

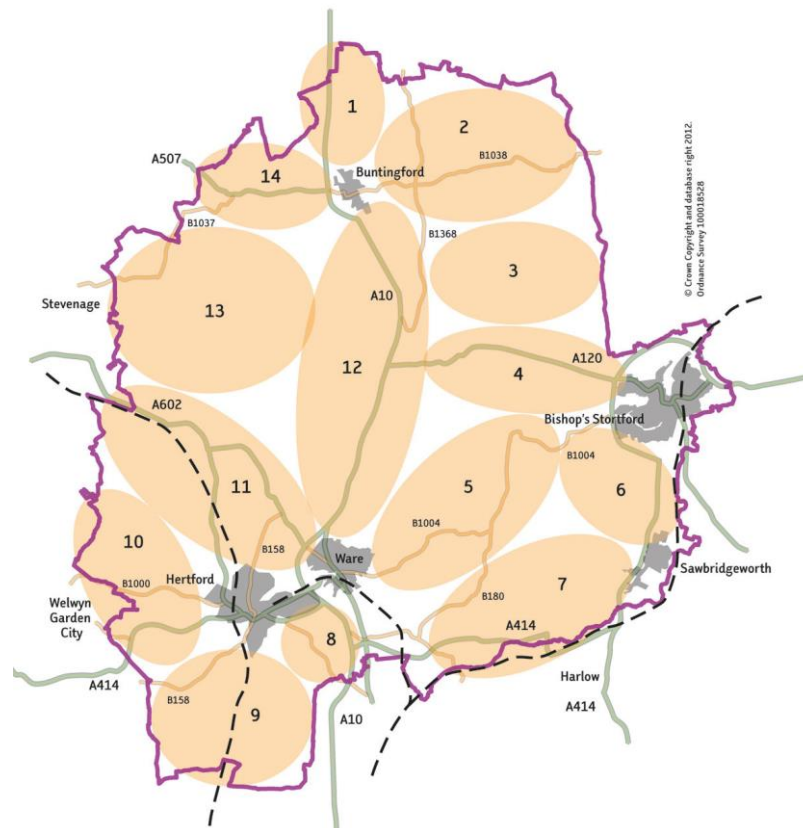
# Settlement Appraisal

## East of Stevenage

### 1. History

- 1.1 The Preferred Options District Plan did not include any development on land to the east of Stevenage. The [Supporting Document](#) of the Preferred Options District Plan records the various assessment stages that were undertaken to inform the Preferred Options Draft District Plan. It therefore provides an essential background to this current Settlement Appraisal. Chapter 4 of the Supporting Document explains the process of shortlisting or 'sieving' options or 'Areas of Search'.
- 1.2 The first stage of the option sieving process comprised a theoretical appraisal of areas of search rather than an assessment of specific sites. As shown in Figure 1 below, the district was divided into areas shown as ellipses to avoid the false impression of precision. At this initial shortlisting stage, the appraisal considered whether a new settlement of approximately 5,000 new homes could be accommodated in the wider area to the east of Stevenage (Area of Search 13), considering issues such as transport infrastructure, connectivity and coalescence.

**Figure 1: Areas of Search for New Settlements**

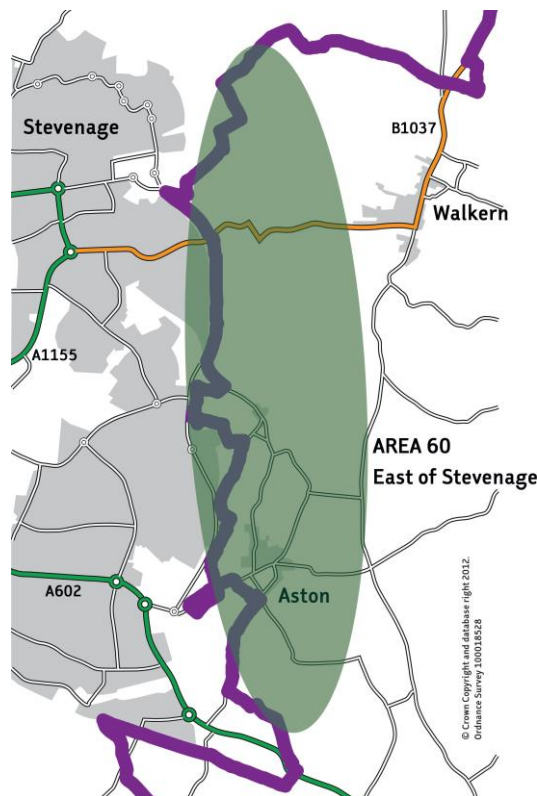


- 1.3 Area of Search 13 scored poorly in terms of transport infrastructure because the area had neither rail nor primary route potential and was therefore given a 'red' rating against this criterion. The area was given an 'amber' rating under the

settlement network criteria as it would be considered a satellite settlement to the town of Stevenage. A new settlement in this location was not considered to cause coalescence between towns and was therefore given a 'green' rating. It was concluded that Area of Search 13 was not a suitable location for a standalone new settlement as it was not considered possible to deliver the necessary scale of transport infrastructure required to support a new settlement in this location.

- 1.4 Whilst the potential for a new settlement was discounted, further work was then undertaken to consider the appropriateness of a strategic urban extension of around 5,000 homes. The area of land under consideration at the time is shown in Figure 2 below (Area of Search 60).

**Figure 2: Area of Search 60 – Land East of Stevenage**



- 1.5 A two stage sieving approach was undertaken. The first sieving stage was a factual assessment of 69 areas of search across the District against 21 different topic areas, drawing on input from stakeholders and evidence that was available at the time. Section 4.10.2 of the [Supporting Document](#) contains the evaluation of Area of Search 60. Based on the first sieving stage, Area of Search 60 was considered a 'marginal fail'. It was concluded that a strategic urban extension would require significant infrastructure in terms of employment, education, highways and waste water infrastructure and would be of a scale that would harm the Beane Valley. A smaller scale of development was also considered to fail this round of assessment because it would not be able to support the infrastructure requirements, given its unknown size, location and ability, thus making development too uncertain to warrant further consideration. The potential benefits associated with development were not considered sufficient to outweigh the uncertainty. This first sieving stage indicated that further consideration would need

to be given to whether strategic employment or housing need would provide the 'exceptional circumstances' necessary for a Green Belt Review in this location.

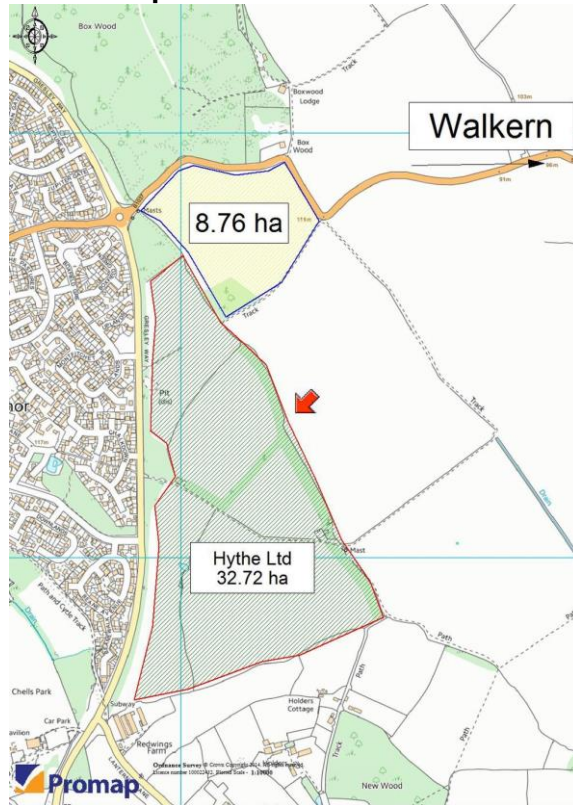
- 1.6 The second stage of the sieving process considered the potential impacts of development on the settlement or the locality. This stage drew together a number of considerations including links to the economic geography of an area, the capacity of town centres, travel to work patterns as well as physical or environmental constraints. Section 4.10.3 of the [Supporting Document](#) explains this second sieve in more detail. The sieving process at the time acknowledged that if it was determined that the East Herts housing and economic needs could be provided in other locations, there would be no need to develop to the east of Stevenage.
- 1.7 Following this second sieving stage, strategic development to the east of Stevenage was discounted for the following reasons:
- A strategic urban extension to the east of the town would require considerable supporting infrastructure which would be deemed unattractive to employers and investors, not able to compete with or complement the existing retail offer or too costly in terms of the provision of road networks.
  - The scale of development would require a large land take that would be detrimental to the Beane Valley, a wide valley containing rare and valuable chalk stream environments.
  - Alternative locations within East Herts were available and would meet the needs determined at that time. Alternative sites were also available and sequentially preferable around the north and west of Stevenage as established by the Stevenage and North Herts Area Action Plan which could meet development needs within the sub-regional context. Therefore land to the east of the town was not needed to accommodate the needs of Stevenage or East Herts.
- 1.8 Consequently the land to the east of Stevenage was not included in the East Herts Preferred Options District Plan published for consultation in 2014.

## **2. Consultation Responses**

- 2.1 Comments were received to the 2014 Preferred Options Consultation that suggested that land to the east of the town could be suitable for a smaller scale of development than was previously considered. Stevenage Borough Council suggested that the evidence used looked only at broad areas and therefore may have "missed the opportunity to properly consider more discrete opportunities for smaller-scale development and incorrectly reached the conclusion that east of Stevenage is an inappropriate location for development." Stevenage Borough Council also considered that "a relatively small-scale scheme to the east of Stevenage ~ of perhaps between 500 and 1,000 homes ~ could make a positive contribution to medium-term development requirements, introduce greater flexibility and certainty to the East Herts strategy and provide sustainability advantages over a number of the sites that have been identified."

2.2 Keymer Cavendish, the agent representing Hythe Ltd (landowner) made representations which included a large swathe of land which wraps around the eastern and north-eastern edge of Stevenage. However, part of the representation focused on the smaller triangle of land directly adjacent to Gresley Way, north of Aston village – as shown in Figure 3 below.

**Figure 3: Hythe Ltd representation to the 2014 Preferred Options District Plan consultation**



2.3 The representation cited housing need and delivery issues with the proposed Broad Locations that could result in the Plan being found unsound. Therefore smaller sites which could be delivered quickly without such infrastructure constraints should be considered more favourably, such as their new smaller site. The representation referred to the Stevenage Landscape Sensitivity Study (2006), which suggested that minor adverse impacts on the Beane Valley would remain until structural landscape planting that was undertaken in 1995/96 was established. This planting has had 20 years to establish and has achieved the objective of shielding the site from the Beane Valley. The representation outlines the site's suitability for a number of reasons including affordability compared to other locations.

### 3. The Emerging Strategy

3.1 A key element of plan-making is the consideration of all reasonable alternatives to the development strategy. Therefore it was considered sensible to assess the newly submitted site in the same way that other sites had been assessed. As such further work was undertaken on the Green Belt and transport modelling, with

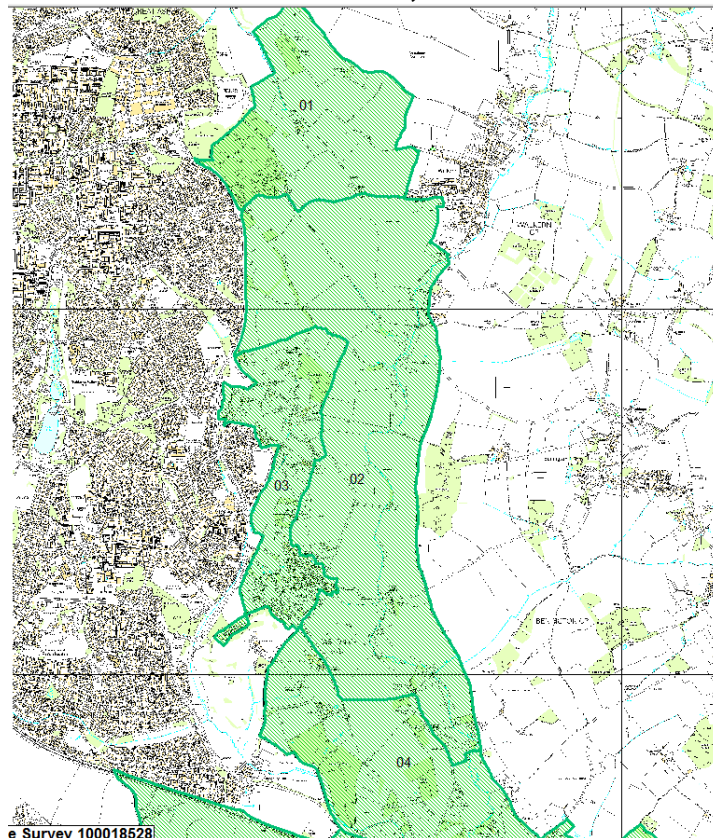
further consideration given to the potential impact of a smaller scheme on the landscape.

#### 4. Technical Assessments

##### East Herts Green Belt Review 2015 (Peter Brett Associates)

- 4.1 The 2015 East Herts Green Belt Review assessed the District's Green Belt against the purposes of including land within the Green Belt. Land to the east of Stevenage was divided into 4 separate parcels based on the Landscape Character Assessment parcels and using readily recognisable features on the ground. Parcels 1 to 4 cover the land to the east of the town, with the northern part of Parcel 2 adjoining Gresley Way and Parcel 3 covering Aston and Aston End. The Review notes that the current inner Green Belt boundary is well defined, with a well contained urban edge. The parcel has a paramount contribution to the roles of Green Belt in checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas and assisting in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. The Review recommended that overall the parcels had a very low suitability as an area of search. It should be noted however, that Parcel 2 covers a large area of land and as such the overall assessment of 'low suitability' relates to the parcel as a whole.

**Figure 4: East Herts Green Belt Review, 2015: Parcels identified by PBA**



- 4.2 Further consideration of the proposed site in relation to Green Belt purposes has been carried out by Officers as part of this appraisal. Whilst Gresley Way is a strong boundary, the structural planting carried out in the mid-1990s which sits along ridgelines has created a well-contained site with a relative sense of

enclosure, distinct from the adjacent broad Beane Valley. The smaller parcel therefore has a more limited role in terms of preventing urban sprawl as there is a clearly defined outer edge to the site. The smaller parcel makes no contribution to preventing the merging of towns. There are two designated Rights of Way through the southern part of the smaller parcel, with access to the countryside to the east of the town prohibited by the road infrastructure of Gresley Way. Whilst the Beane Valley is a rare example of a chalk stream environment, the structural planting makes the site physically and visibly removed from the Beane Valley.

Stevenage Green Belt Review 2014/2015

- 4.3 The first stage of the Stevenage Borough Council Green Belt Review, undertaken in 2014 came to a similar conclusion as the 2015 East Herts Review.
- 4.4 This was followed by a further assessment of smaller parcels undertaken in 2015, which divided the area to the east of Stevenage into smaller distinct areas. A more detailed assessment was undertaken in relation to these distinct areas. Area E4 covers land to the east of the town, north of Aston village, with two smaller sub areas: E4(i) covers the relevant area of land being promoted, while E4(ii) covers land between the potential site and the northern edge of Aston village along Long Lane.

Figure 5: Stevenage Borough Council Green Belt Review, 2014

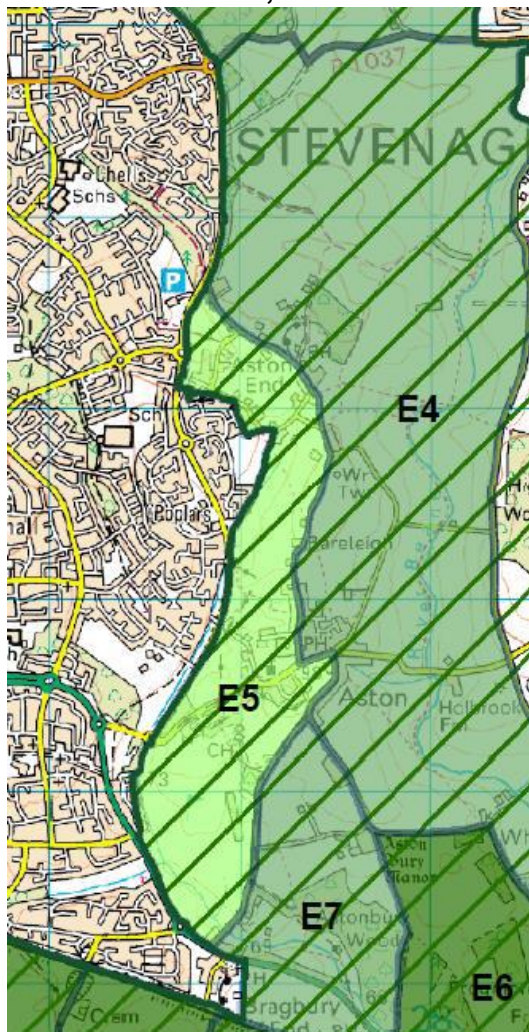
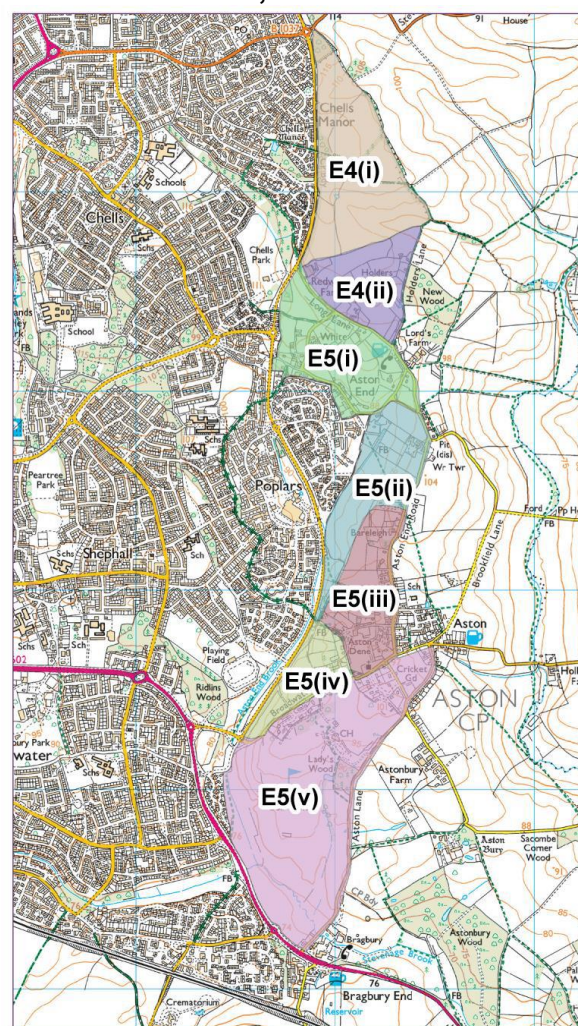


Figure 6: Stevenage Borough Council Green Belt Review, 2015



- 4.5 The commentary for segment E4 states that “the combination of topography, large-scale open fields, distant views and no immediate visual connection with the urban edge of Stevenage to the west, give this segment a strongly rural character and openness. As such the segment is an important part of the Green Belt to the east of Stevenage. Roads (albeit of varying size) form strong boundaries to this segment.”
- 4.6 The commentary for parcel E4(i) states that the parcel is “characterised by large scale open fields which form part of the plateau between the Beane Valley and Stevenage, this parcel makes a contribution to containing the easterly edge of Stevenage, but has been subject to extensive boundary planting which contributes significantly to its visual containment.” Parcel E4(ii) has a similar role as E4(i) and “is characterised by a more enclosed landscape of small fields in largely pastoral use, contributing to a strong sense of visual containment.” The Stevenage Review recommended the release of parcel E4(i) and the safeguarding of parcel E4(ii) for future development for 770 and 400 dwellings respectively.
- 4.7 While the Stevenage Green Belt Review is not formally endorsed by East Herts Council, the review follows a sound methodology and as the parcels are of a smaller scale, the review provides a useful more detailed independent assessment.

#### [East Herts Landscape Character Assessment 2006](#)

- 4.8 The East Herts Landscape Character Assessment, whilst this is an older document, it is considered a useful ‘sense-check’ which focuses only on the landscape and its capacity to accommodate change.
- 4.9 Land to the east of Stevenage is located within Landscape Character Area 39, the Middle Beane Valley. The assessment highlights the wide valley landscape and relative tranquility of the landscape despite its proximity to Stevenage. A key message from this assessment is that the impact of development on the eastern edge of Stevenage has been well concealed from the wider landscape and therefore has had minimal impact on the valley environment.

#### [Stevenage Landscape Capacity and Sensitivity Study 2006](#)

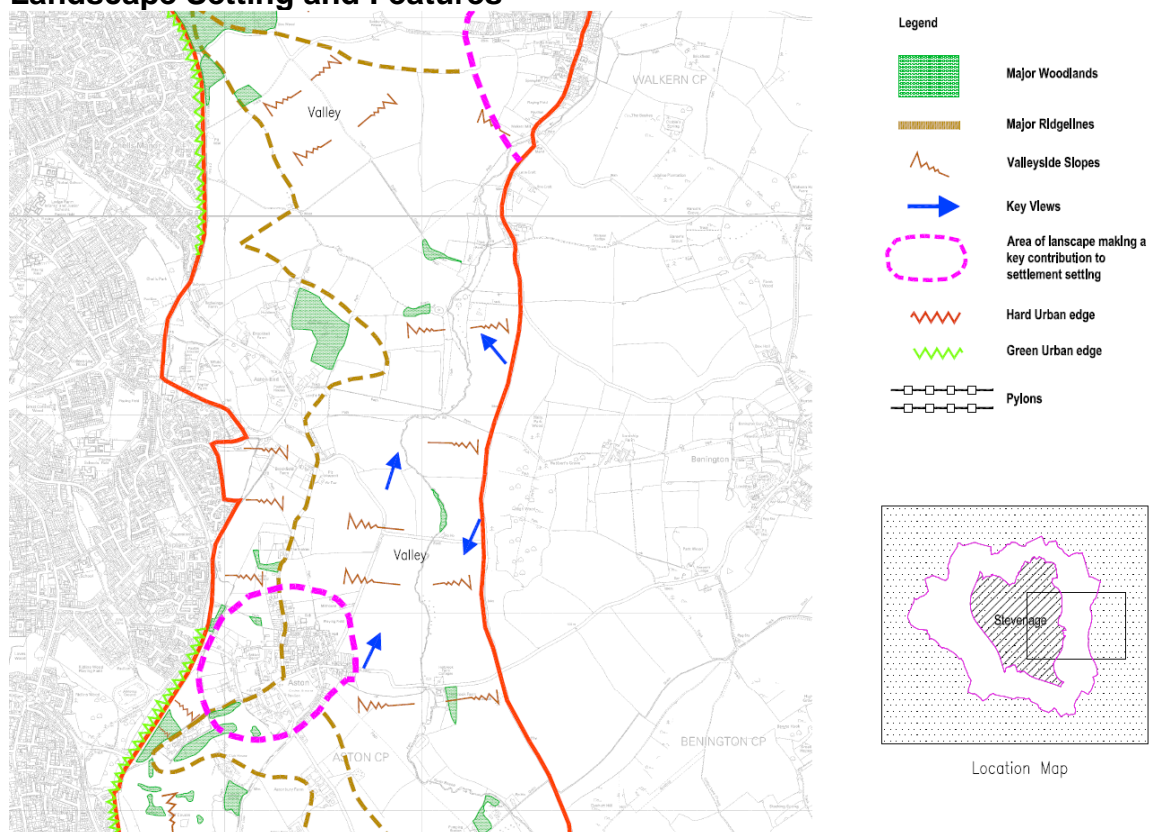
- 4.10 Stevenage Borough Council and North Herts District Council undertook a Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study in 2006 to help inform decisions about the future extent and directions of residential and employment growth around Stevenage. As with the East Herts Landscape Character Assessment, while this study is an older document, it provides a useful independent view on the potential for the landscape to the east of the town to accommodate development.
- 4.11 The Study identified smaller Local Landscape Areas using landscape features. Land to the East of Stevenage was defined as Local Landscape Character Area 6: Chells Manor Farmlands. The assessment indicates that the area has a moderate sensitivity and moderate capacity for a residential extension, i.e. that there are only likely to be minor or moderate effects on the specific

characteristics of the site from such development. The assessment suggests a number of specific landscape mitigation measures:

- Open space to the western boundary, incorporating and strengthening existing areas of advance woodland planting (to prevent wider visual impacts of urban development on the Beane Valley, conserving and enhancing its undeveloped character)
- Conservation and enhancement of the existing historic hedgerow framework
- Two storey residential development only
- Scope for possible minor adverse impacts on the Beane Valley until planting is fully established.

4.12 The assessment includes two concept diagrams; one which sets out the landscape setting and features (Figure 5b of the Assessment seen in Figure 7 below); and one which illustrates how potential development could fit within these constraints (Figure 17 of the Assessment seen in Figure 8 below).

**Figure 7: Stevenage Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study Figure 5b Landscape Setting and Features**





**Figure 8: Stevenage Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study Figure 5b Potential Development**



#### Transport Modelling 2015

- 4.13 In order to better understand the potential implications of development in this location, the Council commissioned Aecom via the County Council in May/June 2015 to look at future transport issues in response to the potential development site to the east of Stevenage and to identify mitigation proposals if required. The model tool used was the Stevenage, Hitchin Urban Model (SHUM) originally developed to assist the preparation of the Hitchin and Stevenage Urban Transport Plans. The model tested the addition of two roundabout junctions off Gresley Way to serve 750 homes and a two form-entry primary school (40% of homes (300) were assumed to be affordable homes for the purposes of trip rate calculations). 312 trips were forecast during the AM peak and 324 trips in the PM peak.
- 4.14 The study concluded that the development would not have an adverse effect on the highway network and that the two additional roundabouts on Gresley Way may have the beneficial effect of slowing vehicles down and staggering entry of vehicles to key junctions. Because the additional junctions would make the journey time along Gresley Way slightly longer, this may cause a minor dispersal of vehicles to other routes on the local road network. However, this was not considered to be an issue in terms of the performance of the network. The A602/Gresley Way junction and the A1 junctions in particular already experience congestion. The additional vehicles associated with the potential

development of 750 homes would make only a small contribution to this existing situation both when considered a standalone development and in the context of the wider anticipated growth around Stevenage.

## **5. Interim Conclusion**

- 5.1 Following consideration of the further technical work on Green Belt and transport modelling, together with further consideration of landscape matters, Officers concluded that a smaller site for up to 750 homes to the east of Stevenage could be a reasonable alternative for development should further sites be required to meet the Council's objectively assessed housing need. As such Officers considered that further work should be undertaken to assess the wider implications and infrastructure requirements arising from development in this location.

## **6. Stakeholder Engagement**

- 6.1 In order to consider the wider implications and infrastructure requirements arising from development in this location the Council invited the landowner's agents (who had by this time changed to Pigeon Land Ltd) and other statutory stakeholders to a Stakeholder Workshop which was held on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2015 to discuss the potential for around 750 homes to the east of Stevenage. In addition to East Herts Council Officers and the site promoters, the following stakeholders were represented:

- Stevenage Borough Council officers
- Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust
- Herts County Council – Highways (Development Management, Transport Modelling, Passenger Transport, Strategy and Programme Management)
- Herts County Council – Education
- Herts County Council – Property
- NHS England / NHS Hertfordshire
- Thames Water

- 6.2 To assist the discussion, Pigeon Land Ltd provided a concept plan detailing what development might look like at in this location.

- 6.3 The aim of the meeting was to identify the main issues that would require further testing through the District Plan. The following matters were particularly relevant:

### **Housing**

- Given the proximity of the site to Stevenage there should be consideration given to the housing needs of Stevenage in terms of the type and mix of dwellings, including the desire for aspirational housing to complement the dominance of three bedroom terraced properties in the stock of the town.
- Affordable homes should be distributed throughout the site and would meet the needs of those on the East Herts register. There should be a steady flow of provision.

### **Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople**

- The site should make provision for either a Gypsy and Traveller site or a site for Travelling Showpeople which should be designed in accordance with best practice.

### **Transport**

- Only a small proportion of the trips generated by the site head east, with the rest moving towards the town centre and the A1(M). Key constrained parts of the network such as the A602/Monkswood Way, A602/Gresley Way and A1 junctions would not be adversely affected by the additional movements.
- The provision of a primary school within the site would mean the majority of the trips associated with the school would be within the neighbourhood, although some external trips would be generated through teacher movements and parental choice.
- Cycleways and footpaths should be provided to ensure connectivity to existing neighbourhoods as well as bus routes and bus stops. Detail such as bus route alignment would need to be addressed through masterplanning.

### **Waste Water**

- Sewerage capacity issues at Bragbury End were noted, upgrades will be needed as well as on-line storage.

### **Education**

- All primary schools in the school planning area are operating at or near capacity and forecasts suggest that this will continue. A two-form entry primary school with early-years provision would be required on a relatively flat site of approximately 2.5ha.
- There will be a deficit of secondary school places of three-forms of entry by 2021.

### **Biodiversity**

- The site currently has a relatively low ecological value; any development should therefore result in a net gain in biodiversity across the site. Detailed ecological assessments should be undertaken and mitigation planned for appropriately. Sustainable drainage should be integrated into the design and there are likely to be the key opportunities to create an ecologically rich and multi-functional environment.

### **Healthcare**

- NHS primary care provision would be required to serve residents as well as secondary care facilities. Multi-use facilities are the preferred format which offer a greater capacity but are more expensive. Modelling work is ongoing to determine the need for new or the expansion of existing facilities.
- The care home element of the site would generate a considerable demand for primary care services.

## **7. Developer Meetings/Information**

- 7.1 Following the Stakeholder Workshop several meetings have been held with Pigeon Land Ltd. The meetings have focused on discussions over the principal

of development in this location and what an evolving masterplan should consider addressing the issues raised at the Stakeholder Workshop in particular.

- 7.2 In order to assist in its deliberations, the Council invited further information from landowners, developers and agents in the form of Delivery Statements which would form the basis of draft Statements of Common Ground. Officers consider that the Draft Delivery Statement for land to the east of Stevenage provides sufficient assurance that the issues raised have been or are capable of being addressed and that all supporting infrastructure can be provided.
- 7.3 These statements in their final form will contain details about required infrastructure and utilities and will be used to support the submission of the Plan to the Planning Inspectorate. The Draft Delivery Statements form the basis of the Deliverability Assessment below.

## **8. Deliverability Assessment**

### **Introduction**

- 8.1 This Deliverability Assessment section sets out details of the proposed development in relation to its feasibility in delivery terms. It also aims to preempt and address typical queries which could be raised by Inspectors at the Examination stage. It is a useful way of illustrating that a site would be deliverable and, if any outstanding issues have been identified that could be an impediment to development, that mitigation measures can be successfully employed to address them. Where it has not yet been possible to fully define such mitigation measures, there should be a clear mechanism in place to ensure that they can be addressed.

### **Aims & Objectives**

- 8.2 Development on land to the East of Stevenage will create an urban extension to the town. The site will provide a mix of tenure, including affordable and aspirational homes as well as a care home for retirement living and a site for Travelling Showpeople. The new homes will be supported by a range of community facilities located around a central hub including a primary school with early-years provision.
- 8.3 Accessed directly off Gresley Way, the site will support bus routes, cycle and pedestrian routes along a clearly defined road hierarchy incorporating tree-lined avenues and smaller residential roads. Open spaces will be provided which provide multi-functional drainage solutions as well as space for recreation, creating connections to the wider open countryside of the Beane Valley. Consideration of these place-making objectives has led to the conclusion that a lower site capacity is appropriate, and as a result, a figure of 600 homes has been identified as being deliverable.

## Identification of site constraints

### Green Belt

- 8.4 The site is currently located within the Green Belt, with the inner Green Belt boundary which is drawn tight against the built-up edge of Stevenage. The East Herts Green Belt Review 2015 (Peter Brett Associates), discussed above, came to conclusions on the suitability of land in terms of overall suitability as an area of search.

### Minerals

- 8.5 The land is outside the sand and gravel belt; therefore no prior extraction is required.

### Land Contamination

- 8.6 There are no previous land uses recorded on this site that may have caused land contamination.

### Surface Water Flooding

- 8.7 The site does not contain any flood zones, but there are two narrow channels along which surface water flooding may occur. These can be accommodated into the masterplanning of the site through the creation of attenuation ponds which have multiple purposes such as providing a means of natural filtration and as part of an area of open space.

### Heritage Assets

- 8.8 There are no known heritage assets on the site, however, as with a large proportion of the District, there may be unrecorded archaeological assets that will need to be considered and treated accordingly.

### Beane Valley Landscape

- 8.9 The greatest concern in terms of environmental impact is the relationship of the site with the Beane Valley, one of the world's rarest chalk stream environments. The Beane Valley is a wide open landscape with long views into and across the valley. Studies have shown however, that this site is well contained by structural planting which has defined the outer edge of the site and also created visual barriers within the site along particular contours, further shielding views from the current edge of Stevenage, from within the site towards the valley, and from the opposite side of the valley towards the site. The existing urban edge of the town is well-screened by a bund and established tree line. Where this has to be 'punched through' to create the new access points, special attention could be given to how this occurs without reducing this barrier, whilst also facilitating a visual connection between the site and the wider countryside.

- 8.10 In terms of the biodiversity and ecology of the site, there are no wildlife designations on the site and as an intensively farmed agricultural field, the current biodiversity is relatively low. However, existing trees, hedgerows and surface water features would need to be retained on the site with further enhancements made to the biodiversity of the site through on-site mitigation such as buffer and boundary planting, and the installation of bird and bat boxes for example.

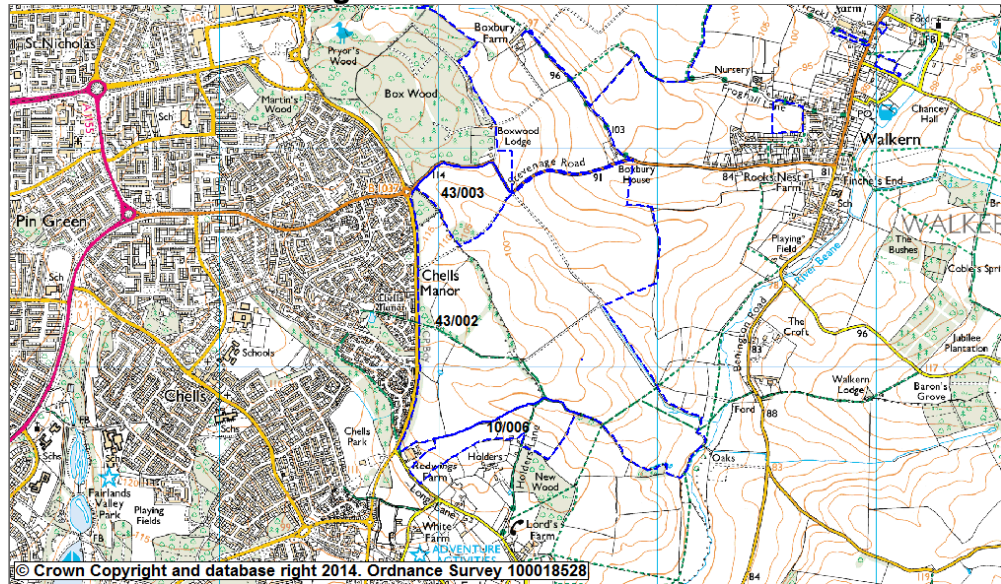
### Proximity to Aston Village

- 8.11 The site is located within the Parish of Aston which runs parallel to the east of Stevenage, extending to Box Wood to the north down to Watton-at-Stone and Datchworth to the south. There is currently no Neighbourhood Plan for the parish. The village of Aston is the Parish's main settlement, with Aston End forming a dispersed hamlet of farm holdings and individual houses to the north of the Parish, and Hooks Cross a hamlet which straddles the A602 to the south. The closest property to the site is Holders Cottage, Holders Lane in Aston End, which has extensive grounds (a remnant of historic agricultural enclosures). There is a tree belt which runs along the southern edge of the site which provides screening which is approximately 100 metres from the property. The site promoter's initial masterplan and the Council's concept diagram locates an open space within the south-eastern corner of the site, thus ensuring that the views from the Holdings remain largely open. Oblique views of some rooflines may be possible depending upon the final masterplan, but given the distance from the property, this is not considered to be a harmful impact.

### Consideration of Alternative Sites

- 8.12 As part of the Plan-making process it is necessary to consider whether there are alternative options to the proposed development. Having identified that land to the East of Stevenage is suitable in principle for development, it is also necessary to consider whether there is an alternative location in which to accommodate a similar amount of development. The Strategic Land Availability Assessment is one means of looking at other locations and forms of development.
- 8.13 Hythe Ltd submitted land totaling some 248 hectares to the Call for Sites which informs the Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA). SLAA site 43/002 covers land to the east of Gresley Way, wrapping around Box Wood, north of the village of Aston as shown in Figure 9 below.
- 8.14 The SLAA assessment of the site as a whole concluded that the site could form part of a larger strategic scale development in this location. The site could be considered to be either deliverable or developable depending on the nature and scale of development and would be subject to the review of the Green Belt in this location.
- 8.15 As has been documented in Section 1 of this appraisal, a considerable number of alternative approaches to development have been considered throughout the Plan-making process. The Council is charged with seeking to meet in full its objectively assessed housing need (16,400 homes), and in particular to ensure there is a rolling five year supply of land available to meet this need. Matters such as the requirement for major strategic infrastructure interventions are preventing other sites from coming forward early enough in the Plan period. It is the lack of delivery of such infrastructure that prevents alternative options such as new standalone settlements from being deliverable within the Plan period, even if sufficient land was available. As such, the alternative option of diverting development to areas beyond the Green Belt, i.e. in the rural area beyond the Green Belt would not represent a sustainable form of development.

**Figure 9: SLAA Site 43/002**



### **Duty to Co-operate**

- 8.16 Several Duty to Co-operate meetings have been held both between officers and at Executive Member level with Stevenage Borough Council. Records of each Member level meeting are reported to the District Planning Executive Panel and published on the Council's website. A Memorandum of Understanding has been jointly prepared to assist with each council moving forward to examination.

### **Land uses and proposals**

- 8.17 Land at Gresley Park will provide a new neighbourhood of approximately 600 homes. A neighbourhood centre located at the heart of the community would provide for local convenience retail needs, a healthcare facility (if necessary), a primary school with sufficient land to accommodate two forms of entry and a pre-school, a care home and assisted living properties, all located around a multi-functional open space. This pattern of development centred around a neighbourhood centre reflects the pattern of growth in Stevenage. The site will provide a mixture of house sizes and tenures to provide both affordable and aspirational homes in a highly accessible location which will be integrated with existing communities through safe footpath and cycle links. The site will be expected to make land available for self-build and custom-build properties.
- 8.18 The Council's recent Accommodation Needs Assessment of Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople concludes that nine Travelling Showpeople plots are needed over the Plan period, with seven of these to be delivered within the first five years of the Plan.
- 8.19 Land to the East of Stevenage is considered a suitable location for the delivery of a site due to the ease of access to the principal road network, access to services and because, being a strategic scale development, a site could be planned comprehensively as part of the wider masterplan. With such sites being limited in opportunity, this site is considered by Officers as being able to accommodate a proportion of the immediate needs arising. Therefore a site for

at least five pitches will be expected to be provided on the site within the first five years of the Plan, the details of which will be resolved through the masterplanning process.

- 8.20 It is an important consideration when preparing the masterplan that the quantum of development and the resultant land take is of a scale that can fit within the area of land that is already physically and visibly enclosed. Existing boundary planting will be maintained and reinforced where necessary to ensure that the development is well screened from within the Beane Valley and from the opposite west-facing valley side. The site is not visible from the nearest roads on the opposite valley side due to the intervening landscape and ridgelines. Given the distance from these vantage points even if glimpsed views of rooftops were to occur it is not considered that this view will be harmful. However, it is proposed that buildings do not generally exceed two storeys in height.
- 8.21 The development will take the form of a new neighbourhood in order to encourage walking and cycling to the neighbourhood centre and local school, and existing bus routes must be extended into the site creating bus connectivity to Stevenage town centre and train station. Local education, health and retail opportunities will serve to make the development sustainable, reducing the need for travel as well as providing local job opportunities.
- 8.22 Sustainable Urban Drainage will be incorporated into the layout of the development and will create multi-functional green spaces. Distinct character areas will be created within the development which will contain tree-lined avenues and streets to create urban greening and create a net gain in terms of biodiversity across the site, which is currently arable farmland.

### **Infrastructure needs**

- 8.23 Development of 500 homes would normally trigger the need for a single form of entry at primary school level. As capacity constraints have been identified with regard to the local primary schools, the County Council have indicated that sufficient land should be provided to facilitate a primary school of two forms of entry plus an early-years facility to provide for increased demand from the local catchment over time. At secondary school level, the County Council has indicated that secondary schools within Stevenage will be at capacity. However, the Council plans to bring back in to use the former Barnwell East school, which would serve the needs arising from the town as well as approximately one form of entry arising from the development at Gresley Park.
- 8.24 An important part of any neighbourhood is access to local primary healthcare facilities such as doctors and dentists. These facilities if provided will also serve the wider town.
- 8.25 The transport modelling commissioned by the Council tested two access points from Gresley Way. Hertfordshire Highways has indicated however, that they have no 'in principle' objection to the creation of three access points, though further detailed consideration would be required. The site promoter is suggesting three development parcels each with its own access via new roundabouts onto Gresley Way together with drainage and utilities



infrastructure to serve three home builders on site at once to enable early delivery of homes within the first five years of the Plan period. Transport modelling undertaken by Aecom identified the need to upgrade the Gresley Way/A602 junction and recommends an improvement scheme. This scheme is estimated at £426,000 towards which the development would be expected to contribute significantly if not in total.

- 8.26 Ideally the design and layout should be such that it avoids conflicts of vehicle movements through residential estate roads between Travelling Showpeople and the settled community. Further consideration of these sorts of issues can be determined through the masterplanning process.
- 8.27 The northern part of the site has underlying chalk and so may be suitable for infiltration drainage falling to an infiltration pond. The southern part of the site will need to be served by attenuation basins that will outfall to the existing surface water sewer in Gresley Way. If subdivided in to development parcels, each parcel could have its own surface water drainage infrastructure. Thames Water have confirmed that the Rye Meads Waste Water Treatment Works has the capacity to serve the development. The development can access existing foul water connection points within Gresley Way.
- 8.28 Utility plans indicate that adequate connections to the requisite services can be achieved. It is intended that the overhead electricity cables can be buried in a manner incorporated into road layouts and through the creation of new wayleaves. This will further reduce the visual impact of development in this location.

### **Delivery Study**

- 8.29 The East Herts Strategic Sites Delivery Study is a technical document which assesses the financial viability and deliverability of the proposals contained in the Preferred Options District Plan. While the study did not specifically assess the land to the East of Stevenage, it did test the financial viability of different site typologies. The study concluded that development schemes in the District, particularly in those areas adjacent to neighbouring settlements that are predominantly or wholly residential in nature, should be considered financially viable when taking into account the policy requirements of the District Plan as a whole.

### **Implementation Route Map: Masterplan, Phasing and Delivery**

- 8.30 The site will be allocated in the East Herts District Plan for 600 homes plus a site for Travelling Showpeople. The Green Belt boundary will be redrawn along the landscape belt, thus defining the outer edge of the development. The site promoter is willing to enter into a Planning Performance Agreement which will set out the timescales for agreeing the masterplan with Officers prior to a period of public engagement. It is the intention that the proposal will be submitted to the Council as a planning application prior to the Examination in Public, with the decision not anticipated until after formal adoption of the District Plan. This approach will illustrate to the Inspector that the proposal is fully deliverable, without prejudicing the decision-making process of the authority.

- 8.31 The Council requested in March 2016 that site promoters representing the proposed allocations submit a Draft Delivery Statement which will form the basis of a Statement of Common ground for the examination in Public. The site promoters provided an indicative phasing plan which, based on having three house-builders on site, building at the same time, each with an access from Gresley Way suggests that the development could be complete within the first five years of the Plan period. The Draft Delivery Statement also suggests it would be possible to have two house-builders on site and still complete within five years. However, the start date of delivery will need to be amended along current anticipated timescales, with adoption of the District Plan not anticipated until late 2017.
- 8.32 The community hub, bus routes, cycle and pedestrian links will be delivered alongside the homes to ensure that new residents will have access to an appropriate level of services and facilities and to encourage the use of non-car modes of transport. The Draft Delivery Statement indicates that the proposal is viable and deliverable.

## 9 SA Objectives

- 9.1 The Sustainability Appraisal is an integral part of Plan-making. This Settlement Appraisal forms part of the Sustainability Appraisal process as it considers the impacts arising from development and a consideration of alternative options. To assist the broader District-Wide Sustainability Appraisal, each of the urban extension options and the proposed development strategy for each East Herts town has been assessed against the Sustainability Appraisal Framework as updated by the Strategic Housing Market Area Spatial Options Distribution work. The appraisal of land to the east of Stevenage below describes how the site will meet the objectives as set out in the Sustainability Appraisal Framework. The wider likely cumulative impacts of development will be assessed in the Sustainability Appraisal supporting the District Plan.

### *Air Quality*

- 9.2 The site is not near to an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) and is not considered likely to exacerbate air quality issues. The site will have tree-lined avenues and will increase tree planting across the site. Buffer planting required to minimise and mitigate impacts on areas of woodland will increase biodiversity across the site mitigating air quality impacts arising from increased vehicle movements and buildings.

### *Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure*

- 9.3 Whilst ecology interests on the site is limited, there are two wildlife sites near to the proposed allocation: Box Wood, which lies to the north of the site and New Wood to the south of the site. A phase 2 survey for reptiles has indicated that there are no newts present in the shallow pond within the site. There is low biodiversity value within the areas of arable woodland, however, the woodland belts and hedgerows have the potential to support bats, birds dormice and badgers. Mitigation will therefore be required which will be achieved through the retention and positive management of mixed plantation woodland, landscape belts and enhanced green infrastructure corridors through the site.

### *Community and Wellbeing*

- 9.4 The proposed housing mix and tenure and range of community facilities will support all age ranges, including the needs of an ageing population. The provision of bungalows and assisted living units will also provide for those with specialist physical needs. The community hub will provide for a primary school with pre-school facility along with local shops and healthcare services. The use of cycle-ways and footpaths will connect the site to the existing town and a fit-trail has been proposed by the site promoter and would be designed around the site.

### *Economy and Employment*

- 9.5 The Stevenage Local Plan seeks for a proportion of new homes to be 'aspirational homes', larger (four bedroom plus) semi or detached properties to provide an alternative to the dominant Stevenage housing stock of three bedroom terraced properties. This approach also seeks to retain workers who would otherwise seek housing outside of the town. The education, retail, care home and healthcare facilities will also provide local job opportunities. The site is located relatively close to the Pin Green Industrial Estate and Gresley Way offers transport options to enable access to the town centre and to the A602.

### *Historic Environment*

- 9.6 The site lies outside a defined Area of Archaeological Significance. However, with all developments the Council requires assessments to be undertaken prior to development occurring. The Delivery Statement indicates that a preliminary archaeological appraisal sets out that there is evidence of prehistoric and Roman activity within the surrounding area and as such, a more detailed archaeological assessment should be undertaken prior to development. This will need to be timed to prevent delay to commencement of development on site.

### *Housing*

- 9.7 The proposal provides for a wide range of house types and mix, with an appropriate quantum and mix of affordable housing, bungalows, family sized homes, aspirational homes, a care home and assisted living properties. A site will also be provided for Travelling Showpeople. The site is proposed to come forward within the first five years of the Plan period.

### *Land*

- 9.8 There will be a variety of densities across the site ensuring that the land is used efficiently but in a manner that respects the edge of settlement location within a landscaped setting. The land is currently in agricultural use, being arable fields there is therefore no contaminated land to remediate.

### *Landscape*

- 9.9 Despite its proximity to the Beane Valley, the site is well contained and screened from the more open landscape of the valley. Mature tree belts and hedgerows will be maintained and enhanced and the design layout will incorporate tree-lined avenues and areas of open space and water features. The topography will dictate the layout and density of development to maintain a softer outer edge and to ensure building heights on areas of higher ground are appropriate.

### *Low Carbon Development*

- 9.10 The site will incorporate footpaths and cycleways and facilitate a bus route through the site connecting to the existing town, thus facilitating the use of alternative modes of transport. The site will not support a decentralised heating system but will comprise buildings that incorporate sustainable building features exceeding building standards. On-site flood attenuation measures will be a fundamental element of the overall design of the site, incorporating natural drainage features and the creations of suds and swales.

### *Transport*

- 9.11 The development site is well located to provide good connections to and extend the network of off-road cycle routes that traverse the town. Cycleways and footpaths will be incorporated into the design along with safe crossing points to provide pedestrian connectivity to the existing town. Existing bus routes must be extended to run through the development. Transport modelling indicates that anticipated levels of vehicle movements generate by this development would not adversely affect the wider highway network, though the A602/Gresley Way junction will need enhancements.

### *Water*

- 9.12 Methods to minimise water consumption through construction and occupation of the development will be utilised and appropriate connections to water supply and waste water networks are possible. The wider Rye Meads Waste Water Treatment Works has capacity with local improvements to connection points required.

## **10 Conclusion**

- 10.1 The Council has undertaken consideration of the potential for development on land to the East of Stevenage through this appraisal, which includes the consideration of smaller parcels of land. As discussed in the Development Strategy Chapter, the Council has a duty to meet its identified housing need and, due to the lack of brownfield opportunities, this results in a consequential need to release some Green Belt land in order to achieve sustainable development in the District. Officers acknowledge that the assessment of the area to the east of Stevenage would not in itself suggest that the land would be suitable for Green Belt release. However, it should be noted that the Green Belt Study should be viewed in its overall context, whereby the majority of land assessed throughout the district via this process resulted in similar ratings being achieved. Therefore, of necessity, the imperative of meeting the District's housing need brings into deliberation locations that may not otherwise have been considered suitable to be brought forward for development.
- 10.2 On balance it is considered that, in order to allow for an urban extension to the sustainable settlement of Stevenage, it would be appropriate to allow some Green Belt release in this instance in order to meet identified housing need.
- 10.3 Notwithstanding a number of constraints, the site is well contained by an established tree line, is accessible from Gresley Way and is sufficient distance from the nearby village of Aston, to not impact visibly or physically. Sufficient

safeguards can be put in place to ensure that tree belts and landscape features are maintained.

- 10.4 The site will provide new homes in an established travel to work corridor and will provide new employment opportunities. The site will not only provide for a range of housing types including much needed affordable housing and homes for older people, but it will provide an opportunity to create more aspirational homes to assist in the regeneration ambitions of Stevenage Borough Council, retaining homeowners that would otherwise need to look outside the town for larger, semi-detached or detached homes.
- 10.5 The site will provide a number of benefits to both the new and existing community, namely through the provision of a new school and other community facilities. The site will also contribute towards the improvement of infrastructure which is necessary to support the wider growth within the town, namely the reinstatement of Barnwell East Secondary School and improvements to the A602/Gresley Way junction. The primary school and early-years facility will be in the centre of the development alongside community facilities, serving to create a focal point for the new community. The new school and healthcare facilities will also serve the wider population.
- 10.6 Importantly, this site is the only location which can provide a site to meet the identified accommodation needs of Travelling Showpeople which can be delivered within the first five years of the Plan. The incorporation of this accommodation within the masterplan will also serve to avoid conflicts between future occupants of the development.
- 10.7 As the site lies adjacent to the administrative boundary of Stevenage and East Herts, this site provides an opportunity for two authorities to plan comprehensively to meet the needs of their residents through the creation of new community services and facilities. The masterplan approach will provide opportunities for local engagement in the planning of the new neighbourhood. It will also provide assurances over the immediate delivery of development required to meet the objectively assessed needs in the first five years of the Plan period. It is therefore proposed that this site becomes an allocation within the East Herts District Plan for strategic development of 600 homes and supporting community infrastructure.
- 10.8 Figure 10 below shows an illustrative conceptual diagram which provides an indication of how the various proposed uses could potentially be configured across the site. This, or a subsequently amended diagram, is likely to be used as a basis for commencing the Masterplanning process which, when finalised, will be used to inform the decision making process.

Figure 10: Illustrative Concept Diagram

