considerations. Its development would marginally add to the viability of a food store at Stanborough.

70. The site could be delivered within five years.

### **StL17 Land at Great North Road**

71. This site is also sandwiched between the former A1 and the A1M and overall together with other land to the north, the LUC study considers that its release would be of moderate harm to the GB's purposes. The Council considers it to have a capacity for 5 gypsy or traveller pitches. There would be a need for attenuation measures to reduce the noise and air pollution from the adjacent motorway, to acceptable levels. However, it would have similar movement sustainability issues to the other two sites at Stanborough.

72. The southern part of the site protrudes into the critical gap between Hatfield and Welwyn garden City, which has been classified as most essential GB. Consequently, development on the southern part of this site, beyond the extent of the existing built development on the other side of Great North Road, is unlikely to be found sound. In such circumstances its use by built development would not be appropriate.

## **Welham Green**

### **Green Belt sites submitted to the Examination in 2020**



## **WeG1 Welham Manor and WeG3a Land at Station Road**

73. These adjacent sites are located on the western side of the village. Access considerations suggest that they would benefit from being planned on a comprehensive basis. This is compounded by the need to ensure that undeveloped land to the east of WeG1 and to the north of WeG3a, close to Station Road, do not become land locked. The whole area could probably accommodate about 100 dwellings.
74. When assessed individually, the removal of WeG1, which is already partially developed, from the GB was considered to only result in moderate-low harm to its purposes. When assessed individually, the loss of WeG3a was considered to result in moderate harm. There is a well-developed hedge and adjacent vegetation along much of the southern boundary to WeG3a. Although some strengthening would be required, it would act as a partial visual screen from the wider GB, thereby reducing the impact of the development upon that area immediately.
75. The sites are within a reasonable walking distance of a arrange of local shops, the PS, bus stops with regular bus services to a range of destinations, as well as a railway station with frequent services to London, Hatfield and Welwyn Garden City.
76. There are no highway issues and it is agreed that any potential harm to the setting of nearby listed buildings could be appropriately mitigated. The sites could contribute to the five-year supply of housing.
77. Comparatively, the development of these sites would be less harmful to the GB's purposes than most and they are in a sustainable location adjacent to the most sustainable excluded village. Their development consequently meets the exceptional circumstances test and is sound.

## **WeG10 Dixons Hill Road**

78. This agricultural field could accommodate about 120 dwellings. When assessed individually, the harm caused to the GB's purposes, through the development of this site, was considered to be moderate. However, its long western boundary is open, and it would be necessary to create a landscaped feature to provide a new robust and permanent GB boundary. This would take time to establish.
79. The site is within a walkable distance of the village school and local shops, as well as the bus stops on Dixons Hill Road. However, the frequency of bus services here is less than elsewhere in the village and

the site is about 1km from the railway station. In this respect it is less sustainable than some other sites in Welham Green.

80. Providing a comparative assessment of the sustainability of potentially available sites in Welham Green does not suggest that the housing development requirement for the village<sup>1</sup>, can be more appropriately met elsewhere, then this site would be found sound.

## **2020 Green Belt sites not formally submitted**

### **WeG6 Skimpans Farm**

81. This site, which could accommodate about 70ds, was covered by the whole of parcel 59 in the LUC stage 3 assessment. The harm to GB purposes, through its development, was assessed to be moderate. The LUC stage 3 study also found that the site is contained by existing built development and a railway embankment. These surround about three quarters of the site. The open area is adjacent to woodland. Consequently, the assessment found that this site's release would have limited impact on the wider GB.
82. I have commented elsewhere on the inappropriateness of introducing a green gap policy, into the site assessment process, at this stage. However, that consideration seems to me to be particularly disingenuous in the context of this site. Whilst the site is undoubtedly open land between Welham Green and Brookmans Park, there is already built development beyond some of the south-eastern boundary, which faces Brookmans Park. Although in the GB, that development nevertheless affects its openness. Additionally, that development is located at the closest point to Brookmans Park in the context of built development. In considering the site's contribution to the Local Purpose LUC found that it only played a partial role in preventing the merger of the two settlements. It also commented that it would not have a significant impact on narrowing the gap between Welham Green and Brookmans Park.
83. None of the proposed development would extend any closer to Brookmans Park than the benchmarks already set by the community centre and the church. At the nearest point, the two settlements are about 500m apart but most of the distances between built development are noticeably greater. The intervening area is mostly comprised of woodland so that there is no intervisibility between the settlements. The Council comments that the proposal would reduce the width of the gap at its narrowest by about 100m. However, this calculation ignores

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<sup>1</sup> NB It was confirmed at the Stage 8 Hearings that the 100 residential units proposed at site SDS7, Marshmoor policy area were to be reserved for the use of visiting research and other key workers and would not be contributing to the Borough's wider housing needs.

the observations that it makes elsewhere about the need to offset development from the boundary in order to maintain the flood plain.

84. The Council accepts that there are strong features along the south-eastern boundary of the site that could define the GB boundary. Additionally, the need to protect the floodplain from development introduces further possibilities to strengthen the screening effect of woodland in the area between the two settlements. The floodplain could remain in the GB so that it is not necessary to remove 4ha from the GB to accommodate about 70 dwellings as the Council claims.
85. The site is adjacent to a church and community centre and is within walking distance of the station, shops and bus stops serving frequent services to a variety of destinations. The PS is about 1km away. Whilst some pupils could cycle and others might walk, most probably would not. Nevertheless, in comparative terms this is a sustainable location for residential development on a site whose removal from the GB would only cause moderate harm to its purposes.
86. There are no severe highway issues and it is agreed that any potential harm to the setting of the adjacent listed buildings could be appropriately mitigated. Noise from the railway could be ameliorated by a bund and planting, which could also eventually screen the site from passing trains. The site could contribute to the five-year supply of housing.

### **WeG12 Land north of Pooleys Lane**

87. This site, which could accommodate about 80ds, was covered by the whole of parcel 60 in the LUC stage 3 assessment. The harm to GB purposes, through its development, was assessed to be moderate. The study also found that the site, which is being partially used for grazing and stabling horses, is largely open and rural. Nevertheless, the harm to the wider GB that could result from its release, would be limited.
88. It was agreed at the hearing that if the site were to be developed, then the built development would be restricted to the area south of the electricity cables, with the area to the north being retained in the GB and as open space. Planting that could expand the woodland and wildlife areas to the north would help to further visually separate Welham Green from Hatfield. The GB to the west could be screened by enhancements to the existing hedge line.
89. I have commented elsewhere on the inappropriateness of introducing a green gap policy into the site assessment process at this stage. However, the site does form a part of the remaining undeveloped land between Welham Green and Hatfield to the west of

the industrial area. Parts of that area are also being considered for housing off South Way, a school in that location and another school at the New Barnsfield site, a short distance north of this site and immediately east of the industrial area.

90. Nevertheless, as the LUC Local Purpose points out, whilst the gap between Welham Green and Hatfield is fragile, the role that the openness of the whole of this site plays in that conundrum is reduced by the existing development to the east, which already joins the two settlements. Restricting the extent of built development to south of the electricity cables would limit the harm to the GB but not remove it. However, there would be some compensation if the buildings on the northern part of the site were removed and that area when landscaped, remained completely open.
91. The site is within a reasonable walking distance of a range of local shops, the PS, bus stops with regular bus services to a range of destinations, as well as the railway station, which has frequent train services to London, Hatfield and Welwyn Garden City. It is located adjacent to an existing large employment area and within easy walking distance of the proposed Marshmoor strategic employment area. From a movement perspective, this is a very sustainable location for new residential development.
92. Although the site would be accessed from a single access point that already serves a large number of dwellings and has obvious congestion issues, as a result of parked cars, the highway authority does not object to the proposal. Any noise issues from the adjacent industrial area, together with wildlife concerns could be resolved through mitigation. The sites could contribute to the five-year supply of housing.

### **WeG15 Land at Potterells Farm**

93. The site's development capacity is about 150ds. As a sub parcel, its loss from the GB was considered to result in moderate-high harm. In particular, it makes a significant contribution to purpose 3 countryside protection and its release would undermine the integrity of the wider GB to the south and west, particularly its visual openness. Whilst the LUC analysis did not take account of mitigation, the screening of the site from the remaining GB to the west and south would require a considerable length of green infrastructure that would take some years to establish before it began to reduce the visual impact of new development on the wider area.
94. The site is within a reasonable walking distance of a range of local shops and bus stops with regular bus services to a number of

destinations. However, although the nearest walkable distance to the school is about 0.6km, the average distance is about 0.75km, a distance that few young children tend to walk on a regular basis. Similarly, the railway station is over 0.7km from the eastern edge of the site and about 1km from its south-western part. Whilst this site does have positive attributes from a movement perspective, the site as a whole, in that context, is less sustainable than other sites at Welham Green that are being considered.

95. Apart from a large barn and the former farmhouse, the south-eastern part of the site is now largely unused, unkept and in places overgrown. This area's southern and western boundaries have a collection of trees and shrubs that help to visually separate it from the land used for agriculture to the south-west. With appropriate screening this area could be developed without having the GB impacts discussed above.
96. Between this area and the southern boundary to site WeG3a is agricultural land that following the development of that site, would be surrounded by development on three sides. Like the underused land, it has not been separately assessed from a GB perspective. However, the harm to the wider GB from the loss of these areas is likely to be less than moderate-high.
97. There are no insurmountable highway issues and any potential harm to the setting of nearby listed buildings or the nearby Swallow Holes Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) could be appropriately mitigated. In part the site could contribute to the five-year supply of housing.
98. Were this site to be progressed further, either in whole or in part, then its access and layout should be comprehensively planned with sites WeG1 and 3a.

### **WeG17 Land south of Dixons Hill Road**

99. The release of this site from the GB was considered to result in high harm. This is because of the resulting westward extension of the built-up area of Welham Green and the impact the site's development would have on the integrity of the wider GB to the south. In the context of the GB assessment around Welham Green, the release of land that would cause high harm to the GB's purposes does not appear to be necessary.

100. Consideration has been given to using this site for a new PS. However, such a location on the western edge of the village, would not be sustainable from a movement perspective. It would be more than 0.5km walkable distance from large parts of the existing village, some parts being up to 1km away. Such a location would be unlikely to maximise the number of PS children who walk to school.
101. Additionally, there is already congestion at peak times at the junction of Dixons Hill Road with Station Road and elsewhere. The addition of large numbers of additional cars to the network taking and collecting children from a school at this site would unnecessarily exacerbate this highway problem. In the context of the availability of land that is better related to the existing settlement and the options being considered for its expansion, this site is not a sustainable location for a school.
102. No highway safety or capacity matters or insurmountable infrastructure issues have been raised.

## **Brookmans Park**

### **Regulation 19 sites**

#### **HS21 and 23 Land at Golf Club Road**

103. These two small sites have already been found to be sound.

#### **HS22 Land west of Brookmans Park Railway station**

104. This site has already been found to be sound in principle. The LUC GB study concluded that its development would result in high harm to the GB's purposes, the site making a significant contribution to safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. The pre submission Stage 2 GB review came to similar conclusions. However, although the site's development would result in the loss of open countryside, it is contained to the west by Brick Kiln Wood and the hedge along its northern boundary, which could be strengthened, would limit views of the development from the open countryside to the north.
105. A landscaped screening bund to the north of the southern boundary could similarly screen the site from Hawkshead Road and the public footpaths to its north. The Council has reviewed the optimum location for this. I have suggested that the triangular area between the site's eastern boundary and the railway is removed from the GB and either allocated for development during the plan period or safeguarded for later years. A similar approach could be taken to the

southern parts of the originally proposed site, depending upon the housing need that the Council considers appropriate for the plan period at Brookmans Park and the appropriateness or otherwise of allocating other sites.

106. The whole of this site is within walking distance of a railway station, bus stops with regular services, the village PS, a range of local shops and other facilities. It is one of the most sustainable locations for new development, from a movement perspective, outside of the two towns.
107. There are no highway access, capacity or safety issues that cannot be resolved by mitigation, including maintaining the current nature and low traffic volumes along Bradmore Lane. The ecological issues raised can also be resolved through mitigation.
108. Whilst the stage 2 and 3 GB reviews consider that the site's development would result in high harm, on balance and with appropriate mitigation, as discussed, I agree with the Council's conclusion that the benefits of the site, particularly its movement sustainability, more than outweigh the adverse impact on the purposes of the GB and the loss of the site's openness. Following the satisfactory resolution of the matter of appropriate screening to the southern boundary, I find the proposal to be sound and conclude that there are exceptional circumstances to justify its removal from the GB.

## **Green Belt sites submitted to the Examination in 2020**

### **BrP1 Bell Lane**

109. This agricultural field could accommodate about 100 dwellings. Its assessment against the GBs purposes is somewhat confusing. Its consideration as a separate parcel (P72) notes that it is open and predominantly undeveloped so that its release would represent encroachment into the countryside. However, it also finds that it is contained on three sides by existing built development that is washed over. It concludes that if the parcel is removed from the GB in association with the adjoining area of built development (P68) then the harm from the site's release would be limited and the rating moderate. However, a minor extension to the parcel, at its south-western corner, to include a small area of woodland at Home Farm, supposedly increases the rating of the larger area to moderate-high. A landscaped feature along its north-eastern boundary could remove the intervisibility between the built development and the adjacent A1000 as well as the wider GB to the east.

110. There are no insurmountable highway issues and any potential harm to the setting of the adjacent listed buildings could be appropriately mitigated.
111. However, the site is about 2km from the village centre, which has a wide range of local shops and services, with the railway station and primary school a little further distant. Very few people would regularly walk these distances and the use of the facilities by cyclists, on a regular basis, is unlikely to be high. Whilst the promoter has offered to construct a segregated footpath/cycleway to improve the connectivity, the distance to the village centre would still be about 1.5km. There are bus stops close to the site, but the services are infrequent (6 per day, with 3 visiting Brookmans Park centre) so that persons for whom travel by bus is not the only movement option would be unlikely to use them on a regular basis. The services are also not particularly satisfactory for persons who have no choice other than to rely on the use of public transport to move about.
112. Chancellors secondary school is within walkable distance of the site, as are some retail facilities at a petrol filling station and garden centre. However, the latter two are on the opposite side of the A1000, a very busy main road that is difficult to cross on foot. There are no proposals to provide a crossing point, and it is not known whether it would be viable to install such facilities. Additionally, it is not known whether, given the standard of this road and its traffic flows, such a solution would be acceptable to the highway authority.
113. The evidence before the examination suggests that in comparison with other options, this is not a particularly sustainable site for new residential development. Unless there is a genuine local need for additional housing that cannot be met in a more movement sustainable location and where exceptional circumstances for GB release can be justified, then its development is unlikely to be found sound.

## **2020 Green Belt sites not formally submitted**

### **BrP12a Land north of Peplins Way**

114. This site, which could accommodate over 100ds, was not independently assessed by the LUC GB study. It formed a part of a much larger parcel (P66), which was centred around Brookmans park golf course. Additionally, it forms about a half of parcel P66a which also includes a finger of open agricultural land extending further into the countryside to the north-east. The harm to GB purposes, if both wider areas were to be developed, was assessed as being moderate-high.



115. The site is immediately to the north of existing development at Peplins Way, through which it would gain access. Its western and much of its northern side are contained by Peplins Wood and there is woodland a short distance to the east across a part of the golf course. The LUC study noted these elements of containment and also found that the sub parcel was more strongly contained by the existing built development than the larger parcel. It also found that the GB harm that could result from release of the site would be more limited than the whole parcel. These considerations are more acute in the context of the proposed site than in the context of the sub-parcel as a whole. Consequently, if it had been separately assessed, its rating could have been different. Whilst the assessment comments that the development of the whole sub-parcel would lead to greater containment of the golf course to the south, weakening its contribution to the GB, the golf course is to the east of the site and not the south. It is also screened from much of the golf course by vegetation.
116. I have commented elsewhere on the inappropriateness of introducing a green gap policy into the site assessment process at this stage. Whilst this site is undoubtedly open land between Brookmans Park and Welham Green, as the LUC study notes, when considering the local purpose, there are blocks of woodland to the north-west of the parcel, between the settlements, which act as separating features. Whilst the railway does act as a connecting feature and does reduce the perception of separation between them, the railway is physically distant from this site and not visible, there being woodland to separate them. In considering the site's contribution to the Local Purpose, LUC also found that it only played a partial role in preventing the perception of merging between the two settlements.
117. There is currently a gap of about 0.5km between built development at the two villages. The proposal may reduce it by 0.05km if the whole of the area up to Peplins Wood were to be developed but the development could clearly be offset to avoid this. Indeed, as Peplins Wood is a Local Wildlife site, there will be a requirement for an undeveloped buffer, with a minimum width of 15m, in any event. The development could be screened from the rest of the parcel to the north-west by earth mounding and planting, removing any impact that it would otherwise have on the wider GB to the north-east.
118. The Council comments that the proposal, in common with the development of WeG6, would reduce the gap between Brookmans Park and Welham Green by 100m. However, this calculation ignores the observations that it makes elsewhere about the need to offset development at WeG6 from the boundary, in order to maintain the flood plain, and it doesn't consider the point discussed above about the wild life considerations or the potential to extend Peplins Wood.

119. The site is between 0.5km and 0.75 km from the village centre which has a range of local shops and other facilities as well as bus stops with regular services to a number of destinations. The railway station is a little further distant, but the PS is much closer and within easy walking distance. From a movement perspective, this is a sustainable location for development.
120. The access via Peplins Way is congested, particularly at school start and finish times, but any potential issues that could affect the free flow of traffic could be mitigated. Wildlife and flooding issues could also be appropriately mitigated. The site could contribute to the five-year supply of housing.

### **BrP34 Brookmans Park Transmitting Station**

121. This site could accommodate about 300ds and 10,000 sm of employment floorspace. The LUC GB assessment also included the built-up complex of the adjacent garden centre and the site itself contains a number of buildings associated with the transmission station and other uses. Nevertheless, the conclusion was that its development would cause moderate-high harm to the purposes of the GB. This is largely because it would extend the built-up area of Brookmans Park to the west of the A1000 and into the open countryside beyond it.
122. There are no insurmountable highway issues and any potential harm to the setting of the transmission station, the historic woodland and other ecological assets could be appropriately mitigated.
123. The site is between 2.3 and 3km from the railway station and PS, a little closer to the village centre, which has a wide range of local shops and services. However, very few people would regularly walk these distances and the use of these facilities by cyclists on a regular basis is also unlikely to be high, particularly given the need to use the heavily trafficked A1000 for some of the distance. If the site was developed subsequent to BrP1 and the suggested segregated footpath/cycleway, to improve the connectivity, was constructed, the distance to the village centre would still be about 2.0km. In my view this would not appreciably increase the usage of walking and cycling as a means to access these local facilities.
124. Chancellors secondary school is within a walkable distance of the site, as are some retail facilities at a petrol filling station and garden centre. However, the school is on the opposite side of the A1000, a very busy main road that is difficult to cross on foot. There are no proposals to provide a crossing point, although it may be viable to install such facilities. However, it is not known whether, given the

standard of this road and its traffic flows, a surface solution would be acceptable to the highway authority.

125. The garden centre is 700m from the southern part of the site and the garage 1km from the same point. Whilst a segregated footpath/cycleway could be constructed for part of this route, through the site, parts of the journey would have to be made along the side of a very busy primary road. In consequence many residents would choose to drive to these facilities rather than to walk or cycle.
126. There are bus stops close to the site, but the services are infrequent (6 per day, with 3 visiting Brookmans Park centre) so that persons for whom travel by bus is not essential would be unlikely to use them on a regular basis. The services are also not particularly satisfactory for persons who have no choice other than to rely on the use of public transport to travel.
127. The site is still used for radio transmission and there is no definite date programmed for these operations to cease. There could therefore be delivery issues. Whilst the development of the site would require upgrades to the wastewater network, these could be implemented in a reasonable and acceptable timescale. However, if not commissioned until the station is about to close and that becomes some years away then deliverability will be further compromised.
128. The evidence before the examination suggests that in comparison with other options, this is not a particularly sustainable site for new residential development. At the same time its removal from the GB would cause moderate-high harm and its delivery is not certain. In such circumstances I agree with the Council's findings and conclude that site's proposed development is unlikely to be found sound.

## **Little Heath**

### **Regulation 19 sites**

#### **HS22 Land north of Hawkshead Road**

129. This site has already been found to be sound.

#### **HS24 Land south of Hawkshead Road**

130. The final LUC GB report ( EX99 March 2019) removed the separate assessment for this site (parcel 78c) that was contained in the initial

report (EX88 August 2018), incorporating the site into the larger 78b parcel, which was given a rating of high harm<sup>2</sup>.

131. In reviewing and changing its findings LUC said that it considered “the release of this area would weaken the Green Belt boundary and the integrity of adjacent Green Belt land, and that the rating for P78b would not therefore be reduced by a more limited release of land. Scenario P78c has therefore been deleted”.
132. At the hearing in July 2020 I expressed concerns about the potential visual effect this development could have on the wider GB, both in Welwyn-Hatfield and Hertsmere, which this site adjoins to the south-west. I asked the Council and site promoter to assess the ability to screen this site from the wider GB through earth mounding and planting.
133. Additionally, I asked the Council to consult with Hertsmere Council to establish whether or not a readily recognisable boundary that used physical features to seamlessly interface a new edge to the GB, could be achieved in this part of Little Heath and Potters Bar and whether such a boundary would be likely to be permanent.
134. The additional work undertaken by the site promoter demonstrates that a planting belt, along the north western boundary, could be established and that it would eventually screen the site from the wider GB, including from the public footpath adjacent to Hawkshead Road. However, given the prominent location of the site, it would take some years before all of the development became effectively screened from views across the valley.
135. The consultation with Hertsmere suggests that the establishment of a seamless new edge to the GB boundary, across the Borough boundary, is not an option at this point in time because Hertsmere Council is not considering releasing land for new development in the adjacent part of Potters Bar.
136. The site is about 1.5km from Oakmere Park, which has a range of local shops and services, with the railway station a little further away. Very few people would regularly walk these distances and the use of facilities by cyclists on a regular basis is unlikely to be high. The primary school is 0.6km from the site’s entrance (about 0.9KM from the southern part of the site). Consequently, whilst some young children are likely to walk to and from school each day many would not.
137. There are bus stops close to the site, with hourly services to Potters Bar and north London and to various destinations towards Luton.

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<sup>2</sup>That assessment gave the site a rating of moderate-high

Persons for whom travel by bus is essential would have a reasonable frequency of service if not an ideal one. This is not a particularly sustainable location for a significant amount of new development.

### **Green Belt sites submitted to the Examination in 2020**

#### **LeH4&5 Land at Videne and Studlands, Hawkeshead Road**

138. These adjacent sites are located on the northern side of Hawkshead Road. Access considerations suggest that they would benefit from being planned on a comprehensive basis.
139. The stage 3 GB assessment considered that the development of these sites, when considered together and along with the Swanley Bar area to the north, would have a moderate impact on the purposes of the GB. However, the proposed new boundary to the GB is erratic and not clearly defined to follow recognisable features that are likely to be permanent. The proposed development area would leave a narrow finger of land between itself and two new dwellings that have recently been provided on land to the east. Whilst this land was not independently assessed by the GB studies, it clearly demonstrates the same characteristics as the proposed development sites and would most likely have been given the same rating.
140. I have asked the Council to revisit the GB boundary in this area, in order to achieve a more legible and logical boundary that excludes the developable parts of the finger of land from the GB and includes it either within the development area or as safeguarded land. Additionally, as the adjacent built development makes no contribution to the GBs openness, it is appropriate for it also to be outside the GB.
141. The movement sustainability credentials of these sites are very similar to those discussed above in the context of site HS24. Nevertheless, despite the comparatively poor movement sustainability credentials of this site, there is a need for some new development at Little Heath if local needs are to be satisfied locally. Development in this area would be less harmful to the GB's purposes than development at site HS24.

#### **Cuffley**

142. In paras. 120 and 121 of my Interim Report, I set out some of the parameters relating to settlement sustainability and highway concerns that I would ask the Council to consider when deciding upon an overall distribution of development that necessitates GB release.

#### **Regulation 19 sites**

143. Apart from Site HS31, Land west of St Martin de Porres Catholic Church, none of the other sites have been found to be unsound. HS26 The Ridgeway and HS28 Land at Northaw Road have already been found sound and HS27 Land at Meadway has been found sound subject to reviews of the precise area to be developed and the wording of some of the policy criteria.

### **HS29 Land north of Northaw Road and HS30 Land at Wells Farm Northaw Road**

144. I discussed these sites in my Interim report at paras. 123 to 125. The sites were not individually assessed in the stage 3 GB report but formed the southern end of a much larger parcel (P87) that extended northwards. HS29 cannot be seen from most of the larger parcel and HS30, which in part is previously developed land and contains a number of buildings, has a mature hedge along its north-western boundary, which helps to screen the views of the existing built development from the wider GB.

145. The Stage 2 GB assessment found that HS30 did not contribute significantly to any of the national GB purposes and had moderate or strong boundaries. However, it also noted that it was detached from Cuffley.

146. Because of the topography and the existing hedge, both sites could be satisfactorily screened from the wider GB. In consequence I do not consider a high harm assessment to be appropriate for these two sites.

147. The sites are walkable to the PS and the bus stops on Northaw Road. However, bus services along Northaw Road are somewhat limited. HS29 is about 0.5km from the village centre, where there are more frequent bus services as well as a range of shops and local facilities. This distance is walkable by most people and commuters would probably walk from this site to the railway station. The distances from HS30 are further, so that a higher proportion of residents are likely to use the private car to access these facilities rather than to walk or cycle. Nevertheless, the locations of the bus stops and railway station suggest that this is a location that could enable a successful encouragement of the use of more sustainable means of travel.

148. The future of these sites, in the context of this plan, lies in the relative amount of overall development that is justified at Cuffley and the deliverability of the other proposed sites, as well as the site considerations discussed in my Interim Report.

## **2020 Green Belt sites not formally submitted**

### **Site Cuf15 Land to the south of King George V Playing Fields**

149. This site, which could accommodate 180 ds was not individually assessed by the stage 3 GB study. A larger parcel that included land to the north, as well as some to the west of the railway, was all considered to have a rating of moderate-high. Subdivisions adjacent to the existing built development were rated as causing moderate harm to the GBs purposes if developed. To what extent this site alone would maintain the high-harm rating, if separately assessed, is debatable. The area south-east of the electricity pylons probably would but to the north east of these the built development associated with the adjacent recreation facilities and at Wells Farm, in addition to the pylons themselves, have a real impact on this part of the site and reduce the sense of openness.
150. A defensible GB boundary could be created close to the southern boundary of the site and north of Northaw Brook. Additional planting could eventually minimise the impact of built development on the wider GB to the south-west.
151. The bulk of the site would be at least 1km from the village centre, where there are a range of shops and other local facilities. The station would be about 1.2 km. There are bus stops on Northaw Road but they are about a 0.5km walk from the centre of the site and the service is infrequent. The PS is about 0.5km away. Whilst most children would walk to school and the bus stops are accessible on foot, distances to other facilities tend to be beyond the limits that most people would regularly walk. Given that the movement sustainability credentials of sites HS29 and HS30 are better, unless Cuffley is to have an additional amount of new development, this site is unlikely to be found sound.
152. Other than adding to village congestion, no highway issues were raised. Any potential impact to heritage and ecological assets could be appropriately mitigated. The site in part could contribute to the five-year supply.

## **Rural area**

### **Regulation 19 site**

#### **Symondshyde**

153. This site had been discussed extensively at two previous hearing sessions. Following those the Council gave further consideration to the optimum extent of the development site, in the context of the varying

harms to the GB, the extent to which any visual harm to the wider GB could be appropriately screened and the development's interface with the Green Corridor. Additionally, along with Hertfordshire County Council, it looked at the viability of the proposed public transport and the optimum level of development needed to establish viable services in the context of the GB location. Further submissions were made by third parties on these outcomes and they were rigorously debated at the third hearing.

154. I discussed this site at length in my Interim Report paras. 84-95. I concluded that the submitted evidence suggested to me that if the overall housing requirement can only be met by the establishment of a new village within the Borough, then an expanded village on this site would appear to be the most appropriate solution.
155. Having now heard all of the evidence, I am satisfied that a viable, regular and frequent public transport system could be established, as well as viable local services and facilities, commensurate with a development of 1500 or more dwellings.
156. The extended area includes an area north-east of Furzeffield Wood, the eastern boundary interfacing with the proposed Green Corridor. Whilst the northern part of this extension includes a triangular area rated as resulting in high harm to the GB's purposes if developed<sup>3</sup>, this area has recently been quarried. Its topography has changed, as has its interface with the wider GB to the north-east.
157. Any revisions to this site should include the land between Long Grove Plantation and PF50, as well as the land between that wood and Wet Grove, both of which topographically relates to Symondshyde. They should be either included in the development proposal or safeguarded for later development, a means of access from the main Symondshyde development being secured through the policy criteria.
158. Nevertheless, there are sites, adjacent to some of the villages, with frequent public transport and where most local facilities are within easy walking distance. Some of these are more sustainable than a new village at Symondshyde would be. Some of them would also result in lower harm to the GB's purposes. However, the sustainability credentials of this location are likely to be better than those at a number of the examined sites that do not have a range of facilities within easy walking distance and regular, easily accessible public transport.

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<sup>3</sup> The area was not independently assessed but the much larger parcel 44 was rated as high harm overall. Adjacent land that was assessed in sub-parcels was considered to only cause moderate-high harm.



159. The Council should assess the evidence and reconsider whether or not a new village at Symondshyde is a justified component of its settlement strategy and if it considers it to be so, to what extent development should take place there during this plan period as opposed to subsequently?

*M Middleton*

**Melvyn Middleton**

**Inspector**

**May 2021**

### **Abbreviations**

ds	dwellings
EX	Examination Document
GB	Green Belt
Framework	National Planning Policy Framework 2012
FOAHN	Full Objectively Assessed Housing Need
IR	Interim Report
Km	kilometre
LUC	Land Use Consultants
P	Parcel
Para(s)	paragraph(s)
PB	Public Bridleway
PF	Public Footpath
PS	Primary School