

Submission from the Panshanger People residents group to the Planning Inspector for Welwyn Hatfield's stage 4 hearing on the 27th June 2018

Responses to Inspector's preliminary questions doc EX72:

SP 18 North East of Welwyn Garden City

"Would you reassess the extent and capacity of this site with a view to maximising the potential housing numbers that could be achieved through

- a) The site's extension to the north.
- b) A detailed review of the Green Belt boundary in this area.
- c) Investigation of the feasibility of locating some non-housing uses, particularly open uses in the adjacent parts of East Hertfordshire."

Panshanger People (PP) response:

Having followed the Local Plan process since 2009 we are not aware of any discussion or project to co-operate with East Herts on non-housing uses. We would oppose any development that proposed higher density over green spaces. This is a "Garden City"; gardens and sizeable accessible green and open spaces have always been a feature and should continue to be so. The following is stated by the TCPA as Garden City principle "Development that enhances the natural environment, providing a comprehensive green infrastructure network and net biodiversity gains, and that uses zero-carbon and energy-positive technology to ensure climate resilience."

Removing or moving the green belt or non-housing uses would severely compromise this principle and should not be permitted.

Q23. Has early and meaningful engagement and collaboration been undertaken with the local community, as required by paragraph 155 of the NPPF?

PP response:

Our group would in no way agree that this has happened. There has never been any local plan making workshop or focus group since 2009. There have been exhibitions locally of what the landowner and the council propose, but these were exhibiting plans already made with no input at all from the local community. The council have never once written to all residents in the area to let them know about their public consultations and encourage them to participate. They have never visited or engaged with local groups they could define as "hard to reach" as it is stated they should in their own SCI. There are community hubs and day centres in the area, they have not leveraged any of these to engage local community groups. Even today members of our small group hear from local people who still have no idea what it being proposed for the area.

Responses to the exhibitions and the consultations have been overwhelmingly negative. However, the plans have barely been modified as a result. The last public

consultation in 2016 yielded a borough wide response rate of barely 1%. The council appendices documents which commented on the objections ends with just two words for every objection raised, they are "No Change". We counted this repeated 811 times throughout the appendices. By comparison we noted not a single instance of 'will change' or 'change'. How can this be remotely described as listening to local communities? This does not demonstrate meaningful engagement. We have raised these points many times over the years and they have made no difference at all to the level of community involvement or engagement sought by WHBC from Panshanger residents. WHBC have managed to write to every household about the introduction of a Brown Bin charge, why could they not write to residents about this more important issue? Even in the same envelope as that letter?

If WHBC seeks to disagree with the above we would ask that they provide you, and residents, with credible and detailed evidence to the contrary. Our group is not aware that any exists.

Q25. Will there be adequate capacity in the offsite drainage network and treatment capacity to support this development in addition to other development proposals that would use the same systems?

PP response:

We are aware that there are capacity issues with the sewerage outfall at Rye Meads. We are not aware that a costed and agreed plan exists to resolve the problem.

Q26. Should the Masterplan make provision for a segregated primary footpath and cycle network that links into such routes that provide access to other parts of the City?

PP response:

This development is at the edge of town and is semi-rural in nature. It would be approximately three miles from the centre of WGC. Bus routes are few and reducing. The existing cycle paths seem to be very underutilised. There should be good Rights of Way across this site but the peripheral nature of the site on the far edge of the town mean it will never offer easy non-motorised access to the town centre itself. Hertford town will be geographically closer to WGC town centre for many of the people who may come to live on this site. How is that not coalescence in Green Belt terms?

Q27. Has a comprehensive survey of the site's wildlife been carried out, identifying the presence of any protected species?

Q28. If so have any protected species been identified and in that case what mitigation is put forward to ensure their continual survival and protection?

PP response:

We are aware that a very limited survey has been carried out by the landowner and this is outlined in their current application. What evidence is there that any comprehensive survey has been carried out, especially one that is independent of the landowner? There is some rare Hertfordshire habitat on this site, and some protected wildlife. We are not aware of any comprehensive survey work that records and documents all of this. If it exists where is it?

29. Should the Master Plan make provision for the development of health facilities to serve the new local community?

PP response:

Yes. Healthcare services in the area are already over-stretched, this is common knowledge among most local residents. However, even though this provision falls outside the landowner or Borough Council's remit there should be a mandatory requirement for it to be in place before new residents move into any new development. The last extension to Panshanger in the 1980's included no new health or community provisions. Land was set aside for a school at that time but it was never built. That land recently became the site of a large new care home (placing further demands on already strained healthcare services).

We have seen no evidence of any joint working with the NHS or County Council to plan and fund any additional health facilities, a development of this size should surely come with it's own health provision given there is already a lack of capacity in this area locally? We are not aware of any survey work that evidences that current health care capacity will be sufficient?

Q30. Should the Master Plan require the provision of a small neighbourhood centre at which such facilities, along with other provision for the new community, could be located?

PP response:

The landowner and Local Plan proposes the development will only have one shop, 200 square meters in size, which is a small convenience shop. The landowner's current plan as submitted state that new residents can use the existing Moors Walk shops. Have they looked at the congestion at Moors Walk? There are people driving around and around much of the day trying to find a parking space. Around 1,640 new regular shoppers will surely add a lot more congestion on streets around Moors Walk and at the shops themselves. Moors Walk will be unable to cope with such an influx and any development should include masterplanning for more facilities to serve the new intended local housing. Not doing this would significantly impact on the retail and shared amenities for both new and existing residents. What traffic surveys have been carried out at Moors Walk shops to ascertain the impact of this, our group isn't aware of any?

Q31. What is the evidence base justifying a gypsy and travelers site in this area in addition to one within Birchall Garden Suburb? How robust is it?

Q32. Is a gypsy and traveller site in this location supported by the Gypsy and traveller community?

PP responses to question 31 and 32:

Our responses to Local Plan consultations over the last several years have questioned the robustness of WHBC's evidence within their needs assessment reports. WHBC's initial assessment in 2011 and the follow up needs assessment of 2016 contain no evidence of any qualitative direct engagement with the Traveller communities of Welwyn Hatfield. A short question paper involving a box ticking exercise is the primary

evidence base for the resulting assessment conclusions. The respondents to this paper exercise apparently number only 42. In terms of face to face engagement page 9 of the 2011 report states:

"During the fieldwork only one household agreed to participate therefore due to the small sample size, this is not considered to be a representative sample." In addition, page 16 of this assessment states:

"8 respondents indicated they would like to live within Hertfordshire, 3 specified the East Herts District area, which is very close to the Holwell site. One respondent specified a preference for particular sites (Holwell / Barley Mo). The majority of respondents living on the public site (Holwell) did mention, as a first choice, that they would like their family members to be able to remain on Holwell."

The 2011 assessment estimates 54 new pitches will be needed between 2011 and 2026. Some respondents clearly want to live outside the borough and the majority said they want to stay in existing sites. WHBC now plans to create new traveller sites in new locations, but there is no evidence from the traveller community itself that this is what they want to happen. There is no direct quantitative or qualitative evidence of what the traveller community itself wants and favours. Does WHBC not have a duty to be far more inclusive of the traveller community, making more of an effort to ascertain their wishes and feelings, rather than imposing upon it what they speculate should happen?

In the WHBC 2016 updating assessment it states on page 6:

"Site visits were carried out every week throughout February 2016. Multiple visits were made to sites to maximise participation rates. The majority of residents on private sites politely refused to take part in the fieldwork." It goes on to say "A lower response rate was achieved in 2016 compared to the previous assessment which was carried out in 2011." With only 42 respondents taking part in 2011 and in 2016 fewer still, this doesn't appear to be a large enough sample to be reliable or truly indicative.

The government changed its definition of travellers between 2011 and 2016. The definition became somewhat tighter and many LA's found that following a re-assessment of need after this new definition was applied, the total pitch provision required fell. However, in Welwyn Hatfield the total figure rose instead, from 54 to 61.

By way of comparison the East Herts equivalent assessment was carried out in 2016 by Opinion Research Services, a research company experienced in this field. Their report states the total number of traveller pitches required up to 2027 is 5 (East Herts Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Needs Assessment p.50).

The East Herts assessment methodology would seem to be more thorough, and better executed than the WelHat equivalent. East Herts claim to have carried out 46 individual in-depth interviews. WHBC must have been aware of the 2014 and 2016 East Herts reports, and how vastly different their total pitch count was in comparison to their own report. Did they not try and co-operate with East Herts to see what scope there was for evening out the pitch provision numbers between the two districts?

The new site for pitches being proposed within Panshanger is beside an existing 'Brick and Mortar' community. Landowner Mariposa states in its outline planning application

recently submitted to WHBC for the site that it could contain up to 35 caravans and 70 people. This is far in excess of the 6 pitches figure the Local Plan proposes for the site. Why is there such a large disparity?

We have a situation where nearby residents have never been directly canvassed about that proposal (bearing in mind the 1% response rate to poorly publicised Local Plan consultations overall), and we have a situation where the traveller community itself does not seem to have been canvassed in any meaningful way as to whether they would want to live in an area such as this. Surely WHBC has a duty to engage both groups in a far more effective way in order to build up a credible evidence base as to what the future needs are in the Borough for both of these communities?

The current WHBC methodology seems to be to tell or impose on communities what is going to happen to them, rather than to seek their genuine participation and give them a stake in their own future, in keeping with the spirit and wording of the Localism Act.

Importantly, we can see no evidence the gypsy and traveller community has supported this location, by way of contrast a local residents' petition (not carried out by Panshanger People) containing hundreds of names that was handed into WHBC last year in opposition to pitches at this location.

There is a glaring difference between East Herts findings and proposal of 5 new pitches over the plan period, and Welwyn Hatfield's proposed 61 new pitches. How can this difference be justified and evidenced, what cooperation has there been on this by the two authorities?

Q33. To what extent does this proposal have ramifications for highway safety and the free flow of traffic on the wider highway network? What mitigation measures have been put forward to ensure that this development does not undermine these principles?

PP response:

The landowner claims the development with 650 homes would house 1,640 people. They also state in their recent planning application that traffic flows will have "no adverse impact at the assessed junctions. The model output also indicates that there would be no significant increase in traffic flow levels during peak times at The Mundells gyratory and the B195 Black Fan Road / Herts Lane / Ridgeway roundabouts." They also say that traffic on Mundells would increase by less than 1% during the morning rush hour. Have they ever been along and looked at the daily congestion in the area now? Traffic already backs up in many of these places causing significant congestion. With 1,640 additional people, and associated commutes and school runs you could easily assume another 1,000 vehicles. It is highly infeasible to imagine there will be no adverse effects on traffic. Have the County or Borough Council done their own survey of projected likely traffic flows? If so, where is the evidence of that?

Q34. Does the policy effectively deliver the requirement of paragraph 143 of the NPPF to encourage the prior extraction of minerals?

PP response:

About 15 years ago there was a large and successful campaign to prevent Herts County Council from carrying out mineral extraction on this area. The local group who won the case were called F.A.M.E or Families Against Mineral Extraction. They won on the basis that the noise disruption and local environmental degradation that mineral extraction would cause would significantly detract from the amenity of the area and could potentially cause health issues to residents living nearby, not least those children at local schools. Local residents have not been directly informed or consulted by any council about any new plans for mineral extraction on the site.

End.