

EAST HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT PLAN EXAMINATION IN PUBLIC

HEARING STATEMENT

ON BEHALF OF TAYLOR WIMPEY

FOR MATTERS 2, 4 AND 5

**TOWN & COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990 (AS AMENDED)
PLANNING AND COMPULSORY PURCHASE ACT 2004**

Word count: 2,686

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Hearing Statement is prepared on behalf of Taylor Wimpey which is promoting land at West Road, Sawbridgeworth, Policy SAWB2.
- 1.2 It is noted that a Statement of Common Ground is in course of preparation between Taylor Wimpey and East Hertfordshire District Council.

2. MATTER 2 – THE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY - HOUSING

Q12: Is the indicative housing trajectory at Appendix B of the Plan a reasonable estimate of delivery over the plan period 2011-22, having regard to the likely contribution of the strategic sites?

- 2.1 The trajectory indicates that 125 dwellings at SAWB2 can come forward between 2017-2022. We consider this to be accurate and an endorsement of the site's ability to be delivered quickly. Taylor Wimpey intends to apply for full planning permission in late 2017 so that delivery at SAWB2 can be expedited. There is potential to deliver more than 125 dwellings at this site through increased building densities and it is expected that any additional units could also be delivered during 2017-2022. This could assist in offsetting any delays experienced on other sites.

Q14: What is the risk of associated infrastructure not coming forward in time? What action is the Council proposing in event of a delay?

- 2.2 The risk of infrastructure not coming forward to support site SAWB2 is limited as it will, in the main, be tied to the delivery of the wider development as part of a Section 106 agreement. The site is not reliant on external infrastructure coming forward beyond that which can be funded by developer contributions. The relatively straightforward nature of the site and the requirement for infrastructure is reflected in the Council's housing trajectory (Appendix B of the District Plan) which confirms the site is capable of coming forward within the first five years of the Plan period.
- 2.3 Although both allocations SAWB2 and SAWB3 require developer contributions to junction upgrades, with the 'double mini roundabout' between West Road and the

A1184 being most critical, an updated Transport Assessment¹ prepared in support of the Statement of Common Ground confirms that capacity exists at the junction to accommodate the proposed 125 dwellings in isolation without requiring signalisation (both sites in combination do require signalisation).

- 2.4 SAWB2 has an important role to play in providing school expansion land which will accommodate increased pupil numbers from sites SAWB3 and SAWB4. The explicit acknowledgment of this through the examination process is welcomed.
- 2.5 Taylor Wimpey is aware through discussions with EHDC that the Local Education Authority (LEA) has commenced initial work on the delivery of the school expansion that SAWB2 provides the land for. A plan showing an initial scheme has been prepared by the LEA and is included at **Appendix 1**. Taylor Wimpey is also involved in early stage discussions with the LEA about the specific design requirements for the school expansion.

Q15: There has been persistent under delivery and a 20% buffer is appropriate. Taking this into account, would the plan realistically provide for a five year housing supply (5HYLS) on adoption? Will a five year supply be maintained? Should the Plan's policies contain any additional flexibility measures to ensure a continued five year supply? (For example, allocating additional sites or allowing for small-scale development outside but abutting settlement boundaries where major policy constraints are absent?

The Housing Topic Paper (**ED121**) suggests that when applying the Council's revised Objectively Assessed Need figure, the District Plan does not provide for a five year supply unless past shortfall is met over a 10 year period. Yet the 'gap' between supply and requirement over the first five years is comparatively small – only 376 units. It may be possible to boost delivery on smaller allocated sites which are capable of coming forward within the five year period; as such the District Plan should allow for greater densities on allocated sites such as SAWB2 to close the 'gap' between supply and requirement. This will ensure that the explicit requirement at paragraph 47 of the Framework to 'boost significantly' the supply of housing is met. Taylor Wimpey considers that this is an appropriate way to address the shortfall in the first instance and should be acknowledged during the examination process.

¹ This document can be provided to the Inspector upon request

3. MATTER 4 – THE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY – INFRASTRUCTURE

Q1: Would the distribution of development in the Plan have proper regard to the quality and capacity of the road network, the quality and capacity of public transport and wider aims to promote sustainable development?

- 3.1 Allocations SAWB2 and SAWB3 include provision for developer contributions to upgrade key junctions in Sawbridgeworth, namely the 'double mini roundabout' between West Road and the A1184 and the junction between High Wych Road and the A1184. As discussed in our response to Matter 2 Question 14, capacity exists at the 'double mini roundabout' to accommodate the proposed 125 dwellings at SAWB2 in isolation without requiring signalisation.
- 3.2 The need to direct development to those locations which have good public transport, and are considered sustainable in a wider sense (e.g. with good access to local facilities) has a significant bearing on the spatial strategy in East Herts (as discussed further in our response to Matter 5 Question 4). Public transport beyond the Green Belt is relatively limited, with the largest non-Green Belt settlement of Buntingford receiving irregular bus services only (see paragraph 7.6 of **SSS.003**). Existing settlements within and immediately adjacent to the Green Belt provide more options for use of public transport. In the case of Sawbridgeworth, this includes frequent rail services on the West Anglia Main Line and a bus corridor between Harlow, Bishops Stortford and Stansted Airport (see paragraph 8.11 of **SSS.005**). This good provision of public transport clearly assists in achieving sustainable development (as per paragraph 30 of the Framework) and must be considered in light of the need to promote sustainable patterns of development when drawing Green Belt boundaries (Framework paragraph 85).

Q2: What are the principal transport improvements and projects that are required for the implementation of the Plan?

- 3.3 In the case of SAWB2, these are set out in our response to Matter 2 Question 14. These improvements are considered to be deliverable without impediment to the delivery of this site allocation in accordance with the housing trajectory.

Q3: How has the Council assessed the effect of the possible delay/failure of key infrastructure coming forward within the desired timescale? How would this affect the housing land supply and the overall housing targets? What measures are in place to cope with delays?

- 3.4 This is set out in our response to Matter 2, Question 14. In short, it is highly unlikely that the key infrastructure for SAWB2 will be delayed. The school expansion land would be a requirement of a planning permission at this site and Taylor Wimpey is currently preparing a planning application that will deliver this. The availability of the land and the need for extra school places to accommodate the planned housing growth in this area is already known about by the LEA. The LEA is already preparing the work necessary to deliver this planned school expansion (see **Appendix 1**).
- 3.5 The requirements for highway infrastructure improvements have already been identified and can be secured by way of a Section 106 agreement associated with a planning application in due course; this is set out in the allocation for SAWB2. Again, the County Council is aware of this requirement. All other infrastructure requirement for SAWB2 will be addressed through the planning application process in the usual way. SAWB2 has a willing landowner and developer that are committed to bringing this site forward. As such, one can have a high degree of confidence that SAWB2 can come forward within the first five years of the Plan period.

4. MATTER 5 – THE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY – THE GREEN BELT

Q1: Where is the land that the Plan would release from the Green Belt?

- 4.1 For site SAWB2 this is shown clearly as the allocated site within the Policies Map (see submission document **SUB/003**).

Q2: What is the link between the amount of land released from the Green Belt and the housing requirement, the need to direct development to sustainable locations and the localised need for housing? Where is the evidence that this broadly justifies the amount of land to be released?

- 4.2 Taylor Wimpey is bringing forward one of the sites proposed for Green Belt release (SAWB2 in Sawbridgeworth). It is considered that there is a clear need to release Green Belt land in order to meet East Hertfordshire's housing requirement in sustainable locations. This is discussed further in our response to Question 4. The response to Question 2 is set out below in the context of Sawbridgeworth.
- 4.3 The Market Town of Sawbridgeworth has good levels of services and public transport making it a sustainable location for development which is reflected in its status as a Tier 2 settlement. It has successfully redeveloped available land within the boundaries of this settlement such that there is limited potential for brownfield development within the settlement to assist in meeting the current housing need (as acknowledged at paragraph 8.1.4 of the submitted District Plan). The SLAA (**HOP.004**) confirms that there is capacity for only five additional dwellings on sites which are suitable, available and achievable and where there are no pre-existing policy constraints.
- 4.4 The services available and the quality of the town make it an attractive place to live (highlighted at paragraphs 8.1.1 - 8.1.3 of the District Plan), which inevitably influences its popularity. The submitted District Plan recognises this by allocating sites for development, which will assist in meeting the part 6 of the Plan's vision. The failure to provide housing in this settlement will mean that housing demand cannot be met, which will place an upward pressure on house prices and affordability will deteriorate. The Housing Needs Survey shows that in 2014 in East Hertfordshire, average house prices stand at thirteen times average earnings (paragraph 6.4.4, **HOP.009**). In Sawbridgeworth, a single-earner household requires an income of £35,300 (Table 6.2, **HOP.009**); yet 74.5% of concealed households earn below £27,500 (paragraph 1.6.10, **HOP.009**).

- 4.5 Furthermore, it will become virtually impossible to meet local needs for affordable housing of any meaningful scale unless allocations are made in these locations.

Q3: Where can it be demonstrated that the Council has examined fully all other reasonable options?

- 4.6 The District Plan is supported by a series of documents including the Sustainability Appraisal which assesses options for the distribution of development (see response to Q4 for further detail); a Supporting Document (**SSS.001**) which explains the formulation of the Plan strategy; a Green Belt Review (**GRB.001**) and Settlement Appraisals (**SSS.002-SSS.010**; see response to Q6 for further detail). These documents taken together are considered a comprehensive assessment of options for sites and the distribution of development.

Q4: Are there exceptional circumstances to justify the Plan's alterations to existing adopted Green Belt boundaries?

- 4.7 Taylor Wimpey considers that exceptional circumstances do exist to justify the Plan's alterations to existing Green Belt boundaries.
- 4.8 The stated OAN in East Hertfordshire stands at 18,396 (2011-2033) or 836 dwellings per annum (**ED112**). This is considerably more than the 11,100 dwellings (1991-2011) or 555 dwellings per annum required in the 2007 Local Plan. This necessitates a 'step change' in housing provision and the Council's Topic Paper on the Green Belt (**TPA.003**) explains this level of provision significantly exceeds what has historically been delivered in East Hertfordshire (paragraph 4.7).
- 4.9 Paragraph 84 of the Framework explains that the drawing of Green Belt boundaries should take account of the need to promote sustainable patterns of development. In the case of East Hertfordshire, the most sustainable locations for development (i.e. those main settlements with the best services and transport links) and supporting road and rail links are all located within Green Belt. The rural area beyond the Green Belt is comparatively less sustainable with the largest settlements being the Group 1 villages (with the exception of the small town of Buntingford which will accommodate significant growth arising from

recent speculative planning applications) and with limited public transport and no rail service at all. This position is noted by the Council at paragraph 4.16 of its Topic Paper (**TPA.003**).

- 4.10 As discussed above, the Sustainability Appraisal (**SUB.004**) assessed options for dispersed development and for new settlements in the rural area beyond the Green Belt, in lieu of allocations within the Green Belt. It concluded these options performed significantly worse than the preferred approach which included Green Belt release (see summary at p124 of **SUB.004**).
- 4.11 Drawing the above together, it is clear that East Hertfordshire is a district with a significantly increased housing requirement and with no alternative to releasing Green Belt if that requirement is to be met in sustainable locations. As such and in the context of Framework paragraphs 83 and 84, exceptional circumstances do exist to justify Green Belt release.

Q6: Is the site selection / Green Belt Review process robust?

- 4.12 We consider that Green Belt matters must be considered holistically alongside other sustainability considerations such as access to services. This is a requirement of Framework paragraph 84 which advises that Green Belt boundaries must be drawn with regard to promoting patterns of sustainable development.
- 4.13 The Settlement Appraisals (**SSS.002 – SSS.010** including **SSS.005** for Sawbridgeworth) prepared by the Council are of benefit in drawing together the assessment of development locations in terms of the Green Belt functions which they perform, alongside the wider spatial issues relevant to each settlement. The Settlement Appraisals assess not only the eventual allocations but also those sites which were discounted (paragraphs 7.2 – 7.7 of **SSS.005**). They clearly draw together the issues as they relate to each site and in comparison with other sites.
- 4.14 It is noted that the Green Belt Review 2015 (**GRB.001**) has been critiqued by other representors as assessing only 'broad' locations rather than specific sites. The Council recognises this and the Settlement Appraisals therefore consider specific sites in respect of the Green Belt functions (paragraphs 6.4 – 6.9, **SSS.005**).

4.15 For SAWB2, the Council's assessment concludes that the site *in isolation* would:

- Make a 'moderate' contribution in checking unrestricted sprawl (compared with a 'major' contribution for its wider parcel);
- Make a very limited contribution towards preventing settlements for merging (compared with a 'moderate' contribution to the wider parcel)
- Be slightly more contained by local landform in terms of its role in protecting the countryside from encroachment
- Would not contribute to the setting and character of historic towns.

4.16 In addition, Taylor Wimpey has adduced evidence in support of the allocation at earlier stages in the District Plan process². The report, prepared by CSA, demonstrates that the site makes a more limited contribution to the functions of the Green Belt. Extracts are reproduced at **Appendix 2** for ease of reference. This has been published online by the District Council (as part of a 'Developer Submission') and is in the public domain.

4.17 Drawing the above together, it becomes apparent that the site selection process in tandem with the Green Belt Review, taken alongside the spatial issues outlined elsewhere within this statement, is appropriately robust.

Q7: Are the boundaries appropriately defined having regard to Green Belt purposes and the need to use readily recognisable physical features that are likely to be permanent?

4.18 Taylor Wimpey can only fully comment on this question in respect of site SAWB2.

4.19 As discussed above, the release of the site and associated redrawn Green Belt boundaries are appropriate in respect of the Green Belt purposes at Paragraph 80 of the Framework.

4.20 The boundaries to SAWB2 are defined by existing development to the east; West Road to the south; and a watercourse, established tree belt and hedgerow to the north and west. These features are well-established and are readily recognisable.

² These are in the public domain as Developer Submission, available at www.eastherts.gov.uk/article/35686/Sawbridgeworth. A full copy is not provided here for brevity however a copy can be provided should the Inspector require it.

The Concept Masterplan prepared by Taylor Wimpey and submitted with its representations to support this allocation shows that development of SAWB2 will enable the retention of these boundary features. The principles of this Concept Masterplan will be carried through into a planning application in due course.

- 4.21 Taylor Wimpey considers that the boundaries to SAWB2 are appropriate in line with paragraph 85 of the Framework.

APPENDIX 1

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL 2FE EXPANSION PLAN HP2811



22 Car Parking Spaces
with Drop Off Area

Total site area	22520 m²
Net area	16563 m²
Soft outdoor PE	8351 m ²
All weather pitch	
Hard outdoor PE	1158 m ²
MUGA	
Hard informal & social	1229 m ²
Soft informal & social	5825 m ²
Non net area	5957 m²
Buildings	1929 m ²
Access	4028 m ²
Current Site	13194 m ²
Additional Land	9326 m ²

Hertfordshire

Resources
 Hertfordshire County Council
 County Hall
 Hertford SG13 8DQ

PROJECT
**Mandeville Primary School
 West Road
 Sawbridgeworth**

DRAWING TITLE
2FE Epansion Plan

DRAWN	SL
CHECKED	
DATE	21/07/2016
SCALE	1:1250
PLAN NO.	REVISION
HP2811	

APPENDIX 2

EXTRACTS FROM CSA INITIAL LVIA AND GREEN BELT REVIEW



Date: February 2014

West Road,
Sawbridgeworth

**Initial Landscape and
Visual Appraisal and
Green Belt Boundary
Review**

EXTRACTS

Prepared by
CSa Environmental Planning

On behalf of
Taylor Wimpey Ltd.

Report No: CSa/2331/01

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Appendices

Appendix A: Location Plan (Including Photo Locations)

Appendix B: Aerial Photograph (Including Photo Locations)

Appendix C: Photographs

Appendix D: MAGIC Map Extract

Appendix E: Sawbridgeworth Inset Map

Appendix F: Concept Masterplan

Appendix G: Green Belt Assessment Areas

6.0 GREEN BELT BOUNDARY REVIEW

- 6.1 This section considers the current Green Belt boundary around Sawbridgeworth in order to ascertain the landscape constraints to growth on the edge of the settlement.
- 6.2 The functions of the Green Belt as given in the NPPF, are set out in Section 2. The NPPF states that amended Green Belt boundaries should not need further alterations during the Local Plan/District Plan period; indeed they should be capable of enduring beyond it. When defining boundaries, local authorities should take account of the need to promote sustainable patterns of development and ensure that there would be sufficient safeguarded land outside the Green Belt in order to meet the long term development needs of the area. It goes on to say that Green Belt boundaries should be defined clearly along physical features which are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent.
- 6.3 The urban fringes of Sawbridgeworth have been divided into distinct parcels, as shown in **Appendix G**, in order to assess the potential for the individual areas to accommodate growth. Each area has been considered against the first four functions of the Green Belt, as set out in paragraph 80 of the NPPF, and assessed against the criteria set out in paragraphs 79 to 85. As all of these sites are greenfield sites, the 5th function of the Green Belt is not relevant.

Area 1

- 6.4 Area 1 coincides with Area 11 of the EHDC Green Belt Review which found that the area checks unrestricted urban sprawl and maintains openness, serves a partial purpose in preventing merging with neighbouring settlements, safeguards the countryside from encroachment and does not serve to preserve the special character and setting of the town.
- 6.5 The area displays a character consistent with that of the Thorley Uplands character area; open, agricultural fields predominate alongside Parsonage Farm (**Photographs 14, 15, 16 and 17**). This is the northern-most parcel with Bishop's Stortford located approximately 3km to the north.
- 6.6 It is considered that development within this parcel would be remote from the main urban area of Sawbridgeworth and would represent an encroachment into the wider countryside and so would be at odds with the Green Belt objectives.

Area 2

- 6.7 Area 2 coincides with Area 9 of the EHDC Green Belt Review which found that the area partly serves to check unrestricted urban sprawl, serves a purpose in preventing merging with neighbouring settlements, safeguards the countryside from encroachment and does not serve to preserve the special character and setting of the town. The Green Belt Review sub-divides Area 9 into smaller land parcels which it considers in more detail.
- 6.8 Area 2 represents an extensive parcel of land (that includes the Site), the sensitivity of which increases as one moves further westwards into the adjoining countryside. The Green Belt Review notes that the eastern part of this area (Area 9) does not fulfil the first four functions of the Green Belt and our own appraisal would agree with these findings. This area is well related to the existing urban area with the brook located to the Site boundary forming a readily recognisable physical landscape feature.
- 6.9 The villages of Widford and Hunsdon are located approximately 5.5km to the west of Sawbridgeworth meaning that this parcel plays a more limited role in preventing urban areas from merging.
- 6.10 Therefore, some development within the parcel can be accommodated along the eastern edge of this parcel leading to a new Green Belt boundary along the course of the brook and ditch, which would form a robust boundary to the settlement along a permanent physical feature.

Area 3

- 6.11 Area 3 coincides with Area 10 of the EHDC Green Belt Review which found that the area partly serves to check unrestricted urban sprawl, serves a purpose in preventing merging with neighbouring settlements, safeguards the countryside from encroachment and does not serve to preserve the special character and setting of the town.
- 6.12 The eastern boundary is overlooked by the existing residential area to the south-west of Sawbridgeworth and the parcel is crossed by several public footpaths heading west into the countryside. The degree of openness of the parcel is restricted by the existing hedgerow and tree planting along the field margins (**Photographs 22** and **23**).
- 6.13 The village of High Wych is located approximately 1km to the west and, taking into account the Rivers Hospital site and adjacent dwellings, development on this parcel would close the gap between the settlements.

Area 4

- 6.14 Area 4 occupies an area of parkland that abuts the southern boundary of Sawbridgeworth and is home to a large number of mature parkland and hedgerow trees and woodland (**Photographs 24** and **25**). The parkland is crossed by the Three Forests Way public footpath (which is also a National Trail) and a series of informal paths that endow the area with a strong amenity value. As a result, the landscape quality of this area is considered to be high due to the intrinsic value of the numerous landscape elements present.
- 6.15 This, along with the well vegetated boundary with the dwellings off Newton Drive and Kingsmead, means that the parkland plays an important role in the landscape and heritage setting of the town.
- 6.16 Harlow is located approximately 1.5km to the south of Sawbridgeworth and so the parkland plays a role in preventing coalescence of the two towns.
- 6.17 Therefore, it is considered that this parcel does fulfil the functions of the Green Belt and release for development would result in the loss or deterioration of an important amenity space with numerous established landscape features.

Area 5

- 6.18 A footpath running behind the properties off Kingsmead from Area 5 connects into Pishiobury Park, a former deer hunting reserve and manor house that now forms amenity parkland with mature woodland, parkland trees, grassland and scrub of high biodiversity value (**Photograph 26**).
- 6.19 The topography of this area slopes to the east to join the valley of the River Stort, which represents a significant defining element within the landscape (**Photograph 27**).
- 6.20 This landscape plays a significant role in influencing the setting and character of the area and provides an area of high amenity value. Therefore, it is considered that expansion of the settlement in this direction would not be appropriate.

Area 6

- 6.21 Area 6 is heavily influenced by the River Stort which marks the extent of the settlement as development along the western edge of Sawbridgeworth is oriented to overlook the river (**Photograph 28**). The footpath that follows the river does so for much of the river course and is ingrained within the wider network of recreational routes.

- 6.22 There is some development within the parcel as Sawbridgeworth Railway Station is located on the other side of the River which, combined with the quantum of trees and hedgerows means that the land is less characteristic of the Thorley Uplands landscape area (described in Section 2 (**Photograph 29**)).
- 6.23 The River Stort and associated floodplain provides a robust edge to the town. Development in this area would impact on the setting and character of the River and is not considered as appropriate.

7.0 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The Site lies at the western edge of Sawbridgeworth and is being promoted for development through the emerging District Plan.
- 7.2 The Site occupies an agricultural field that is designated as Green Belt and is allocated for development under the emerging District Plan.
- 7.3 In visibility terms, the Site is visible from several locations in the near distance with opportunities to view the Site from the middle and longer distance being limited by topography and intervening built form and vegetation. It is well related to the existing urban areas and development at the Site will not have any significant impacts upon the setting of the Sawbridgeworth Conservation Area.
- 7.4 Development at the Site would constitute a planned release of land from the Green Belt; this appraisal has found this to be appropriate for the Site in relation to the 5 functions of the Green Belt and concurs with the published EHDC District-Wide Green Belt Review (September 2013).
- 7.5 In conclusion, it is considered that development at the Site that addresses the key landscape criteria as outlined in the report would not offend adopted planning policy and would have no material impact upon the character and quality of the surrounding landscape or the heritage assets of the town. Furthermore, development at the Site presents the opportunity to redefine an existing weak Green Belt boundary to provide a robust edge to the town.