

**TPA/1**

**Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council  
Local Plan**

**Overview Topic Paper**

**May 2017**



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## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the key stages and evolution of the plan and the development of the overall spatial strategy. The evidence base and key papers are signposted throughout this Topic Paper.

## 2 Background

- 2.1 The current Local Plan is the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan which was adopted in 2005 under the transitional arrangements set out in The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

### The Local Development Scheme

- 2.2 The first Local Development Scheme was approved in 2005. It set out a programme for the preparation of a Core Strategy. Work commenced in accordance with that programme on producing the evidence and identifying the key issues for the Plan.
- 2.3 The Local Development Scheme has subsequently been updated a number of times. In 2014 it was revised to reflect the Council's decision to move from separate Local Development Documents to the preparation of a single Local Plan and Policies Map. The latest Local Development Scheme (ORD/3) was approved by Cabinet 4<sup>th</sup> April 2017. <http://www.welhat.gov.uk/LDS>
- 2.4 Progress on the production of the Local Plan has been regularly reported on in the authority's monitoring report - the 'Annual Monitoring Report'. <http://www.welhat.gov.uk/AMR>

## 3 Key Stages in the Preparation of the Plan

- 3.1 The key milestones in the production of the Local Plan are set out in Table 1 below.

**Table 1 Key stages in the production of the Local Plan**

Stage	Dates
<p><b>Evidence gathering</b> – this has been extensive and has taken place over a number of years and therefore some studies have been updated. The majority of the evidence base is published on the Council's website. <a href="http://www.welhat.gov.uk/evidencebase">http://www.welhat.gov.uk/evidencebase</a> The list below sets out the main pieces of evidence but is not exhaustive.</p> <p>Landscape Character Assessment 2005; Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment 2006; Central Herts Employment Land Review 2006-7; Hertfordshire London Arc Employment Land Review 2009 ;Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment 2010; London Commuter Belt (West) Strategic</p>	2005-2010

**Table 1 continued:** Key stages in the production of the Local Plan

Stage	Dates
<p>Housing Market Assessment 2010; Strategic Flood Risk Assessment 2009 Retail Town Centre Needs Assessment 2007; PPG17 Assessment; Hertfordshire Infrastructure and Investment Strategy 2009; Rye Meads Cycle Study 2009; Water Cycle Scoping Study 2010; SA Scoping Report 2008; Herts Renewable and Low Carbon Study 2010.</p> <p>Community Facilities Study 2012; Sports Facilities Study and Strategy 2013; Green Belt Review Purposes Assessment 2013; Stage 2 Green Belt Sites Review 2014-16; Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study 2012 -2016; Housing Targets Study 2012; Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessments 2012-14; Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment 2016; Welwyn Hatfield Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2014- 16; Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (level 1 and 2) 2015; Flood Risk and Sequential Test 2016; Welwyn Hatfield Combined Policy Viability Study – June 2014; Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan Update Viability Report 2016.</p> <p>In the light of publication of the 2014 sub-national household projections and updated employment forecasts, the SHMA was updated and the need for employment floorspace reviewed. The Hertfordshire Water Study 2017 is expected to be published shortly once it has been signed off by all the commissioning authorities.</p>	<p>2011 - 2016</p> <p>2017</p>
<p><b>Pre- Issues and Options Consultation-</b> details of the range of consultation that took place are set out in the consultation statement. <a href="http://www.welhat.gov.uk/article/4142/Pre-Issues-and-Options">http://www.welhat.gov.uk/article/4142/Pre-Issues-and-Options</a></p>	<p>2007 – 2008</p>
<p><b>Issues and Options Consultation</b> prepared following the adoption of the East of England Regional Spatial Strategy 2008. Details of the consultation that took place are set out in the consultation statement.</p> <p><a href="http://www.welhat.gov.uk/article/763/Core-Strategy-Issues-and-Options">http://www.welhat.gov.uk/article/763/Core-Strategy-Issues-and-Options</a></p> <p>Although the Issues and Options consultation document was prepared in the context of the Regional Spatial Strategy, the issues and options were still relevant for the Local Plan. The three main sections of the document - The Environment, Sustainable Development and Quality of Life and Providing for Growth addressed the three main dimensions of sustainable development – environmental, social and economic.</p>	<p>March to May 2009</p>

**Table 1 continued:** Key stages in the production of the Local Plan

Stage	Dates
<p><b>Successful Legal Challenge to the RSS.</b> Welwyn Hatfield's growth figures quashed and referred back to the government. This left Welwyn Hatfield with no firm target to plan for and unable to make progress until this part of the East of England Plan had been reviewed.</p>	2009
<p><b>Community workshops</b> - series of workshops around the borough to reflect the new Localism agenda introduced by the Coalition government.</p> <p><a href="http://www.welhat.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=12253&amp;p=0">http://www.welhat.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=12253&amp;p=0</a></p>	November 2010
<p><b>How Many New Homes Consultation</b> – as a consequence of the government's announcement that it would be Local Plans which would set housing targets in the future. Whilst the East of England Plan (EEP) was not revoked until January 2013, as the housing target for Welwyn Hatfield set out in the EEP had already been quashed as a result of a High Court decision in 2009, this left Welwyn Hatfield with no firm target to plan for (although the East of England Regional Assembly had published interim targets as part of its early plan review). The Council carried out consultation on a range of 5 alternative housing targets based on: Urban Capacity (2,925); the Interim East of England Plan Review (5,800); Long Term trends (7,600); the quashed East of England Plan target (10,000); and Official 2008-based Household Projections (14,400). A supporting paper was produced as part of this consultation.</p> <p><a href="http://www.welhat.gov.uk/homes">http://www.welhat.gov.uk/homes</a></p>	June – July 2011
<p><b>Emerging Core Strategy and Land for Housing Outside Urban Areas consultation</b> – the document was informed by two Housing Background Papers, Part 1 considered what should be the appropriate housing target and Part 2 options for different distribution strategies. The consultation document was accompanied by a Sustainability Appraisal, Habitats Regulations Assessment and a Draft Infrastructure Delivery Plan. The Land for Housing Outside Urban Areas considered options for urban extensions around Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield.</p> <p><a href="http://www.welhat.gov.uk/article/4616/Emerging-Core-Strategy">http://www.welhat.gov.uk/article/4616/Emerging-Core-Strategy</a></p>	November 2012 -January 2013
<p><b>Local Plan Consultation document 2015</b> – following the decision in 2014 to prepare a single Local Plan this consultation set out options for sites, a changed strategy for the distribution of growth, other significant changes to strategic policies, and a list of development management policies and their policy intent.</p> <p><a href="http://www.welhat.gov.uk/localplanconsultation2015">http://www.welhat.gov.uk/localplanconsultation2015</a></p>	January – March 2015

**Table 1 continued:** Key stages in the production of the Local Plan

Stage	Dates
<p><b>Draft Local Plan and Policies Map Proposed Submission</b> – this document represented the Regulation 19 publication version of the Local Plan. It was accompanied by a Sustainability Appraisal, Habitats Regulations Assessment and Draft Infrastructure Delivery Plan. In addition to the evidence base and the results of previous consultation, it was informed by two site selection background papers on housing and employment land.  <a href="http://www.welhat.gov.uk/localplan">http://www.welhat.gov.uk/localplan</a></p>	<p>August – October 2016</p>
<p><b>Resolution to Submit the Local Plan</b> – Following consideration of the Regulation 20 representations, Full Council resolved to submit the Local Plan and Policies Map for examination.</p>	<p>10th April 2017</p>

### The Statement of Community Involvement

3.2 At the same time work also commenced on the production of the first Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) which was adopted in 2007. The SCI was subsequently amended to reflect the changes to the planning system. Consultation on the proposed changes took place alongside the Emerging Core Strategy and a revised SCI was adopted in 2013.  
<http://www.welhat.gov.uk/SCI>.

3.3 A statement of consultation has been produced for each stage setting out how the requirements of the SCI and the Regulations have been met. The statements set out the key issues raised during those consultations and how the Council responded.

### Sustainability Appraisal

3.4 Sustainability Appraisal has been carried out at each stage in the production of the plan. This is described in section 5 of the SA report 2016. At the early stages of plan preparation, this comprised an assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of different strategic options. As the plan-making process developed and with more detailed policies and proposals to consider, it became possible to carry out a full appraisal of the options.

### Habitats Regulations Assessment

3.5 Because of the proximity of Europa 2000 sites to development proposals a Habitats Regulations Assessment was carried out on the ECS and the Proposed Submission Local Plan. As a consequence of the recommendation set out in paragraph 6.47 of the 2016 Habitats Regulations Assessment SUB/2 paragraphs 13.22 and 13.23 were inserted into the Local Plan in the Infrastructure Chapter. This relates to any need for additional capacity at the Rye Meads STW being delivered without any harm to European sites, notably the Lee Valley SPA.

## 4 Evolution of the Strategy for Growth

- 4.1 The Core Strategy Issues and Options consultation document (2009) (LPD1) identified that in order to meet the then Regional Spatial Strategy housing target of 500 dwellings per annum (beyond 2021), land would need to be released from the Green Belt.
- 4.2 The Issues and Options document posed a number of options as to how development might be distributed around the borough. These comprised the following:
1. A proportionate approach (PG31);
  2. Growth focused around Welwyn Garden City (PG32a);
  3. Growth focused around Hatfield (PG32b);
  4. Growth focused around Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield ((PG32c); and
  5. Growth focused around the towns and large scale expansion of one or more villages (PG39 to PG46)
- 4.3 The option of a new settlement was not posed at the time as this would not have been in conformity with the East of England Plan 2008, the Regional Spatial Strategy. Land to the west of Hatfield in St Albans was posed as an option for meeting some of that need as this had been referred to in the Regional Spatial Strategy.
- 4.4 At the Emerging Core Strategy stage (2012) LPD/4 a further option was identified in the Housing Background Paper Part 2 (HOU/5).
6. Growth mainly focused on Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield with limited growth around the borough's four large excluded villages.
- 4.5 The Issues and Options document had also referred to the density of development being a consideration. The quantum of land that would need to be released from the Green Belt will be dependent on the density at which new housing is built. Options were posed for different densities of new development. The option of meeting the target entirely through urban capacity through higher densities was considered again at the Emerging Core Strategy stage in the Housing Background Paper Part 2 but was dismissed as a suitable option because it would not deliver the range of housing type and mix to meet the requirements of different households.
- 4.6 Successive consultations have identified strong support for maintaining the character of settlements and a preference for a design-led approach rather than a prescriptive approach to densities. As a consequence, the Emerging Core Strategy set out a strategic approach to achieving a high quality of design in new development and the Local Plan has carried this approach forward in Policy SP9 Place Making and High Quality Design.

- 4.7 The distribution options were informed by evidence set out in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment. The identification of sites had been informed by a call for sites and a review of land in public ownership.
- 4.8 At the Emerging Core Strategy stage, distribution options 4 and 6, as set out in the Housing Background Paper Part 2 HOU/5, were considered to be the only realistic options and the Council decided to consult on a preferred option of urban extensions to Welwyn Garden City, (including land in East Herts which would contribute to meeting some of Welwyn Hatfield's needs) and an urban extension to the north west of Hatfield with a further extension to the west of Hatfield safeguarded to meet longer term needs (option 4). The Land for Housing Outside Urban Areas document (2012) (LPD/3) presented the options for urban extensions around the two towns.
- 4.9 The response to the consultation indicated a strong preference for a more dispersed approach to the distribution of growth and the Sustainability Appraisal had indicated that there were some sustainability advantages to limited growth around the villages as this would help to sustain community facilities which might otherwise struggle to be maintained given the low levels of urban capacity. In addition to these points, the need for a higher housing target resulted in the Council deciding that the release of land from the Green Belt would also be required around the villages.
- 4.10 Given that changes to the planning system in 2012 meant that local planning authorities were no longer required to prepare separate development plan documents the advantages of preparing a single Local Plan as opposed to separate documents were examined. In April 2014, the Council's Cabinet Housing and Planning Panel agreed to recommend to Cabinet that the Local Development Scheme be amended setting out a timetable for the preparation of a single Local Plan as opposed to separate development plan documents. This would also have the benefit of allowing sites to come forward more quickly.
- 4.11 A comprehensive strategic review of the Green Belt took place in 2013 and the Strategic Housing and Land Availability Assessment considered the suitability of those sites which would contribute to a sustainable pattern of development in accordance with paragraph 84 of the National Planning Policy Framework. The Community Facilities Audit completed in 2012 confirmed that the borough's most sustainable settlements are the towns and villages which are inset from the Green Belt.
- 4.12 The settlement hierarchy was first set out in the Emerging Core Strategy. It ranks the towns and villages in terms of the role they play in serving the surrounding area and the level of facilities and services they contain. The Settlement Strategy sets out the scale of development appropriate to the role of each level in the hierarchy.
- 4.13 The Green Belt Topic Paper (TPA/2) discusses in more detail the approach to reviewing the Green Belt, which has been carried out in two stages – a strategic comprehensive review and a site specific review relating to smaller

parcels of land. Figures 7.1 to 7.3, 7.5 to 7.7 and 7.7.3 of the (Strategic) Green Belt Review Purposes Assessment (2013) (GB/1) demonstrate:

- (a) That there are few parcels of land within Welwyn Hatfield which do not perform a Green Belt function; and
- (b) Its importance in preventing the coalescence of settlements. Figure 7.7.3 of the Green Belt Review Purposes Assessment identifies strategic gaps between the towns (see Appendix A).

- 4.14 Exceptional circumstances for its release would be required and the harm to the Green Belt would need to be balanced against the benefits of bringing development forward. The 2015 Local Plan Consultation document consulted on sites which were assessed as being either 'more favourable', 'finely balanced' or 'less favourable' based on an initial balancing exercise. This was subsequently refined and the Housing Topic Paper describes how this was approached for the Proposed Submission version of the Local Plan, with the balancing exercise itself set out in the Housing Sites Selection Background Paper 2016 (HOU/20, HOU/20a).
- 4.15 Whilst a proportionate approach to distributing dwellings was a preferred option for distributing growth, this could only ever be a mathematical starting point as the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development and plans must respond to different opportunities in different areas. Given the different characteristics of parts of the borough; and once the presence of critical environmental assets and infrastructure constraints had been taken into account, it was unlikely that a proportionate split would be achievable or represent the most appropriate distribution pattern.
- 4.16 The Issues and Options paper posed the question as to whether some assets were more valuable than others, however, responses indicated that different people have different values and there was no consensus on which should have more value. The Emerging Core Strategy set a preferred option for protecting key environmental assets proportionate to their significance and this approach has been carried through to the submission version of the Local Plan. The impact of development on such assets formed part of the assessment in the SHLAA/ HELAA and or the Sustainability Appraisal.
- 4.17 In response to the Local Plan Consultation document (2015) a number of new sites were put forward for consideration. This included the option of a new village at Symondshyde. Because of its scale, (1,130 dwellings which compares to Welham Green 1,311 dwellings in 2011 and larger than Digswell, Little Heath and Woolmer Green) it was considered that this would provide an opportunity to form a sustainable pattern of development as it would be capable of delivering some facilities and services equivalent to other inset villages in the borough and therefore that it should be assessed to determine its suitability and deliverability. The option of a new settlement had been cited in a number of representations to previous consultations but had never previously featured as a realistic option as no standalone sites of a suitable scale had come forward. At the time of going out to consultation on the Local

Plan Consultation document in 2015 the Council also wrote to the government asking for its help in delivering such an option. However the response from the government was that such a proposal should be brought about locally.

- 4.18 The lack of sufficient infrastructure to accompany growth has been a concern of respondents at every consultation stage. An Infrastructure Delivery Plan has accompanied the Emerging Core Strategy, the Local Plan Consultation document and the Proposed Submission Local Plan. Different scenarios for growth have been tested with infrastructure providers and the results of this testing fed into the site selection background papers (HOU20, HOU20a ECO8 and ECO8a).
- 4.19 Infrastructure constraints most notably around education provision has resulted in a small shortfall of housing against Objective Assessment of Housing Need based on the 2012 household projections (but 10% above the 2012 SNHP 'starting point' and 4% above the demographic scenario with an uplift for younger household formation).
- 4.20 At the earlier Issues and Options stage of plan making, consideration was given as to whether the shortfall could be addressed through the expansion of Hatfield into St Albans City and District Council (SADC) and through the expansion of Welwyn Garden City into East Herts at the Emerging Core Strategy stage. However the option of the expansion of Hatfield into St Albans would result in the loss of a country park, and furthermore it is designated as a preferred minerals area in the Minerals Local Plan and is unlikely to be available for the next thirty years. In addition, St Albans are opposed to its loss not least because it lies within a strategic Green Belt gap between Hatfield and St Albans.
- 4.21 Land to the south east of Welwyn Garden City in East Herts has been identified in the East Herts Local Plan for 1.350 dwellings and is part of a larger site identified as Birchall Garden Suburb in both the East Herts and Welwyn Hatfield Local Plans. However the dwellings to be delivered in East Herts are required to meet East Herts' OAN albeit that they will be delivered within part of Welwyn Hatfield's Housing Market Area.
- 4.22 The Council has committed<sup>1</sup> to an early review of the Plan and will continue to work with other duty to co-operate bodies to address the infrastructure capacity issues and the shortfall in housing against the objectively assessed need.
- 4.23 The Local Plan also seeks to meet the needs for growth for the local economy. Sites are identified to meet the retail floorspace needs in both Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield, with new neighbourhoods providing day to day convenience floorspace.
- 4.24 The evidence which supported the Emerging Core Strategy and the Local Plan Consultation document indicated that no increase in employment

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<sup>1</sup> Cabinet Housing and Planning Panel 16<sup>th</sup> March 2017 paragraph 4.59 of the main report.

floorspace was required. However more recent economic forecasts have reversed that position and the Proposed Submission Local Plan identifies a number of new employment areas and employment sites. Further details on this are set out in the Economy Topic Paper (TPA/3).

- 4.25 Land at Marshmoor SDS7 (WeG4b) was promoted to the Council specifically to provide research and development facilities located close to the station, the Royal Veterinary College and the University of Hertfordshire and within the life science cluster between Camden and Cambridge. This site represents one of the few opportunities within the borough for new employment land. Some new employment land has also been provided within the strategic housing sites at Birchall Garden Suburb SDS2 (WGC5), which straddles the boundary with East Herts, an employment area (EA11) has been designated for B1, B2 and B8 uses and North West Hatfield SDS5 (HAT1) provision has been made for B1 uses within the site. Broadwater Road West SDS3 and SDS4 (Pea02b and Pea02c) is an urban regeneration site predominantly for residential use has also been identified as suitable for some B1 uses.
- 4.26 The key aspects of the spatial strategy are illustrated on the Key Diagram of the Local Plan (Figure 6 page 46) which is reproduced here as Appendix B.

Appendix A: Figure 7.7.3 of the Green Belt Review Purposes Assessment (2013)

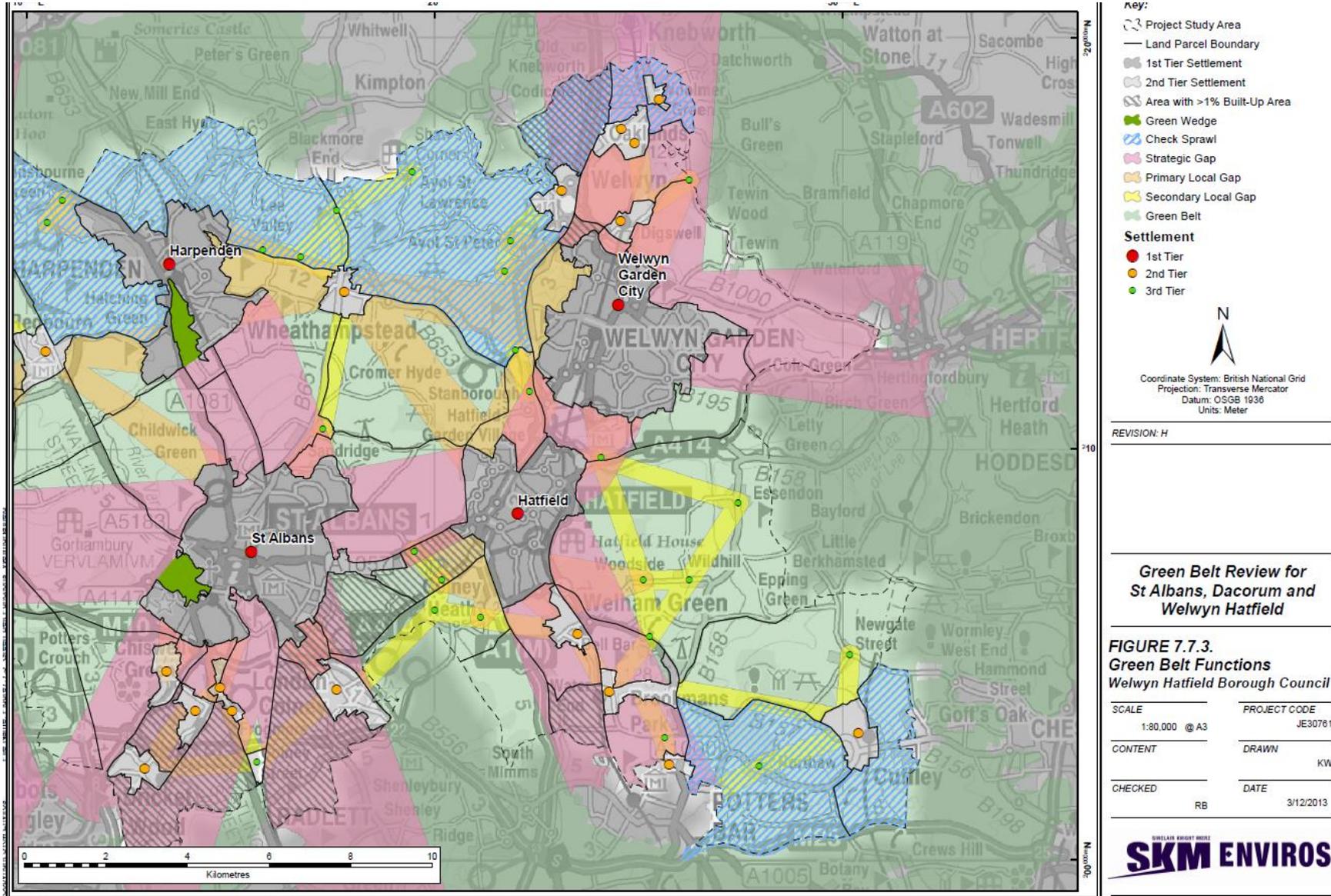
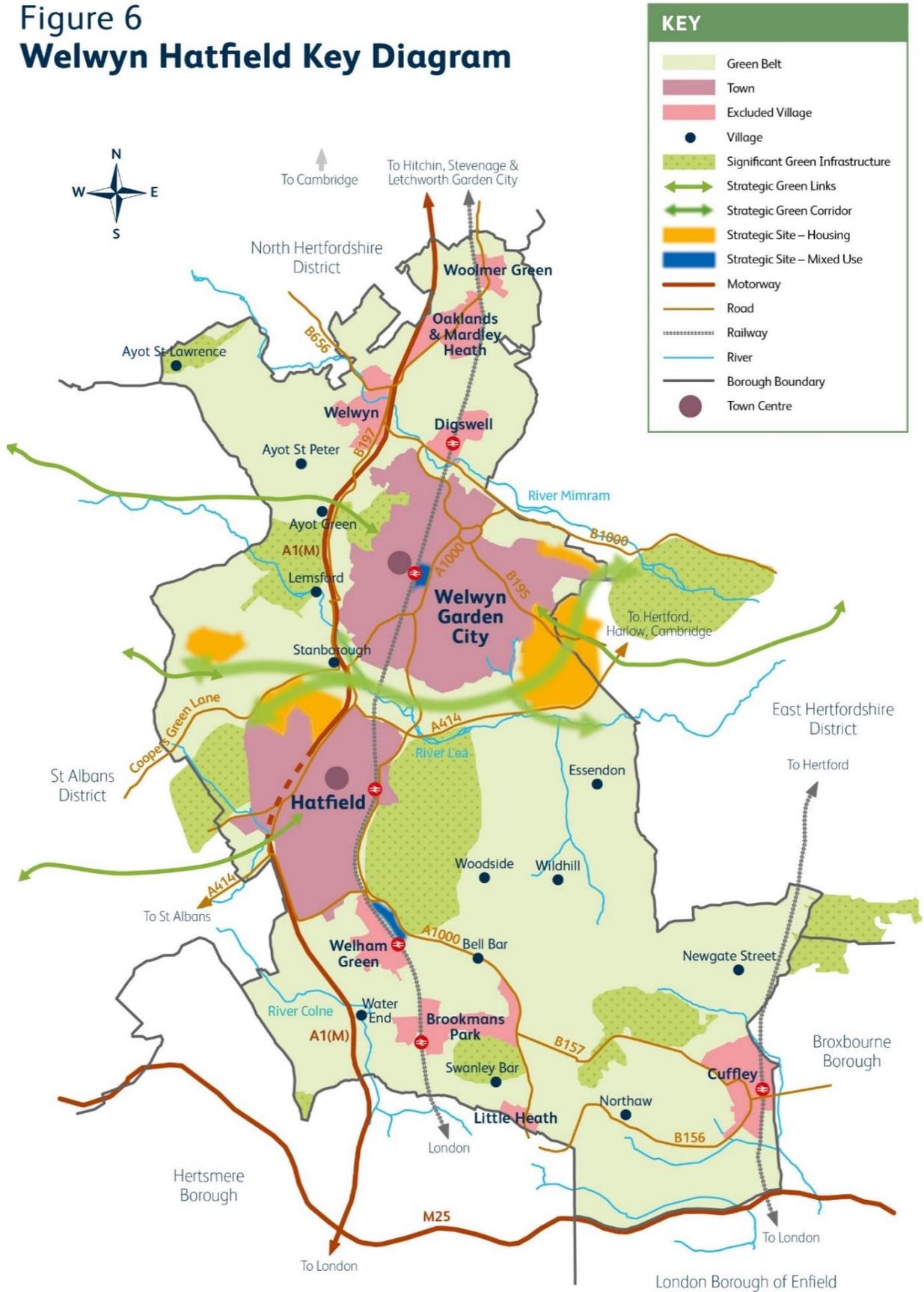


Figure 6  
**Welwyn Hatfield Key Diagram**





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