

Examination of the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan 2013-32 the Overarching Strategy:

Inspector's Preliminary Questions

Having now read the Local Plan (LP) and much of the supporting information that relates to strategic matters, the Inspector is beginning to formulate the issues that may need to be discussed at the Hearing sessions and is coming to preliminary conclusions as to the areas of the plan that it may not be easy to find sound, either because of the nature of the supporting information or the lack of it. To assist the process, he has now asked me to write to you about the Overarching Strategy that you have put forward and he has set out some questions. He would value your brief comments on these.

Matter 3 – the Spatial Vision and Overarching Strategy

Issue

In the context of the overall provision for housing and jobs that the plan puts forward, whether the vision and resultant strategy are justified, effective and consistent with national planning policy in the context of the Borough's Green Belt (GB) location?

Spatial Vision and Overarching Strategy

- 1) The Spatial Vision seeks to ensure that the Borough has a prosperous local economy, which makes best use of its links to London and Cambridge and the benefits associated with being a centre for higher education. Sites upon which new employment opportunities can be provided are to be created. At the same time the indigenous population of working age is likely to decline.
- 2) As a result, significantly above average population growth is anticipated, accompanied by a high demand for new dwellings, many of them to meet the need of migrants who will work in the growing economy.
- 3) The LP makes provision for 12,000 dwellings (630dpa) between 2013 and 2032 but the latest Full Objective Assessment of Housing Need (FOAHN) suggests that about 15,200, (800dpa) are now required.
- 4) Whilst maximizing development within settlement boundaries, a limited release of land from the GB is to take place. This limited release was expected to accommodate about 6,200 dwellings and related facilities (over half of the estimated need). If all of the dwellings from the revised FOAHN were to be built in the Borough, then this could increase to 9,400.
- 5) Two thirds of the expansion is to adjoin Welwyn Garden City (WGC) and Hatfield (H), whose Garden City and New Town heritage is to be reinforced along with the GB between these towns and an associated Green Corridor.
- 6) A large new village settlement is to be created as an exemplar of sustainable best practice, wholly within the GB, in the open gap between WGC/H and St Albans. This area currently has limited accessibility and infrastructure.
- 7) At the same time, the role of the GB between WGC/H and surrounding towns is to be reinforced.

Questions

Spatial Vision

- 1) Is the creation of new employment opportunities and the consequent increase in households requiring new dwellings, consistent with the desire to limit the amount of land lost from the GB?
- 2) In the context of its GB location, should the plan be seeking to make the best use of the links to London and Cambridge and the potential benefits associated with the University, in order to grow the economy?
- 3) Is the amount of development now assumed to be necessary to support the strategy (a growth of over 15,000 households) likely to maintain the existing settlement pattern and limit the amount of land taken from the GB?
- 4) Does the development strategy really reinforce the Garden City and New Town Heritage and maintain their distinctive character?
- 5) Would the proposed new settlement really be an exemplar of sustainable best practice? For example how would it contribute to reducing the impact of carbon emissions on climate change?
- 6) Given its proposed size, (1,200d), how are its overall infrastructure requirements likely to result in a sustainable and economic use of resources?
- 7) How does the new settlement reinforce the GB between WGC/H and the towns to the west?
- 8) Overall, is the Spatial Vision and its long term implications, consistent with the location of W/H within the Metropolitan GB?

Objectives

- 9) Is the proposed new settlement in a location consistent with Objectives 2, 5 and 6 and the third bullet point of Policy SP1?
- 10) Is the extent of built development suggested by Policy SDS2 at Birchall Garden Suburb consistent with Objective 8 and the fourth bullet point of Policy SP1? Does it reinforce the role of the GB between WGC and H? Does it protect the significant nearby heritage asset?

SP1 Delivering Sustainable Development

- 11) Is the decision to plan positively for growth in a way that supports economic growth and to the extent proposed, consistent with the Borough's location and the Council's desire to limit the loss of land from the GB?

SP2 Targets for Growth

- 12) Is the provision of nearly 300 hectares of employment land, together with more than 116,000 sm of new employment floorspace and its ramifications for population growth and overall dwelling requirement, consistent with the desire to limit the amount of land

- 13) Is the suggested phasing of residential development consistent with National Planning Policy Guidance's (NPPG) desire to boost significantly the supply of housing?
- 14) Is this phasing and the differential rates of development put forward, fully justified by infrastructure constraints?

SP3 Settlement Strategy

- 15) Has the GB Review been objectively undertaken using a methodology that has produced sound conclusions?
- 16) Do all of the changes to the GB boundaries result in the production of stronger GB boundaries as advocated by NPPG?
- 17) Are the proposed new GB boundaries, consistent with the need to have regard to their intended permanence in the long term and their capability of enduring beyond the plan period?