

East Herts District Council Local Plan – Examination in Public

Hearing Statement for Scott Properties Ltd

Matter 5 – The Development Strategy – Green Belt

The National Planning Policy Framework advises that a key characteristic of Green Belts is their permanence, and that Green Belt boundaries should not be amended except in exceptional circumstances.

Exceptional circumstances to justify the removal of a site from the Green Belt cannot exist where there are legitimate, suitable, available and deliverable non-Green Belt sites that could meet development needs. Put simply, there is (quite rightly) a sequential preference that sites that are not in the Green Belt be utilised in advance of considering any amendment to Green Belt boundaries.

In the case of the emerging East Herts District Local Plan, it is respectfully suggested that the Council have not considered all potential alternatives to the proposed Green Belt releases that characterise much of the proposed development strategy.

In the Sustainability Appraisal it is claimed that the Council tested the concept of two new settlements outside of the Green Belt, as well as the principle of directing development to the rural areas, and concluded that the expansion of existing settlements, in a manner that necessitates Green Belt releases, is a more sustainable option.

However, there is a considerable amount of middle ground between these alternatives. For example, the Council do not seem to have considered the opportunities provided by growth at non-Green Belt villages, where such growth would serve to (a) meet housing needs, but also (b) to ensure the viability of, and facilitate expansion of, amenities, infrastructure and community facilities in those settlements. Clearly this is not the same as a new settlement. The number of dwellings would be far less but could ensure the vitality and viability of villages through and beyond the plan period.