



Examination of the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan 2013-32: Stage 3

RESPONSE TO THE INSPECTOR'S MATTERS AND ISSUES ON BEHALF OF TARMAC TRADING LTD.

Policy SP 12 Strategic Green Infrastructure

Tarmac Trading Ltd. (Tarmac) is the promoter of Birchall Garden Suburb (BGS), which is proposed to be allocated for development under Policy SP 19 of the Plan, as well as under Policy EWEL 1 of the draft East Herts District Plan.

This statement follows our Publication stage representation on Policy SP 12 of the Plan and should be read in conjunction with the statement we submitted for the joint Examination hearing on the BGS proposal, particularly our responses to issues 6 to 18 inclusive within that statement.

We respond in this statement to the Inspector's issues 93 and 94.

93) Is too much development being proposed in the Welwyn / Hatfield Green Corridor to maintain its existing natural assets, including its wildlife and to enable their enhancement to be achieved?

No. The amount of development being proposed in the identified Green Corridor is not excessive. Its environmental assets would be enhanced by the proposed BGS development, as demonstrated in the Green Infrastructure Strategy we submitted at Publication stage and as set out within our statement for the joint Examination hearing on the BGS proposal (see our responses to issues 8, 10, 14 and 16/17 within that statement).

However, the two much more important green corridors within the area on account of their ecological interest and wider environmental value are the valleys of the rivers Mimram and Lea, including those watercourses themselves. These are the area's true green corridors of significant environmental value. In this regard, we note the Inspector's Issue 80 ("Does this section of the plan sufficiently recognise the ecological importance of the River Mimram and its environment?"). In our view, the ecological and wider environmental importance of the Mimram and Lea valleys is in danger of being overlooked by a misdirected focus on the identified Green Corridor running somewhat vaguely between the two.

Nevertheless, although the identified Green Corridor is not nearly of such value as those two true green corridors, the proposed BGS development would maintain its existing natural assets, including The Commons Local Nature Reserve, Panshanger Park and the woodlands and other wildlife habitats between them; and improve connectivity between these assets, both for wildlife and for people on foot, by bicycle and on horseback. The proposal to restore the historic landfill in the centre of the BGS site as extensive informal parkland is the most significant mechanism by which enhancement of the area's natural assets would be achieved, but this proposal should be understood in its wider context of multiple green links across the site offering fine-grained permeability (see our response to issue 7 within our statement for the joint BGS hearing).

This approach of multiple linkages providing for fine-grained permeability is evident in our draft Parameter Plan and draft Illustrative Master Plan for our forthcoming outline planning application for BGS. These plans are presented at **Appendix 1** and **Appendix 2** to this Statement respectively.



94) Is the proposed Green Corridor sufficiently wide to enable it to be environmentally viable as a strategic ecological route?

Yes. It does not need to be any wider to enable that objective to be achieved.

When considering the requirements of a green corridor, it is essential that the habitat areas the corridor is going to connect are identified; a selection of key species in these areas are identified to act as 'umbrella' species (actions for which will also be positive for many other species) and then it is possible to look at what these species require to facilitate movement throughout their natural range (in terms of accessing their territories, feeding, breeding or resting sites).

A range of ecological studies have been undertaken to provide a thorough understanding of the ecological baseline of the area. The reports of these studies have been submitted to the Examination (EX36). These studies have provided a basis upon which potential ecological impacts arising from BGS can be assessed.

This work has allowed the identification of key areas of habitat outside and within the site and an appreciation of the species utilising the site itself and the features within it.

Ecologists have played a significant part in formulating the landscape strategy for BGS and the functioning of the site in providing connectivity for wildlife has been considered carefully as the masterplan has evolved. As such, key habitats have been retained as stepping stones and linkages, while a green infrastructure network across the site has been designed to create and strengthen connections that can be used by flora and fauna.

In a consultation meeting with representatives of the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust (HMWT) on 17 November 2017, key aspects of the BGS green infrastructure proposals were discussed, including habitat connectivity through the site and positive feedback was received on how the scheme would deliver significant networks for habitats of biodiversity value. The views expressed by the Trust on connectivity and habitat enhancement opportunities have been taken fully into account and incorporated into the scheme design.

Rather than defining a single key green corridor through the site, the scheme provides a high level of porosity for wildlife movement much more widely over the site through the provision of a wide range of other multi-functional spaces (landscape planting, surface water drainage features and public open space, for example) that would cumulatively deliver biodiversity gains.