

Appendix 5

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council Response to Inspector - Facilities and Settlement Size

Introduction

A hearing session was held on 12 March 2020 into the proposed allocations Birchall Garden Suburb and Symondshyde. The Inspector produced a note, reference EX186C in which he expressed reservations about the proposals and sought additional information and analysis. This paper is one of a series which seeks to respond to that note with further justification and information.

Purpose

The Inspector has requested further analysis of the potential viability of community and commercial facilities in Symondshyde, given its current proposed 1,130 dwelling size. In particular, he has asked for information on other communities to gain an insight into commercial and funding implications of community scales. The purpose of this paper is to provide the information sought together with a commentary assessing the relevance to the Symondshyde new village.

Summary

A comparative study was undertaken of “new villages” (built since 1990 or currently being planned) to measure their facilities and infrastructure against their size. This evidence indicates:-

- Primary Schools can be provided and are viable at about 900 dwellings or more. A primary school is proposed at Symondshyde.
- Secondary School provision will depend on the planning and education strategies since they will service a larger catchment than just a new village. There is a secondary school planned in the nearby NW Hatfield site which will provide facilities within walking distance of the new village.
- Community halls and general needs (food) shops can be provided and are viable at 550 dwellings or more. Both are planned at Symondshyde.
- Primary Health Care (GP) services are difficult to plan for and provide at any “village” scale and there is a current centralisation/clustering trend in such services. There is provision for a surgery building at the nearby North West Hatfield allocation which the Council will be strongly encouraging the NHS to take up and which will provide close access for Symondshyde. In addition, the transport investment set out in the report by WSP (Appendix 4 to S.Tiley’s covering letter) will provide sustainable access to the existing surgeries in and around Hatfield Town Centre.
- Public Houses are less certain overall. There is some evidence that a new settlement of around 1,100 homes could support a public house, but clearly an increase in scale would improve the prospects. In the case of Symondshyde the council believes that the existing brewery on the site is a potential kernel for a new public house.

Background

Symondshyde (SDS6) is a proposed new village north west of Hatfield, some 1km from the proposed North West Hatfield urban extension (SDS5). The proposal in the submitted plan has a capacity of 1,130 dwellings, with the nearby urban extension to provide 1,650. The Council's view is that these would act in combination with respect to service provision, albeit physically separated by highly accessible and permeable greenspace. However, this paper and the research it is based on considers the Symondshyde new village as a discreet proposal.

Symondshyde is to provide the following facilities to meet the day to day needs of its residents.

- A small neighbourhood centre to meet the day to day retail needs of residents
- A community centre
- Leisure facilities
- A 2 form entry primary school (420 places)
- Contributions towards the delivery of a new 8-10 form entry secondary school at NW Hatfield

New Village Study

In accordance with the Inspector's request, the Council has researched a range of new villages across the country. We have defined a new village for this purpose as a mainly residential development, separated from another settlement and which has been developed from the 1990s onwards. There are three sources which have been examined, using internet research. These provide 18 examples for comparison.

- The redevelopment of former isolated hospitals from the 1990s onwards. These new villages are largely complete and are all 1150 dwellings or less in size.
- One example of a development plan allocation which is not part of the Garden Communities programme with 1100 dwellings. This is partly developed.
- Garden Villages within the Garden Communities programme. These are mainly not commenced and in various stages of the planning process. They are all proposed to be 1500 dwellings or more.

A table summarising the results of the research is attached as an Annex to this paper. For each of the new settlements it shows the following information. It is sorted from small to large settlement.

- Name
- Location
- Development Status
- Nearest settlement
- Number of dwellings
- Schools
- Community Halls
- Shops
- Health Facilities
- Public Houses

The implications for Symondshyde

- Primary Education

Primary Schools are present or proposed in all the settlements researched with 880 dwellings or more. This is consistent with Hertfordshire County Council's requirement for a 2-form entry (420 place) primary school per 1000 dwellings. See submitted Local Plan, paragraph 13.45.

At Symondshyde, the proposed 2 form entry Primary School accords with this evidence. Our conclusion is that the primary school is necessary and deliverable and will be viable in operation. Should there be an increase in the settlement size, the primary school would need to expand accordingly, and there is no obvious impediment to this being achieved.

- Secondary Education

The research indicates that secondary schools are rarely present in new villages. Two examples where secondary provision is to be made on-site relate to the wider needs of the areas involved rather than the number of pupils arising in the villages themselves. Financial contributions to off-site provision are more commonly proposed.

A new 8-10 form entry secondary school is proposed in the nearby allocation at North West Hatfield (SDS5) and Symondshyde would be one of the developments making financial contributions towards it. This school will be within walking distance of the new village. The provision has been agreed with the landowner in a signed Memorandum of Understanding, therefore its delivery is secure. Hertfordshire County Council is content with the proposed location of the secondary school.

- Community Halls

The smallest new village examined, with 350 dwellings, had a functioning community hall, but some other slightly larger settlements did not. All the developments with 550 dwellings or more had a community hall, suggesting that this is the more certain scale for viable provision. Unsurprisingly, all the proposed Garden Villages (1,500 dwellings or more) are due to contain a community hall, with some proposed to be combined with other facilities such as sports and health.

The Local Plan requires that a community centre is provided at Symondshyde and the landowners have confirmed their intention to do so in their submitted technical paper EX92A. The evidence suggests that such provision will be viable at the new village's current scale so there should be no need to increase the settlement size for this reason. Nevertheless, it does seem likely that increasing the scale of the proposal would lead to benefits such as a larger facility with a wider range of activities.

- Shops

A general purpose (food) shop exists in all the existing new villages of 550 dwellings or larger. Every proposed Garden Village proposes one or more shops, generally within a village centre.

The Local Plan requires the provision of a small neighbourhood centre to meet the day to day needs of residents, and the evidence of other new communities indicates that a food shop would be viable in Symondshyde, potentially together with a small number of associated non-food units. It seems possible that increasing the scale of development at Symondshyde would increase the potential number and range of retail facilities. However, there is no direct evidence of this in the comparative study.

- Health

Research indicates that primary health care (in particular GP practices) is absent in all of the existing new villages. Many of the Garden Village proposals refer to health provision of various forms. A key problem in this area is the nature of primary health care organisation. GP practices are independent companies and are not bound by local plan requirements, nor indeed by CCG policies and strategies. In general, the trend is towards more centralised provision, whether as larger practices or co-location with other GPs or in community hospitals. A recent example of a new GP surgery moving into a new settlement is at Cranbrook in Devon, but that has a proposed scale of 8,000 dwellings so is not a helpful comparison with the situation here.

There is no proposal to provide health facilities at Symondshyde. Our assessment is that such provision is unlikely even with an increase in the new village's scale. The nearby urban extension at North West Hatfield has land set aside for a GP surgery and the Council will be seeking to persuade the CCG to plan for primary care provision at that site. The existing surgeries are mainly located in and close to Hatfield town centre, reflecting their role as something needed occasionally, rather than on a day-to-day basis. The proposals to enhance bus provision will give good public transport access to the town centre and this would provide certainty that residents of the new village can access GP surgeries in a sustainable manner.

- Catering

None of the existing new villages have a pub, although two have a restaurant. Finberry, near Ashford in Kent (size 1100 dwellings) has just received outline consent for a public house. This indicates that a village the size of Symondshyde could attract such a provision, although obviously that is not certain yet. All the 1500+ dwelling Garden Villages refer to the inclusion of one or more pubs, often in addition to cafes and other eating establishments.

There is currently no reference to a public house or other eating establishment within the local plan policy. The Council believes that the existing brewery on the site is interested in expanding their operations to provide a linked pub/bar operation on site. This specific local circumstance therefore favours the Symondshyde proposal over and above other locations. A pub in this location would also be within reasonable walking distance of the nearby North West Hatfield allocation and indeed the existing Hatfield Garden Village housing area.

Clearly, common sense suggests that the economics of a public house would benefit from a greater population in the immediate catchment and therefore increasing the size of Symondshyde would be likely to support the viability of this provision.

- **Overall Conclusion**

The evidence gathered gives a good level of confidence in the provision of a primary school, community hall and shop at Symondshyde at the current scale of development, providing resident access to day-to-day facilities. Common sense suggests that an increase in scale would be beneficial to these facilities' long term viability through additional demand and also additional development funding.

At present there is no specific mention of a public house, but the evidence suggests that this may be possible as a viable business, particularly because of the synergy with the existing brewing business on the site. Consideration should therefore be given to including a public house as a policy requirement, particularly if the village is to be expanded.

It does not appear likely that there could be local health facilities within the site at either the current or a larger scale. There is scope for a GP surgery at the nearby NW Hatfield site

where a site has been made available. In any case, the improvements to public transport set out in the separate paper would provide improved access to the existing cluster of surgeries in Hatfield town centre.