

Ian Davis:

Site Allocations: Chapter 7 – Hertford – Policies HERT1 to HERT 7

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

Hertford was originally assessed as needing 3242 new homes during the plan period. EHDC have only planned for 950 new homes in Hertford leaving a significant shortfall. (Draft District Plan Development Strategy: Background and overview 2014)

This decision appears to have been driven by the sieving of the call for sites and the advice from Herts Highways that the A414 could not accommodate the increased traffic from development beyond the proposals for years 1-5 without a bypass (IDM.001_infrastructure_delivery_plan section 9.10 and other documents). The decision was taken to place the remaining homes needed for Hertford to the East of Welwyn Garden City (Policy EWEL1). This will be ineffective for the purpose as Hertford has a different market profile and demand to WGC. Hertford is seen as a significantly more desirable place to live than Welwyn Garden City with house prices reflecting this. The proposed development East of Welwyn Garden City will function as WHBC homes, not EHDC homes.

This leaves Hertford short of around 2000 homes and does nothing to manage demand.

Issues 4: Is the plan sound in its choice of sites to be removed from the GB?

No. The Green Belt review process was strictly applied in the Hertford Area leading to EHDC ruling out several large potential development sites offered under the SLAA around Hertford. The plan promotes the land East of Welwyn Garden City (Policy EWEL1) to meet the Hertford shortfall in new homes but this site scores lower under the green belt review than some of the sites around Hertford (EHGB_Final_Report_18_09_15_FINAL_(Reduced_size)). The justification for this in the EWEL1 settlement appraisal makes a nonsense of any green belt review and could be applied to any site:

4.4 It is common in Hertfordshire that 'countryside' activities and land uses immediately about the urban edge, therefore any development on the edge of a town will conflict with Purposes 1 and 3 of the Green Belt (checking unrestricted sprawl and protecting the countryside from encroachment). Whilst the development extending out from the town could be considered as separate and unrelated to the town due to the presence of woodland blocks and open spaces, these assets also provide an opportunity to link in to the existing residential areas of the town. Planned development is also not sprawl, particularly when the development itself will create a new outer edge through land uses and structural planting.

In the Hertford Settlement Appraisal some 20 other rejected sites are compared to those taken forward, including for their impact on the Green Belt. In the East of Welwyn Garden City (Policy EWEL1) Settlement Appraisal only 1 alternative site is compared, around the nearby villages, despite the EWEL1 proposal being promoted to provide new homes for Hertford. It should have been appraised against the larger sites offered around Hertford for a fair comparison.

The Hertford Settlement Appraisal states:

3.17 Whilst the full Plan growth is undeliverable without a strategic intervention at Hertford, the assessment we have undertaken indicates that the traffic growth associated with the sites in your current first 5 year housing trajectory (up to 2021) is likely to be acceptable in terms of traffic impact on the A414

and:

3.21 Importantly, at a strategic level, HCC will be seeking to develop specific measures for mitigation of the A414 corridor (including the stretch through Hertford) through its emerging Hertfordshire 2050 Transport Vision. Public consultation on this document is expected shortly.

That consultation document states:

Traffic and congestion on the A414 through Hertford is constraining the level of housing growth that can be delivered in the area without a severe deterioration in journey times and reliability.

and:

Alternative options to a bypass have been considered, but it is unlikely that a viable option could be delivered that adequately addressed the levels of traffic and congestion in the town and the problems this causes.

Once any bypass is built (the HCC Highways consultation document gives this a “timescale for implementation” of 2021–2031) then the land out to it will most likely need releasing from GB to allow future housing for Hertford. Why not modify the GB now to that end?