

**EAST HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT PLAN (EXAMINATION)**  
MATTERS & ISSUES STATEMENT  
PIGEON LAND LTD  
OCTOBER 2017



## 1 East Hertfordshire District Plan Examination

### Matters & Issues Statement

- 1.1 Terence O'Rourke submits this statement on behalf of Pigeon Land Ltd (Pigeon) (respondent ref: 1053728). It should be read alongside representations to the East Herts Pre-submission District Plan (December 2016).
- 1.2 This document responds to the questions raised under Chapter 12 – East of Stevenage (Policy EOS1).

### Issues

*Q1. How and why was the allocated site chosen ahead of other potential options particularly having regard to Green Belt boundaries, landscape character and demands on infrastructure?*

- 1.3 The Sustainability Appraisal of the East Herts District Plan (Sept 2016) demonstrates that the Council's preferred strategy provides a balanced distribution of housing to meet the identified needs of both rural and urban communities, when assessed against reasonable alternatives.
- 1.4 It demonstrates that the Council has considered alternatives to the release of Green Belt land around the main towns including the redirection of growth to the rural area and the potential for two new settlements in the District, concluding that the dispersal of housing across the rural area would not represent a sustainable form of development.
- 1.5 The East of Stevenage site is set within a discreet self-contained landscape parcel that will be in keeping with both the character of the immediate surrounding area and Stevenage as a whole. It can be developed without significant harm to Green Belt purposes. The East Herts and Stevenage Green Belt Reviews (GRB/001, GRB/002 and GRB/003) provide a comprehensive analysis of the extent to which land to the east of Stevenage serves the five purposes of the Green Belt. The Councils acknowledge that draft allocation EOS1 makes no contribution to Purpose 2 (Merging) and Purpose 4 (Setting or special character of a historic town) and further consideration of the site in relation to Green Belt purposes has been carried out by EHDC as part of the East of Stevenage Settlement Appraisal (see paragraphs 4.1 to 4.7 of SSS/010).
- 1.6 A Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) between Pigeon and Hythe Limited and East Herts District Council (EHDC) has been prepared for the examination. A further site specific assessment of the site against Green Belt purposes is contained at Appendix 12 of the SoCG. It concludes that the East of Stevenage allocation is capable of accommodating development without material harm to the relevant purposes of the Green Belt.
- 1.7 A Landscape and Visual Assessment (LVA) of the site is contained at Appendix 7 of the SoCG. The LVA, in conjunction with technical studies that form part of the Council's evidence base, confirm that the land is suitable for release from the Green Belt and provides a sustainable location for development in both

landscape and visual terms. This is as a result of the substantial containment provided by the existing structural planting, which also ensures the site's visual and physical separation from the Beane Valley and surrounding settlements.

- 1.8 The initial Concept Masterplan prepared for the site is landscape led. A key feature is the retention and reinforcement of the existing belts of planting bounding the fields, particularly at the edge of the site where the realigned Green Belt boundary is to be located. This will maintain a robust and effective screen between the development and countryside.
- 1.9 The proposed allocation will deliver a new sustainable neighbourhood on the eastern edge of Stevenage, close to existing employment opportunities, services and facilities, and public transport links.
- 1.10 The SoCG demonstrates that the site can be bought forward with all requisite infrastructure required to facilitate its delivery.

*Q2. Is it deliverable, having regard to the provision of the necessary infrastructure and facilities?*

- 1.11 The allocation of land to the East of Stevenage will facilitate the delivery of a new sustainable neighbourhood at Gresley Park. The site is well located in terms of existing services and facilities, is well served by bus services and good links with the existing footpath and cycle network.
- 1.12 It will deliver 600 new homes (including approximately 240 affordable dwellings), a care home and assisted living accommodation. It will provide a new neighbourhood centre comprising convenience retail, a community building and potential for healthcare facilities and a new primary school including pre-school provision. The allocation of the site will enable a development of a high quality sustainable design and layout, including green infrastructure corridors and areas of open space.
- 1.13 The scheme will provide upgrades to existing road junctions at Uplands and White Way (to roundabouts) and a new roundabout junction to the south of White Way to provide site access.
- 1.14 Pigeon Land is confident that the site will deliver 600 homes and associated infrastructure and facilities, including the neighbourhood centre and primary school, within five years. Subject to its removal from the Green Belt, the site is 'deliverable' when considered against the tests at NPPF footnote 11 and will make a significant contribution to the five-year housing land supply position.
- 1.15 The SoGC agreed between Pigeon and Hythe Limited and EHDC provides a timetable demonstrating that a new sustainable neighbourhood can be delivered at Gresley Park within a five-year period.
- 1.16 A significant amount of technical work has already been undertaken with respect to the suitability of the site and a significant amount of masterplanning has already been undertaken to inform the preparation of the Concept Masterplan. There are no technical obstacles to its delivery and there is an active landowner promoting the site with a development partner. The SoCG demonstrates that the site can be bought forward with all requisite infrastructure

required to facilitate its delivery, including off-site highway improvements. Pigeon are also working with Hertfordshire County Council to ensure that the Primary School and Pre-school site are phased appropriately within the overall delivery of the site.

- 1.17 Pre-application discussions have already commenced between Pigeon and EHDC to address the criteria and parameters for the delivery of the allocation. A Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) has been agreed. The PPA envisages the approval of a masterplan for the site in early 2018 prior to the submission of a planning application.
- 1.18 The masterplan will provide three distinct development parcels to facilitate the early delivery of new homes. This will enable the site to be developed by three separate home builders concurrently helping to boost housing supply and ensuring that the site is fully deliverable within the first five years of the plan period. The neighbourhood centre and the primary school and pre-school will also be brought forward within this timescale.
- 1.19 It is the intention of Pigeon to pursue a planning application at the earliest opportunity. An early indication that the site will be released from the Greenbelt would therefore be beneficial to this process and assist in the delivery of new homes from this site.
- 1.20 It is proposed that this will take the form of a hybrid planning application to facilitate the early delivery of the first homes within each development parcel. Pigeon are committed to working with EHDC and other stakeholders to deliver this allocation at the earliest opportunity.
- 1.21 The policy (as presently drafted) requires the provision of a 'healthcare facility' within the neighbourhood centre. On going discussions are taking place with East and North Herts Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to confirm the requirements or otherwise for on-site provision. The CCG has indicated that its preferred approach will be to meet the site's healthcare requirements within existing facilities in Stevenage. It is therefore requested that additional flexibility is inserted into the policy to allow for the payment of a financial contribution in-lieu of on-site provision and to ensure that the policy is effective.
- 1.22 It is intended that provision for health will remain within the scheme for contingency purposes and in the event that on-site provision is not required by the CCG, as currently anticipated, then alternative health uses such as a pharmacy or dentist will be explored.