

# **Examination of the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan**

## **Council's Hearing Statement for Matter 2**

### **Overarching Strategy: Q6 Spatial Vision and Settlement Strategy**

**9 October 2017**

**(For Hearing Session 24-26 October 2017)**



**6) Spatial Vision and Settlement Strategy**

**6a) Do they reinforce the Garden City and New Town heritage of the borough, whilst maintaining the area's distinctive character?**

***Welwyn Hatfield response***

- 6.1 Yes, the spatial vision and settlement strategy reinforce the Garden City and New Town heritage whilst maintaining the area's distinctive character. By seeking to reinforce the borough's unique heritage and maintain the character of our settlements, the spatial vision emphasises the value the Council gives to the Garden City and new town principles and also to the local distinctiveness of its villages. The Settlement Strategy recognises the role and function of each of the borough's settlement which it seeks to maintain and reinforce through the approach to allocating growth and protection of the Green Belt.
- 6.2 Garden City principles are recognised as a basis for good planning. In September 2015 the Council undertook a stakeholder workshop to consider how these principles can be updated to reflect current challenges. The outcomes of this workshop led to the identification of a series of Garden City principles based on those first identified by the Town and Country Planning Association. The ten principles are outlined in the Settlement Policies section of the Submitted Local Plan promote strong leadership, a strategic approach and community engagement. This emphasis on the planned approach is one of the reasons why the Council sets out a requirement for the preparation of masterplans to form the basis of Supplementary Planning Documents for each of the strategic sites. This approach will enable new neighbourhoods to come forward as extensions to the towns. The principles also seek to deliver key qualities of the Garden City heritage (many of which are also New Town characteristics) such as good quality and mixed tenure homes, a range of local employment opportunities, the use of planning obligations and CIL to deliver open space and infrastructure, provision of neighbourhood facilities and integrated and accessible transport systems.
- 6.3 The Vision and Objectives will be delivered through the implementation of the policies set out in the Local Plan. A number of the strategic policies in the Local Plan reinforce and enhance aspects of the Garden City and New Town heritage. Policies SP 12 Green Infrastructure and SADM 17 Urban Open Land protect and improve the provision of open spaces, which is a key aspect of the garden city and new town design ethos. Policy SP7 Type and Mix of Housing promotes the delivery of different tenures and types of housing to support the needs of different households and Policy SP6 seeks to safeguard existing community facilities and enhance provision at a neighbourhood scale. Policy SP9 Place Making and High Quality Design sets out the requirements for high quality development, which reflects local character and context at different (often overlapping) scales. Applicants are required to submit a Sustainable Design Statement will have to demonstrate how the design responds to the spatial character and context of the site. Considerations include the architecture, built form, formal layout, townscape, landscape and integration of green infrastructure. This does not mean that new development

should mirror the surrounding built environment but must respect and relate to it positively.

- 6.4 Settlement specific issues such as the regeneration of Hatfield town centre, are addressed through a series of objectives and settlement specific policies.
- 6.5 The character of an area is not just about its appearance but also about how it functions as a place. The Settlement Strategy identifies a settlement hierarchy based on the existing role and function of the settlements and by indicating what the primary, secondary and tertiary focuses for development will be. The Sustainability Appraisal<sup>1</sup> indicated that the villages would benefit from limited growth in order to help sustain their facilities and services and help meet locally generated housing need.
- 6.6 **Representations and soundness:** There are very few representations relating to the issues of Garden City and New Town heritage and maintaining local character in the spatial vision and settlement strategy. Several comments relate broadly to maintaining local character by criticising the level of growth at specific villages and the inclusion of the new village Symondshyde. Proposed changes seek to move Welham Green up the settlement hierarchy so more sites are allocated and delete reference to a new village. The Council consider these changes are not appropriate. Welham Green clearly does not function as a town and insufficient growth has been promoted which would result in a change in its function. Symondshyde will be of a similar size and perform a similar function to a number of villages in the borough and therefore it is appropriate to include it within the settlement hierarchy.

**6b) Is the strategy being advanced consistent with the borough's Green Belt location?**

***Welwyn Hatfield response***

- 6.7 Yes. The settlement strategy clearly directs the majority of development towards Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield with more limited development within and around villages. In order to deliver the proposed level of growth, the exceptional step has been taken to release a limited amount of land from the Green Belt. The case for these exceptional circumstances is detailed in response to Q5.
- 6.8 The proposed strategy is consistent with the NPPF, which states that when reviewing Green Belt boundaries, local planning authorities should take into account the need to promote sustainable patterns of development and consider the consequences for sustainable development of channeling development towards urban areas inside the Green Belt, towards towns and villages inset within the Green Belt or towards locations beyond the Green Belt. The strategy is also consistent with paragraph 52 of the NPPF which acknowledges that the supply of new homes can sometimes be best achieved through planning for large scale development, such as new settlements or extensions to existing villages and towns. Paragraph 89 indicates that limited infilling in villages

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<sup>1</sup> To accompany the Emerging Core Strategy 2012 – paragraph 13.6

washed over by the Green Belt is not inappropriate and Policy SADM34 in the Local Plan sets out the criteria for assessing such proposals in accordance with the Settlement Strategy.

**6c Is the strategy being advanced really one that seeks to maintain the existing pattern of settlements?**

***Welwyn Hatfield Response***

- 6.9 **The existing settlement pattern:** The borough's existing settlement pattern can be described as a network of towns, villages and other settlements. This dispersed pattern of settlements is characteristic of much of Hertfordshire, where there is no one dominant town but instead many towns in reasonably close proximity to each other spread along main transport routes and interspersed with numerous large and small villages, small hamlets and areas of randomly sited ribbon development.
- 6.10 The settlement pattern reflects the policy context of preceding (countywide) structure plans and local plans, where the application of Green Belt policy has played its role in preventing inappropriate development and coalescence - successfully maintaining separation between settlements.
- 6.11 The borough has two towns – Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield – as well as a number of large and small villages providing a mix of urban, suburban and rural areas. The two towns and eight of the borough's existing villages are inset (excluded) from the Green Belt. The gaps between the borough's towns and inset villages and the areas of countryside around these towns and villages are all currently designated as Green Belt (with the exception of one Area of Special Restraint – ASR – at Panshanger). The borough's smaller villages and other small settlement areas are all washed over by the Green Belt. Whilst all the borough's towns and villages are separated from each other by the Green Belt, existing gaps vary from location to location and some gaps are very narrow (and fragile) in certain instances.
- 6.12 **The strategy:** The strategy of the submitted Local Plan seeks to maintain the role and function of the borough's existing settlements. No settlements are proposed to be merged. The addition of the new settlement Symondshyde will not alter the settlement pattern or hierarchy. It will be of a similar scale and size to other villages in the hierarchy and will perform a similar role. Its inclusion will simply be an additional village to add to the network of settlements across the borough.
- 6.13 **Representations and soundness:** A number of representations comment that the allocation of a new village will change the settlement pattern and therefore propose that Symondshyde is removed from the Local Plan. It is considered that this argument conflates the number of settlements with the settlement pattern and does not render the Plan unsound.