



**WELWYN
HATFIELD**

**Joint Examination of the
Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan 2013-2032
and the
East Herts District Plan 2011-2033**

Birchall Garden Suburb/East of Welwyn Garden

Examination Hearing Statements

Matters and Issues

Matter 8 - Retail

Matter 8 – Retail

Development is proposed to occur on either side of a reclaimed waste tip area, creating two distinct neighbourhoods of similar size.

Issues

40) In that context, why is one of the two centres proposed to be subservient to the other?

Response

- a) As set out in Policy SP19 of the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan and Policy EWEL1 of The East Herts District Plan, residential development at Birchall Garden Suburb is proposed to occur in two distinct areas, with significant public open space and woodland, as well as an employment area, separating the two. It is proposed that in order to encourage the sustainability of each part, each of the two areas will have a local centre, with the one in the northern part of the site in East Herts being slightly larger than the one in the southern part within Welwyn Hatfield.
- b) This difference in size is for two key reasons. Firstly, the centre in the northern area is more easily accessible from the A414 and B195 – which provides a route towards Welwyn Garden City Town Centre - than that in the southern area. The proposed centre in the south is further away from the A414, less accessible from that road and likely to be less visible to passing traffic. As a result, the centre in the north is likely to attract more footfall from passing traffic, and as a result will serve a larger catchment area, whereas the one in the south will primarily serve the immediately surrounding area. In addition, part of the southern part of the site lies relatively close to the existing Hall Grove neighbourhood centre within Welwyn Garden City, so it may be that some potential footfall goes to the existing centre instead of the new one.
- c) Secondly, the centre in the south is immediately adjacent to a primary school, whereas the one in the north is in close proximity to a secondary school. These schools will create important footfall for both centres, but inevitably the secondary school is significantly larger than the primary school, so is likely to generate more footfall.
- d) Finally, the Welwyn Hatfield Infrastructure Delivery Plan (Welwyn Hatfield ref: **INF/20**) sets out that two new health centres would meet the need for the levels of growth set out in the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan and that one of these would be provided in east Welwyn Garden City and another in Hatfield. It is considered that the local centre in East Herts would be the more appropriate location for the new centre.
- e) As a result of these contributors to footfall, it is considered that the centre in the north should be larger than that in the south, despite serving broadly similar sized residential areas, and it is considered that there is insufficient capacity for two large centres.

- f) There are a number of existing neighbourhood centres within Welwyn Hatfield, of a range of sizes classified in the Local Plan. The Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan identifies two categories of neighbourhood centres within Policy SP5; Large Neighbourhood and Village Centres, and Small Neighbourhood and Village Centres, and lists ten and twelve of these respectively. Larger centres have a wider range of shops and services such as small supermarkets, pharmacies and GP surgeries. The proposed approach to the provision of centres is therefore consistent with the pattern of neighbourhood centres in Welwyn Garden City.

41) Has there been any assessment of the likely and comparative need for retail and community facilities, within the two neighbourhoods and the respective areas that they abut?

Response

- a) The Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan retail policies are informed by the Welwyn Hatfield Retail and Town Centre Needs Assessment 2016 and the East Herts District Plan retail policies have been informed by the East Herts Retail and Town Centre Study Update 2013 and the Retail and Town Centres Policy – Advice to East Herts District Council
- b) To address the specific requirements of part of the Birchall site, a paper was produced by David Lock Associates on behalf of Tarmac in July 2013 in response to a request to provide evidence that a development of 1,200 dwellings could support a new neighbourhood centre and 2FE Primary School. This paper considered the appropriate size of a neighbourhood centre identified as ‘Cole Green’ (not to be confused with the settlement of Cole Green), the area in the southern part of the site,
- c) The paper, entitled “Birchall Garden Suburb – Neighbourhood Centre Viability Report” set out the role of neighbourhood centres, the provision in proximity to the site, how they have been affected by changes in shopping behaviour in recent years, and how such centres can be delivered by developers.
- d) The paper considered the likely expenditure levels a development of 1,200 dwellings in this location would generate, and concluded that the development could accommodate up to four retail units.
- e) The paper also sought the views of a specialist developer of neighbourhood centres who felt that the centre could support an anchor retail unit along with a maximum of four smaller retail units. It also considered the likely catchment population needed to support a range of other services such as a primary school, a doctors’, a community centre and a public house. Finally, it gave four examples of local centres developed recently as part of residential-led mixed use developments to demonstrate the range of uses which can be accommodated within such sites, and what is likely to be attractive to the development industry.
- f) Whilst no equivalent summary has been produced which specifically considers the northern part of the site, the conclusions on the level of population required to sustain

a neighbourhood centre and a range of services would apply equally to this part of the site.

- g) For the reasons quoted in the response to question 40, detailed above, the neighbourhood centre in the northern part of the site is likely to have greater footfall, and so is considered likely to be able to support a greater level of provision. Likewise, as the northern part of the site is further away from any neighbourhood centres which already exist within Welwyn Garden City, it is currently considered that it would be more appropriate to locate community and healthcare facilities here.

42) Does an evidence base justify the differing proposals for the two neighbourhood centre proposals?

Response

- a) The summary provided in response to questions 40 and 41, above, demonstrates why it is currently considered that the proposed neighbourhood centres in the two parts of the site would be likely to be slightly different in both size and services accommodated, despite serving a broadly similar dwelling numbers.