



East Herts District Council District Plan

Examination in Public

Hearing Statement by

Andrew Martin – Planning Ltd

On behalf of

Chelmsford City Developments

PART 2

Site Allocations – Chapter 5 Bishop’s Stortford

October 2017 | AM-P Ref: 16032



INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This hearing statement has been prepared by Andrew Martin – Planning (AM-P) on behalf of Chelmsford City Developments (CCD), who is now the owner of the Bishop’s Stortford Football Club, as shown on the Plan at Appendix 1. This is a site of some 3 ha, bounded by the A120 to the north, the A1250 Dunmow Road to the east and south and the Woodside Employment Area to the west. Vehicular access is via the access road called Woodside that serves the Employment Area. Junction 8 of the M11/A120 is some 500m to the east of the site. The site is predominantly previously developed land comprising the main and subsidiary spectator stands, changing rooms, flood lighting and other club facilities and car parking areas.
- 1.2 The Football Club is currently being kept solvent by the landlord delaying rent payments, by sponsorship from CCD and contributions from supporters. Although the ground has capacity for 3,500 spectators, it normally only accommodates approximately 350. The future of the Club is simply not viable on its current site and it is seeking various ground share opportunities, preferably as part of a larger complex of football facilities shared by the Bishop’s Stortford Community Football Club. Various locational options for this complex are currently being explored.
- 1.3 CCD have also been exploring through a pre-application request to EHDC the potential for the surplus land surrounding the actual Football Club buildings/spectator stands for the storage of cars in connection with the existing main car dealerships at Stansted Audi (just east of the M11 in Uttlesford District) and Barons BMW in Stansted Road, Bishop’s Stortford. The two businesses have been expanding over recent years and the existing space used by both these dealerships is limited by the existing site limitations. The existing dealerships are congested and additional space is required to hold stock in the short to medium term and cars awaiting delivery.
- 1.4 The surplus land at Bishop’s Stortford Football Club has potential storage capacity for approximately 375 vehicles, which will not affect any residential amenity or neighbouring land use. Expansion of the two businesses to stock additional cars will also result in further employment opportunities. Furthermore, the use of the site for the car storage facility will enable sponsorship and funding for the retention of the Football Club in the short term until a new site is secured.
- 1.5 It is acknowledged, and confirmed in the pre-application response that until the new District Plan is adopted the site would remain in the Green Belt. The pre-application response acknowledged that the objections had been made regarding the site being designated under Policy CFLR1 for Open Space, Sport and Recreation and proposed instead for employment. However, it was stated that the Plan, as currently drafted, would not support the provision of parking spaces associated with employment use and this would weigh against the commercial development of the site.
- 1.6 In addition to the short term proposal for vehicle storage, CCD also have aspirations for the potential comprehensive development of the site for other commercial uses including employment and/or a new main car dealership once the Football Club has been relocated. This will not be possible if the Policy CFLR1 designation is included in the adopted Plan.



RESPONSE TO INSPECTOR’S ISSUES REGARDING CHAPTER 5 – BISHOP’S STORTFORD

2.1 In view of the original representations, on behalf of CCD and their responses to Part 1, only Issues 2, 3 and 7 are relevant to CCD’s position.

2. What is the overall amount of employment and retail floor space to be allocated in Bishop’s Stortford (this could be added to policy BISH1)?

2.2 As BISH1 is entitled ‘Development in Bishop’s Stortford’ it is considered that it should set out all the allocated sites and respective appropriate quantum of development, either in terms of total minimum floorspace or gross site area for other principal land uses, not just the housing sites. Therefore, employment and retail sites and the respective minimum areas should be included in the policy for clarity.

3. How and why was the planned level chosen ahead of other options? Is the site selection methodology robust and transparent?

2.3 For reasons discussed in the Part 1 hearings, the Plan lacks flexibility especially in the event of the allocated sites or other commitments not coming forward as expected. Other options and opportunities need to be identified. Clearly there are other options and the Council representatives did accept in the Part 1 hearing that with the potential lead-in times of the strategic sites and the increased Growth Uplift scenario in excess of 45,000 jobs over the period 2011-33 across the FEMA with a minimum of 10,800 jobs in East Herts District, that the Council is looking at alternative sites and interventions to boost employment in Bishop’s Stortford to provide a range of employment uses. The Inspector has asked EHDC to consider these points and set out what it proposes to do (Day 4 Matter 3).

2.4 In terms of the site selection methodology being robust and transparent, the previous representations on behalf of CCD and others have argued that there is a lack of clarity or flawed judgement on certain site selections currently in the Plan. For example, in the case of the Bishop’s Stortford Football Club, it is clear from the Council’s Examination Hearing Statement in respect of Matter 3: Employment and Retail that Section 8 of the Bishop’s Stortford Town Wide Employment Study (EER/007) considered the different types of new employment land that would be suitable for Bishop’s Stortford based on discussions with local commercial agents and an understanding of employment land requirements. The Study then appraised a variety of existing location options and six potential locations were considered for a business park style development, suitable, predominantly for B1 uses (Item 4 of the Hearing Statement).

Location A is the option that comprises the Bishop’s Stortford Football Club adjacent to the Woodside Industrial Estate. However, it states that “since the study was completed the Council considers that Location A is not considered deliverable as it is reliant on the relocation of the football club”.

2.5 The Town Wide Employment Study for Bishop’s Stortford Final Report prepared by Wessex Economics in June 2013 (EER/007) sets out in pages 32 and 33 an assessment of the Football Club site. It finds that:-

- For all practical purposes the site is located at the M11 Junction 8, so access to the motorway is excellent, subject to congestion on the roundabout off the A120 and A1250 and motorway junction itself. A B1 office development could achieve high visibility.



- The location is clearly suited to a motorway junction business park, but some occupiers, wanting an edge of town location, may favour a less trafficked environment.
- The site is likely to appeal to those occupiers for who immediate access to the motorway is the most important criterion for that location, as distinct from occupiers that have a general requirement to have easy access to motorway, but for whom this is only one of a number of locational criteria. The specification of the building on this gateway site into Bishop’s Stortford could be important in attracting an occupier, the deliverability of development on the site is uncertain. It then goes on to raise the fact that the site is in the Green Belt and that this designation would have to be removed.
- It also states that the Football Club is a valued local facility, and that it would need to be relocated and “that identifying an appropriate site, and securing support for relocation from the supporter base could be time-consuming”.

2.6 Finally, the report recommends, inter alia, that:-

“in order to meet medium (years 5 – 15) requirements for B1 space, EHDC should engage with Bishop’s Stortford Football Club and the owners of the site on which the Club is located to identify relocation options; with a view to removing the site from the Green Belt and designation as an employment site”.

- 2.7 Despite these findings and recommendations, and notwithstanding the fact that the Council decided to remove the site from the Green Belt, it failed to propose the allocation for employment purposes. Instead it is now proposed for ‘open space, sport and recreation’, but without any reasoning or justification. The Council’s sole reason for rejecting the site for employment use, as stated in its Matter 3 Hearing Statement and confirmed on Day 4, is that it “considers that Location A is not deliverable as it is reliant on the relocation of the football club”.
- 2.8 This reasoning regarding deliverability is insufficient to justify the exclusion of the site for employment. There are many sites committed or allocated for housing where delivery cannot be guaranteed or is uncertain yet they are included in this District Local Plan and many others throughout England. There can never be any definite certainty that sites will come forward and Plans can only put forward sites where there is a reasonable prospect. This is why Plans should be flexible and to make provision for more than the minimum needs.
- 2.9 Furthermore, circumstances have changed since the publication of the Wessex Economics’ Report and the Council’s decision not to include the site in the Plan. That is, the Football Club has financial difficulties, due to a dramatic decline in spectators over the years. It has to relocate to survive and where it can share facilities, preferably with the Community Football Club. The proposed partial short term commercial use of the site for vehicle parking will optimise asset utilisation and enable it to survive in the shorter term. The allocation of the Football Club for employment will provide additional employment in the short term and flexibility to redevelop the whole site comprehensively once a relocation site has been secured. The designation under Policy CFLR1 will not safeguard the Club but will prevent the site from securing a viable future through restricting its potential commercial use and value.

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

- 2.10 It is considered that the allocated sites are appropriate and deliverable, at least partially, in the Plan period. The lead-in times in providing the necessary infrastructure and in a viable and phased manner will result in delays in delivering employment floorspace in the larger strategic sites.



Therefore, as recognised by the officers there is a need to identify and bring forward a range of additional employment sites and other interventions.

- 2.11 It is submitted that the Bishop’s Stortford Football Club, for all the reasons given above, should be allocated for employment and not for ‘open space, sport and recreation’, under Policy CFLR1. Consequently, the site should be included in Policy BISH11 Employment in Bishop’s Stortford where Policy ED1 Employment applies and there should be consequential revisions to the explanatory text and Proposals Map E Insert 24 Bishop’s Stortford.

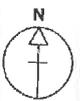


APPENDIX 1

Site Plan of Bishop’s Stortford Football Club



TITLE NUMBER
HD379398

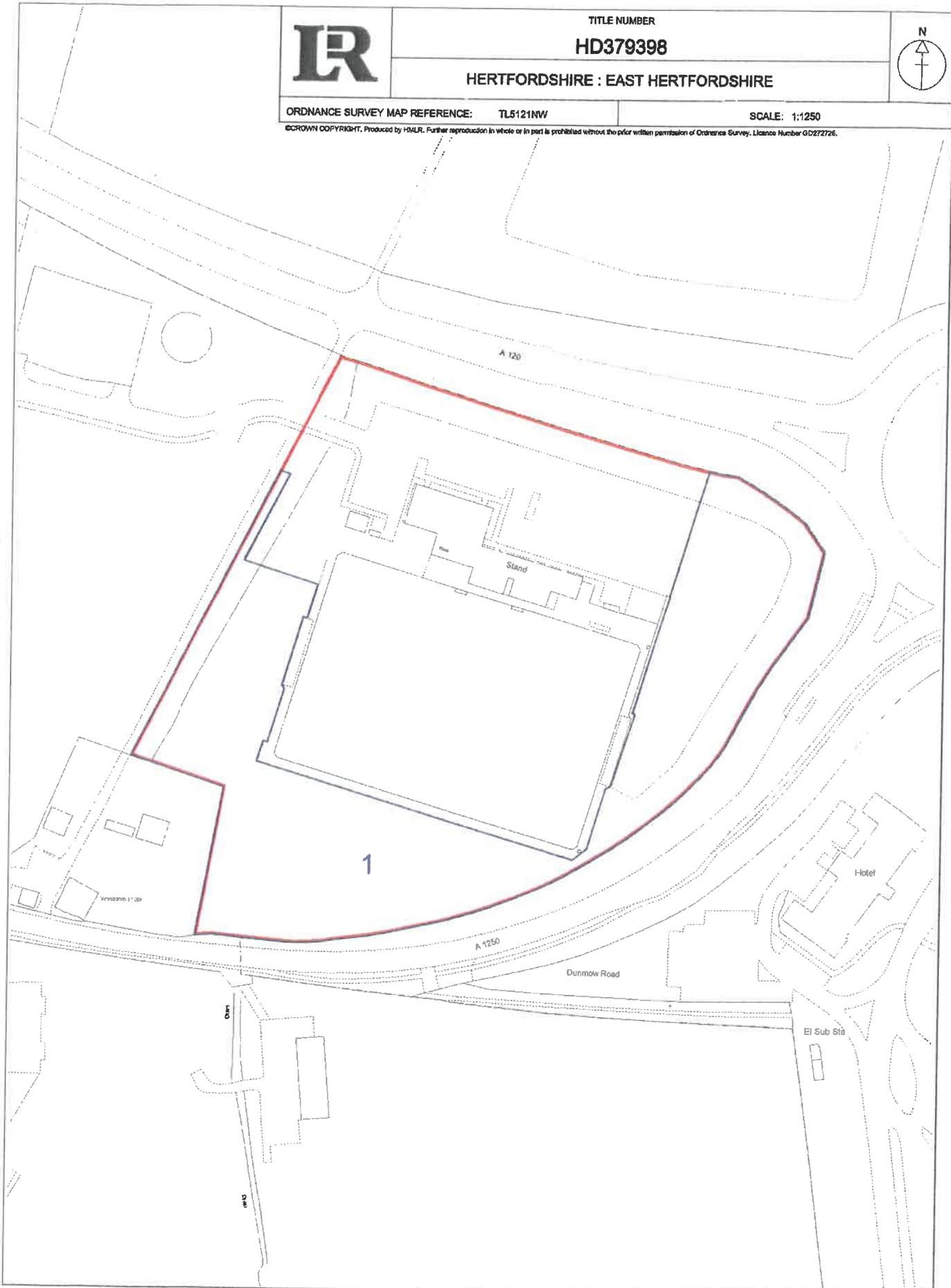


HERTFORDSHIRE : EAST HERTFORDSHIRE

ORDNANCE SURVEY MAP REFERENCE: TL5121NW

SCALE: 1:1250

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