



Examination of Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan
Stage 2
Green Belt Review and Spatial Visions and Settlement Strategy
Historic England, Hearing Statement
October 2017

Historic England Hearing Statement

Introduction

- 1.1 In carrying out its role in protecting and managing the historic environment Historic England gives advice to local planning authorities on certain categories of applications affecting the historic environment. Historic England is the principal Government adviser on the historic environment, advising it on planning and listed building consent applications, appeals and other matters generally affecting the historic environment.
- 1.2 Historic England is consulted on Local Development Plans under the provisions of the duty to co-operate and provides advice to ensure that legislation and national policy in the National Planning Policy Framework are thereby reflected in local planning policy and practice.
- 1.3 The tests of soundness require that Local Development Plans should be positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy. Historic England's representations in relation to the Publication Draft Local Plan are made in the context of the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework ("the Framework") in relation to the historic environment as a component of sustainable development.
- 1.4 This statement addresses the Inspector's questions with regards to Matter
- 1.5 This hearing statement should be read alongside Historic England's comments submitted at previous consultation stages of the Local Plan.

Inspector's Questions

- 1.6 We set out below our responses to the Inspector's questions in light of our historic environment role.

Matters and Issues for Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan Stage 2 hearing sessions

Matters: Green Belt Review and Spatial Visions and Settlement Strategy

4) Green Belt Review.

Do the proposed revisions to GB boundaries result in stronger boundaries that will endure well beyond the life of this plan?

- 2.1 When defining boundaries, the NPPF, paragraph 85, states that local authorities should:
- ensure consistency with the Local Plan strategy for meeting identified requirements for sustainable development
 - not include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open
 - where necessary, identify in their plans areas of 'safeguarded land' between the urban area and the Green Belt, in order to meet longer-term development needs stretching well beyond the plan period
 - make clear that the safeguarded land is not allocated for development at the present time. Planning permission for the permanent development of safeguarded land should only be granted following a Local Plan review which proposes the development
 - satisfy themselves that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the development plan period
 - define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent
- 2.2 Many of the new belt boundaries do follow physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent e.g. roads/streams, field boundaries. We would however question the rationale for the green belt boundary adjoining site SDS1. This does not follow a readily recognisable, permanent physical feature.
- 2.3 In terms of the question of permanence, it is somewhat concerning that Policy SP3 states that 'Green Belt boundaries...will be maintained throughout the plan period and will only be reviewed through a review of this plan'. It is our understanding that Green Belt reviews should be exceptional, not revisited at every review of the plan. The boundaries should be permanent and look beyond the plan period. Indeed this is expressly identified as one of the criteria in para 85 of the NPPF – *'local authorities should satisfy themselves that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the development plan period'*. There does not appear to be any provision for *'safeguarded land' between the urban area and the Green Belt, in order to meet longer-term development needs stretching well beyond the plan period'* as required by the NPPF.

6) Spatial Vision and Settlement Strategy.

Do they reinforce the Garden City and New Town heritage of the Borough, whilst maintaining the area's distinctive character?

- 2.4 Historic England welcomes reference to heritage issues in the overall Spatial Vision for Welwyn Hatfield. We note reference to the Garden City and New Town heritage in the 6th paragraph of the Vision and reference to the wider historic environment in paragraph 7 of the Vision. Paragraph 6 of the Vision sets out key features of the Garden City and New Town heritage including *attractive open spaces, well designed good quality housing, pattern of neighbourhoods providing small-scale shops, services and community facilities, and opportunities for a wide range of employment* and states that these features *will be reinforced*. The paragraph goes on to state that *'the distinctive character and role of our towns and village will be maintained by bringing forward well designed developments. Strategic sites will have been masterplanned along garden city principles'*.
- 2.5 This vision is very much welcomed by Historic England. The New Town and Garden City heritage of Welwyn Hatfield is important. Future development should build upon these principles, recognising those aspects of New Towns and Garden City principles which are good and applying them to the masterplanning of future development in a twenty first century context.
- 2.6 Historic England therefore welcomes this strategic vision for the Borough. It will be important for this Vision to be realised through careful implementation of these aims during masterplanning of major new development coming forward in the Borough.