



HOUSE OF COMMONS

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## Statement by Grant Shapps MP to Public Examination into the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan

I am Grant Shapps, the Member of Parliament for Welwyn Hatfield. I am here to make a statement as the local MP. I also declare an interest as Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on General Aviation – comprising 125 cross-party MPs and Peers – and as a past Panshanger Airfield aviator, which also gives me direct knowledge of the airfield, its position and support in the community and its operations in the past.

May I first say that it is obviously important that the need for housing is not only recognised but met by the Local Plan. I fully support this.

Second, the need for this Local Plan to be robust and sound is also of great importance, because there are people on all sides with different views and what we're seeking is for you, Sir, to guide the Local Authority into making it a sound plan that accords with Government policy. I am totally in favour of that too.

Third, turning now to Panshanger Airfield – and I understand others will follow me in relation to this – it is imperative that this asset, the importance of which has been recognised by the Local Authority in paragraph 14.32 of the draft Local Plan in relation to Sport England, would be capable of remaining a highly important local and community business, leisure and tourism resource, if reinstated. Something which should strongly be supported by Local Plan policy in accordance with the government's National Planning Policy Framework, as well as other guidance documents, which I reference below and believe others will detail.

The question therefore, as I understand it, for you in terms of soundness, is: *“whether this proposed policy [SP 18] is in accordance with Government policy?”* Can the Masterplan *“allow the opportunity for a realigned grass runway on land to the north of the Green Belt boundary”* or, will it lead to the closure of Panshanger Airfield? May I just therefore dwell on that for a moment.

As I understand it, both the land within the Green Belt and the Area of Special Restraint comprising the airfield (which includes land proposed for housing at Panshanger and a narrow area to its north) has a lawful use as an airfield and has been in use as such since WW2, over 75 years ago. It is not in active use today only because the owner has terminated the lease, presumably to consider developing the land as proposed. The lawful use of the land for aviation use nonetheless remains.

Furthermore, it is the only current planning permission on this land. In addition, the northern section of this land has also been Green Belt land for many years and I understand that planning policy states that its boundaries should remain permanent and not be altered except in exceptional circumstances (NPPF para 83), which must first be demonstrated through the Local Plan process.

I also see that the NPPF in para 81 urges Local Authorities to plan positively to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt, such as looking for opportunities to provide for outdoor sport and recreation. This is the definition of Panshanger Airfield, whose sporting and recreational use is important and should be maintained/reinstated, having as it does the very strong support of Sport England.

Indeed, the facility also enjoys strong community support, in addition to companies and institutions including nearby University of Hertfordshire who have in excess of 500 students studying aerospace subjects. The Vice Chancellor says, *“The University of Hertfordshire would welcome the reinstatement of Panshanger airfield as part of a mixed-use approach. Given the impressive aviation history in this area, and the University’s continued status as a leading aeronautical education institution, there could be potential benefits and opportunities for our students and the wider population.”*

The lawful use of the Green Belt land, in this case as an airfield, is for a use which is supported by government policy in both the NPPF and the Aviation Policy Framework (APF)<sup>1</sup> which remains current and with full force. Moreover, a December 2017 Parliamentary Answer states that this Framework has been further strengthened by the March 2015 publication of the General Aviation Strategy:

### **Aviation: Written question - 117145**

#### **Q**

Asked by [Grant Shapps](#)  
(Welwyn Hatfield)

[\[N\]](#)

Asked on: 04 December 2017

#### **Department for Communities and Local Government**

#### **Aviation**

117145

*To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, with reference to the General Aviation Strategy, what assessment his Department has made of how current planning guidance supports the Government's vision of the UK being the best place in the world for General Aviation.*

#### **A**

Answered by: [Alok Sharma](#)

Answered on: 07 December 2017

*The National Planning Policy Framework expects local planning authorities, when preparing their Local Plans, to take account of the role of airfields in meeting business, leisure, training and emergency service needs.*

*The planning practice guidance supporting the Framework was strengthened in March 2015, following publication of the General Aviation Strategy<sup>2</sup>, to make clear that aviation makes a significant contribution to economic growth across the country, including in relation to small and medium sized airports and airfields.*

*The guidance advises that local planning authorities should consider the interconnectivity between airfields of different sizes and that they should have regard to the Aviation Policy Framework.*

Furthermore, I would also draw your attention to the Aviation Policy Framework (APF), including paras 5.6 and 1.86-1.91<sup>3</sup> which support small airfields such as Panshanger remaining in aviation use.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/153776/aviation-policy-framework.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/153776/aviation-policy-framework.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/417334/General\\_Aviation\\_Strategy.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/417334/General_Aviation_Strategy.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/153776/aviation-policy-framework.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/153776/aviation-policy-framework.pdf)

I understand from others who seek to preserve the airfield in aviation use and who have made representations to me as their MP, that it is not practicable to relocate the runway to the north of the proposed housing area exclusively within the narrow band of Green Belt land (shown on Figure 11 in the draft Local Plan). The airfield is a 'community facility' in the context of Policy SADM 7, I understand. If it is not to be lost forever, some of the facility will need to remain on the current Area of Special Restraint (ASR) – this is the area which currently enjoys lawful use as an airfield. I understand that the area to the north of the former airfield<sup>4</sup> is in separate ownership and control and would be outside the proposed Masterplan area in any event. It is therefore clear that if there is to be an opportunity for aviation use on this area, the area currently shown on Figure 11 proposed for development will need to be amended. I return to this point below.

In addition to impediments to relocation including land acquisition from a third party, the need for engineering works including earth moving, the felling and removal of trees, bushes and woodland, and the matter of obtaining planning permission for the formation and use of such a relocated or 'new' runway, the cost would also not be insubstantial if such works were involved. I am also aware, though others will address Civil Aviation Authority requirements in greater detail, of the need for safety margins on either side of any runway, which require land to be clear of obstructions above a certain height. All these matters must be taken into account and I am not aware that either the Council or developer has consulted either the Civil Aviation Authority or other certified, specialist aviation practitioners (such as York Aviation) to ascertain whether the policy, as currently stated, is sound. If no such aviation expertise has been employed, you may regard this as surprising.

Therefore, if relocation as currently envisaged by the Local Plan is not practicable, the Masterplan for the development cannot, to use the words of the Policy "*allow the opportunity for a realigned grass runway on land to the north of the Green Belt boundary*". The policy is, I suggest, by allowing other development on part of the land proposed, doing the very opposite – it is in fact denying that opportunity.

In order to create the opportunity for a mixed-use development, as envisioned by both the Local Plan and guidance including '*Transport evidence bases in plan making*', Paragraph: 012 Reference ID: 54-012-20150313, Revision date: 13 03 2015<sup>5</sup>, it is necessary to "pull back" the pink area of housing development land on Policy SP 18 and Figure 11 in order to adjust the Masterplan for site SDS1<sup>6</sup>. This will enable both housing and aviation uses to be accommodated. I am very much in favour of that compromise situation because, as I understand it, this policy [SP 18] would be unsound otherwise. It would be contrary to policy SADM 7 if this facility is not retained. That is a matter for you of course.

Finally, it is my understanding that nearly every single one of the bullet points in paragraphs 28, 33, 70 and 74 of the NPPF<sup>7</sup>, the Aviation Framework Policy<sup>8</sup> sections 5.6 and 1.86-1.91 and planning guidance on transport evidence bases<sup>9</sup>, which I understand you have copies of, are contrary to the loss of Panshanger Aerodrome as an aviation facility and all that encompasses. If Policy SP 18 (and more particularly Figure 11) as currently drawn, does not in practical terms "*allow the opportunity for realignment*" of a runway at Panshanger Airfield for aviation, then it must be, by definition, unsound.

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<sup>4</sup> beyond (to the north of) the red Site Boundary line on Figure 11 of the Draft Local Plan

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/transport-evidence-bases-in-plan-making-and-decision-taking>

<sup>6</sup>

[http://consult.welhat.gov.uk/portal/planning\\_policy/local\\_plan\\_proposed\\_submission\\_august\\_2016/lpps\\_document?pointId=s1467890356156](http://consult.welhat.gov.uk/portal/planning_policy/local_plan_proposed_submission_august_2016/lpps_document?pointId=s1467890356156)

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/153776/aviation-policy-framework.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/153776/aviation-policy-framework.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/transport-evidence-bases-in-plan-making-and-decision-taking>