

BRIEFING NOTE

WELWYN HATFIELD LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION

9th JUNE 2020

The south western edge of Birchall Garden Suburb: Design considerations

Purpose

This note addresses the concern of the Inspector examining the draft Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan that the form of development proposed on the south western edge of Birchall Garden Suburb (BGS) might be discordant with the Garden City Principles that have underpinned the planning of Welwyn Garden City to date and which the Council intends should guide the design of proposed extensions to the garden city, including BGS.

The Inspector's concern in context

The Inspector refers in his note EX186B to "Welwyn Garden City Objective 4" within the draft Local Plan. That objective is "to develop new neighbourhoods and neighbourhood extensions masterplanned according to Garden City Principles" (para. 14.8 of the draft Plan).

The Inspector goes on to refer to the achievement of "beautifully and imaginatively designed homes set in gardens and attractive green spaces to create healthy and vibrant communities". However, the full wording of "Garden City Principle 5 for masterplanning strategic developments" is:

"Beautifully and imaginatively designed homes set in gardens and attractive green spaces will be achieved through the masterplanning process at a range of densities to suit 21st century living, combining the best of town and country to create healthy and vibrant communities." (emphasis added)

It is important to consider the full wording of this Garden City Principle. Critically, it includes reference to "a range of densities". In this context, paragraph 14.4 of the draft Local Plan states that:

"Since the New Town era, Welwyn Garden City has continued to develop successfully. However, with the passage of time, a number of challenges face the town: The town has a growing population and a need for more homes. Originally designed at a low density there is now a need to consider how higher density development can be accommodated to ensure a more efficient use of land in a manner which retains the character of the town." (emphasis added)

Paragraph 14.4 of the Plan goes on to state that:

"The town is famed for its central grand landscaped boulevard and network of green squares that are integral to the layout and design of the garden city. These areas need to be protected and will need to be replicated using more innovative solutions such as green roofs, walls, terraces and balconies for higher density development to be appropriately integrated." (emphasis added)

The Inspector's concern that the form of development proposed on the south western edge of BGS might be discordant with Garden City Principles needs to be considered in the context of a Local Plan that is promoting higher densities of development at Welwyn Garden City than those built to date. Moreover, the Inspector's concern also needs to be considered in the context of a Plan that is promoting "innovative solutions" to enable necessary higher density development "to be appropriately integrated" with the existing urban area, including the historic garden city. Importantly in this respect, there need be no conflict at BGS between the application of Garden City Principles on the one hand and the pursuit of higher development densities and associated innovative design solutions on the other.

The south western edge of Birchall Garden Suburb

The presence of Burnside calls for "innovative solutions" to the design of that part of BGS nearest to it. In that respect, the existence of Burnside gives rise to design opportunities for BGS as much as being a constraint to be considered in its masterplanning.

The noise modelling that has been undertaken by Cole Jarman (**Appendix 3** to this response to EX186B/C) points to a need for a bund of 10m in height around the northern and eastern edges of Burnside, as well as buildings of up to 4 storeys on this edge of BGS.

This form of development presents the opportunity to accommodate flats and denser houses in a location close to the proposed neighbourhood centre and primary school, where denser housing would be fully in accordance with sustainable development imperatives, including by reducing the need for car-borne travel to key facilities used on a daily basis. Increased densities in this area of BGS close to this community infrastructure will contribute to the more than 350 1- and 2-bed homes that housing needs analysis indicates is required as part of the BGS development.

Moreover, neither 3-storey nor even 4-storey development is in any way alien to Welwyn Garden City. **Annex 1** to this note displays images of as many as twelve examples of such development that accord with Garden City Principles, of which five are 4-storey buildings (Cole Green Lane, Cole Green House, De Soissons Close, Merrifield Court Parkway and Salvisburg Court).

Several of these examples are located in that part of Welwyn Garden City close to BGS, with a cluster of examples sited along or near Cole Green Lane. Woodhall Parade, itself a 3-storey structure, presents a continuous façade of as long as around 200m.

These twelve local examples add to the four examples of specific noise-responsive design we included in our submissions to the Examination in November 2019 (Enclosure C) and February 2020 (Appendix 4). Importantly, it must be emphasised that orientating openable windows of habitable rooms away from a noise source does not preclude fenestration for those same rooms fronting that noise source, thereby maximising both natural light for occupants and architectural interest for observers.

In that context, Cole Jarman has modelled not only a stepped block of flats to the north of Burnside (in addition to the straight-edged block modelled previously), but also alternative design possibilities involving 3-storey flats or even 2-storey semi-detached houses. These three further design possibilities achieve different aspects to the north-south arrangements initially put before the Inspector.

Indicative sketch floor plans of typical housing units within each of these four design possibilities are presented in **Annex 2** to this note. Those indicative plans and accompanying precedent photographs demonstrate the potential for homes on this edge of BGS to provide open, well-lit and commodious living space, delivering high levels of residential amenity.

In all these respects, therefore, these design possibilities accord with Garden City Principles, such that the Inspector can be confident that an appropriate design solution can be worked up at the detailed design stage.

Conclusion

The form of development proposed for the south western edge of BGS would be entirely consistent with Garden City Principles, including the specific interpretation and application of those principles in the draft Local Plan. That form of development not only responds successfully to the noise constraint presented by Burnside, but does so in a manner enabling modestly higher densities and appropriate design innovation, fully in accordance with the draft Plan and with good design practice.

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