

HEARING STATEMENT

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Chapter 7 - Policy HERT3

We have considered the Matters and Issues document (Part 2), prepared by the Inspector in relation to East Herts District Plan 2011-2033 and consider it appropriate to respond to Questions 1, 4, 6 and 8, on behalf of the land owner of 'Land to the North of Welwyn Road', part of the HERT3 allocation.

Question 1: What is the basis for planning to accommodate 950 new homes over the plan period in Hertford?

East Herts District Council (EHDC) are allocating 950 new homes over the plan period, including 300 at my client's site at Land to the north of Welwyn Road (HERT3). The site is sustainably located within walking distance of a range of services and facilities within Hertford.

Whilst my client and EHDC are in agreement in relation to most matters relative to the site allocation; the only dispute is in relation to the quantum of development that can be delivered at this site (See Statement of Common Ground for more information). The significant amount of research, assessments and detailed design work that has been undertaken by consultants in relation to the site demonstrates that the site has a larger capacity than the allocated 300 dwellings afforded to the site by the Council, as evidenced at Appendix 1 (section 3 in particular).

We consider that the Council have been overly cautious in allocating 300 dwellings to a site of this size and in this sustainable location, particularly given the additional housing need that has emerged through the updated land figures. The land owner has appointed a number of consultants to ascertain site constraints and opportunities, and to design an appropriate, sensitive development in accordance with local planning policies, to ensure a high quality residential development of up to 350 dwellings can be delivered appropriately at this site. The site analysis undertaken, and the resultant masterplan is contained at Appendix 1 (sections 2 and 3 respectively).

Question 4: Is the Plan sound in its choice of sites to be removed from the Green Belt?

In order to meet housing need, EHDC are proposing the release of some sites from the Green Belt. Since there is a significant amount of Green Belt within the district including many of the towns and villages that are surrounded by Green Belt, and only a finite amount of previously developed land, the Council considered it necessary to review Green Belt boundaries in order to meet housing need; as paragraph 13.9.4 of the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) details:

"This approach is necessitated on account of the housing need that exists within the various housing market areas, and the fact that locations outside the Green Belt perform less well in terms of most other sustainability objectives."

In assessing the suitability of sites to be released from the Green Belt in relation to the HERT3 allocation 'Land to the North of Welwyn Road', it is considered that the Plan is sound. An important consideration in the release of the land from the Green Belt as part of the emerging Local Plan is in part due to the historic use of the site, which includes informal use for motor cross riding, past mineral workings and most recently, a number of planning permissions for a leisure centre with associated facilities. Therefore, the site no longer serves the purpose of the Green Belt. As such, its removal from this designation is appropriate, and would enable the delivery of much needed housing in a sustainable location on the edge of an existing built up area.

In accordance with the provisions of the NPPF, in considering the release of the land from the Green Belt, the Council paid due regard to the intended permanence in the long term and promoting sustainable patterns of development. The release of this site is therefore justified, effective, and consistent with national planning policy.

The extent of the land to be released from the Green Belt follows natural features, as the SA concludes in relation to the HERT3 allocation "existing roads and natural features will assist in creating definable boundaries to development". A landscape site appraisal and visual appraisal has been undertaken to ensure that the proposed development would have a minimal visual impact on the surrounding area, summarised at Appendix 1 (sections 2.1-2.4).

However, it has recently come to the attention of EHDC and ourselves that there is a discrepancy on the red line plan that has been put forward for the Plan, where the north west corner of the site, that has been promoted for removal from the Green Belt throughout the consultation process of the emerging Plan, has been omitted.

The plans contained within the SOCG and Appendix 1 of this document, illustrate this area to be released from the Green Belt. This part of the land is required to enable a sustainable bus link to the Sele Farm site to the east of the site, and for drainage attenuation purposes. It is therefore requested that the land allocation boundary is modified in the Plan, to allow for these connections. Relevant correspondence at the amended site boundary is contained at Appendix 2.

Question 6: Would the criteria set out in HERT3 be sufficient to protect the local environment, in particular Panshanger Park?

The relative proximity of the site to heritage assets has been taken into consideration through the various studies undertaken to inform development proposals at the site. The Heritage Impact Assessment (July 2016) notes that the site will have the potential to impact Panshanger Park, but that of the two HERT3 sites, this one is of lesser importance.

Notwithstanding this, the impact of a residential development at this site has been fully considered, and it is considered that the redevelopment of the site presents an opportunity to create a better defined edge to Hertford, and improve the relationship between the site and Panshanger Park, thus enhancing the setting overall. Please refer to Appendix 1 for additional information (particularly section 2.6).

Question 8: Are the allocated sites appropriate and deliverable, having regard to the provision of the necessary infrastructure and facilities, and taking account of environmental constraints?

Site proposals have developed significantly since the initial representations promoting the land for residential development were first submitted to the Council's "call for sites" in June 2012, suggesting the suitability of the site for 250- 350 residential dwellings. Further representations were made to the Preferred Options Consultation 2014 and to the Pre-submission consultation 2016. These subsequent representations were informed by the preparation of a number of supporting surveys and documents demonstrating the capacity of the site to deliver 350 dwellings (detailed within the Statement of Common Ground).

Parallel to the work carried out in relation to the Local Plan consultation, two pre-application enquiries have been submitted to East Herts planning department, most recently in 2017. The pre-application enquiries were made to the Council to ensure that when a planning application is made for the proposed housing, this will be both appropriate and deliverable.

Since the Council's pre-application response earlier this year, the proposed scheme has developed further to address all issues raised by East Herts Council, Hertfordshire County Council, and in response to the various representations made by interested parties to the Local Plan pre-submission consultation. The result of these various consultations, pre-application enquiries, and further site investigations is the well considered Masterplan (Appendix 1), and supporting documents prepared for the forthcoming submission of an Outline planning application that accords with the emerging Local Plan.

The document attached at Appendix 1 demonstrates that a housing development of up to 350 dwellings can be delivered on the site, paying due regard to the site constraints within the first 5 years of the development plan, in accordance with the objectives of the Plan.

A Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy has been undertaken to assess the impact of a proposed residential development at the site, including infiltration testing, and a capacity check has been undertaken in relation to foul water discharge; these issues are explored further within Appendix 1 (key summaries contained at section 1), and demonstrate that the necessary technical assessments have been carried out to ensure a residential development of up to 350 is deliverable at this site.

Transport assessments have also been carried out to illustrate key connections and routes, and to set out a public transport strategy to include a re-routed bus service through the site; this is explored further within Section 1.5 of Appendix 1. The assessment demonstrated that the impact of additional traffic arising from a proposal of up to 350 new homes has been fully considered and confirms that appropriate mitigation measures will be put in place where necessary to enable the delivery of the masterplan.

Appendix 1 summarises that public transport, utilities and infrastructure, public rights of way, landscaping and planting, public open spaces, the proximity to Panshanger Park, ecology and other environmental constraints have been considered to ensure that the site is appropriate to deliver a residential development of up to 350 dwellings.