

# **Welwyn and Hatfield Borough Council**

## **Draft Local Plan - Examination in Public**

### **Stage 2 Hearing Sessions, 24 -27 October 2017**

#### **Overarching Strategy and Targets for Growth**

#### **Statement on behalf of Promoters at Welham Green – Hill Residential, Landform Estates Ltd and Potterells Farm Partnership\***

\* This Joint Hearing Statement has been submitted to the Stage 2 Hearing session on behalf of various promoters at Welham Green. Each party has its own duly made representations, but have common interests. This statement does not prejudice the ability of these promoters to submit further statements, either jointly or independently, to future matter sessions.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

1.1 This Joint Hearing Statement (JHS) has been prepared on behalf of Promoters at Welham Green:

- Hill Residential who has an interest in land South of Welham Manor (WeG3)
- Landform Estates Ltd who control Skimpans Farms, Bulls Lane (WeG6)
- Potterells Farm Partnership who has an interest in land at Potterells Farm (WeG15)

1.2 The sites have each been assessed as being suitable, available and achievable for residential development in Welwyn and Hatfield Borough Council's (WHBC) Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) 2016. Sites WeG1, WeG10 and WeG12, also at Welham Green, have been similarly assessed as being suitable for residential development in the HELAA. The Council has not proposed the allocation of sites WeG1, WeG3, WeG6, WeG10, WeG12, and WeG15 to provide new housing in the Draft Local Plan that was submitted to the Secretary of State on 15 May 2017 for independent examination.

1.3 The JHS responds to the 'Questions and Matters' issued by the Inspector in respect of the Stage 2 Examination in Public. Question 7 is of most relevance in respect of the approach taken to growth at Welham Green, although other questions are addressed where relevant, including Green Belt matters.

## **Supporting Information**

1.4 The following supporting documentation is included with the JHS:

1. Appendix A - Education Position Statement (EPS) prepared by EFM Consultants;
2. Appendix B - School Delivery Plan (SDP) prepared by EPDS Consultants;
3. Appendix C - A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) prepared by the Promotion Group;
4. Appendix D - Green Belt Review prepared by Terence O'Rourke; and,
5. Appendix E - Transport Statement prepared by Vectos.

## **Welham Green Background**

- 1.5 Despite determining the suitability, availability and achievability of the six sites, the Council has only proposed limited growth at Welham Green during the plan period restricting it to 92 homes, including 80 dwellings at Marshmoor (WeG4b) and 12 gypsy and travellers pitches at Foxes Lane (GTLAA01). As set out in the Housing Sites Selection Document (June 2016), the Council resisted further allocations at Welham Green *inter alia*, on the grounds of the limited capacity at the existing St Mary's Church of England Primary School, which is a 1FE Voluntary Aided School, under the auspices of the Diocese of St Albans.
- 1.6 Following the Regulation 19 consultation on the Draft Local Plan Submission Document, the Council, at a Cabinet Housing and Planning Panel Meeting on 16 March 2017, subsequently introduced insufficient secondary school capacity in the area as a further reason not to provide for additional growth at Welham Green. The EPS documents this in more detail.

## **2 MATTERS AND QUESTIONS - RESPONSE**

### **Objectively Assessed Housing Need**

- 2.1 The Promoters at Welham Green consider that the constraints imposed by infrastructure requirements, in this case both primary and secondary education, to restricting the proposed level of growth at Welham Green are not fully justified and are in direct conflict with the requirement at NPPF Paragraph 14 for local planning authorities to positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of their area.
- 2.2 The Council's failure to provide for adequate infrastructure, which is necessary to support future growth, has contributed to a proposed housing requirement of 12,000, against an identified Objectively Assessed Housing Need (OAHN) range of 12,500 to 13,433 (at the time of Submission). This represents a significant shortfall of 1,433 units against the upper range. Furthermore, the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) update 2017, which uses the most recently published 2014 based Sub-National Household Projections, suggests that 15,067 new homes are now required. Whichever scenario, WHBC is under-providing against its OAHN. The Draft Local Plan does not therefore satisfy the requirements of NPPF paragraph 47 to meet in full the objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing.

### **Spatial Strategy Apportionment**

- 2.3 Welham Green is a large village to the south of Hatfield with which it retains close physical links. It has a varied character of older and newer housing and a relatively large and established employment area, which includes a Tesco Storage and Distribution Centre and the UK headquarters of Mitsubishi Electric. It has a shopping parade, pubs, a primary school and a village hall. Welham Green has a station on the East Coast Mainline with direct links to London and has good accessibility to the main road and bus networks.
- 2.4 Policy SP3 recognises that most growth will be directed to the main settlements of Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield. Importantly, it highlights that the secondary focus for development will be at the large villages, which includes Welham Green. The village's position in the settlement hierarchy reflects its sustainability credentials for locating additional growth.

- 2.5 Welham Green has a population of 3,741 (2011 Census), containing approximately 4% of the existing residents within the Borough, but will only receive 0.8% of new dwellings in the draft Local Plan (92/12,000). Indeed, the draft Local Plan reveals that if growth is distributed across the borough on a proportionate basis the identified OAHN need for Welham Green between 2011 and 2031 is 360 new dwellings. If the six sites (447) plus the proposed allocations (92) were allocated (539 units) this would equate to 4.5% of proposed new dwellings across the Borough.
- 2.6 Restricting the proposed level of growth at Welham Green will not enable housing needs at the village to be met and does not reflect its position in the settlement hierarchy. Further, by providing the largest proposed employment allocation at the village, without the corresponding levels of housing, the Council is providing for unsustainable patterns of growth through travel to work patterns and an unbalanced settlement.

### **Addressing the Education Constraint**

- 2.7 This JHS and supporting EPS, SDP and MOU provide an overview of key education matters associated with providing additional growth at Welham Green in the Local Plan confirming:
1. there is no overriding primary school capacity constraint at Welham Green;
  2. there are no grounds on which to restrict additional growth at Welham Green on the basis of secondary school capacity. There is an identified need for additional secondary school capacity within the plan period but the failure to identify a third secondary school site for this has, in contrast to the approach at Welham Green, not prevented the allocation of suitable sites for housing elsewhere in the borough; and,
  3. there is agreement in principle between the six land owners and The St Albans Diocese in respect of the delivery of primary education in Welham Green.
- 2.8 The SDP demonstrates the deliverability of additional primary school capacity at Welham Green through a proposed primary school site. The MoU sets out the commitments of the Promoters to enter into a formal collaboration agreement, once the sites have been allocated through modifications to the emerging Local Plan, binding the Promoters to make best endeavours to implement the SDP. A Green Belt Review and Transport update have also been prepared, which consider the cumulative impacts of the additional sites, to further demonstrate their suitability for development.

2.9 The additional primary level education capacity would accommodate the pupils generated by the new housing and be consistent with WHBC's spatial strategy for Welham Green and deliver the housing numbers needed meet the OAHN.

### **Exceptional Circumstances**

2.10 NPPF Para 82 states that '*new Green Belts boundaries should only be established in exceptional circumstances*'. Indeed, Para 83 states that '*Local planning authorities with Green Belts in their area should establish Green Belt boundaries in their Local Plans which set the framework for Green Belt and settlement policy.*' Through allocating WeG4, the Council has acknowledged that exceptional circumstances exist in Welham Green that require Green Belt boundaries to be amended through the Local Plan.

2.11 Further, NPPF Para 83 is very clear that the Green Belt boundary should endure beyond the plan period. The Council's approach to relying on a review of the Local Plan would require Green Belt boundaries to be considered again in exploring options to provide additional development to meet the OAHN is contrary to the NPPF's emphasis on securing an enduring and permanent Green Belt through the Local Plan. If it is concluded that OAHN have been met, the Welham sites should still be safeguarded for development beyond the plan period. Not only would this approach ensure boundaries endure, but in the event other sites fail to deliver housing as anticipated, they could be brought forward to maintain an adequate five-year supply.

2.12 The Council's own Green Belt assessment and the Green Belt review that supports this submission confirms the limited contributions of the six sites, both individually and cumulatively, to the purposes of the Green Belt. Given that exceptional circumstances are considered to exist at the village these sites should be released from the Green Belt and allocated for residential development. The Green Belt review also demonstrates that the proposed primary school site and existing school site should also be released to help meet development needs.

### **3 SUMMARY**

- 3.1 Through preparation of this material, the Promoters at Welham Green have endeavoured to provide a robust and comprehensive response to the education position at Welham Green.
- 3.2 In short, the current approach put forward by the Council will result in the identified OAHN not being met and in turn would be contrary to the requirements for plan making as set out in NPPF Paragraph 14. Furthermore, and in respect of NPPF para 182, the Local Plan has not been positively prepared and will not be effective in delivering the agreed OAHN.
- 3.3 Indeed, the constraints imposed on development in Welham Green are not justified and the Promoters have clearly set out their position in respect of the delivery of additional primary education facilities in the settlement.
- 3.4 With respect to secondary education provision, Welham Green is no different to any other settlement in the Borough. The new Local Plan should be the mechanism for positively preparing the correct level of secondary school infrastructure (including a site for a third secondary school), not through an early review as suggested by the Council.
- 3.5 The Promoters at Welham Green respectfully request that the Inspector considers the allocation of additional sites in Welham Green through Main Modifications to the draft Local Plan.

#### **Attendance at the Examination in Public**

- 3.6 It is anticipated that Barton Willmore, Hill Residential, Terence O'Rourke, EFM and EPDS will attend the Examination on behalf of the Promoters at Welham Green and we respectfully request two seats at the table to facilitate this.