

Welwyn Hatfield
Local Plan Examination
Stage 4 Hearings – Session 17 (SP20)

05/18

Statement on behalf of Gascoyne Cecil Estates

Written Statement



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Introduction

1. At the Stage 4 Hearings the Inspector is considering the Settlement Policies and Site Allocations in the Submitted Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan. The agenda for Stage 4 contains 58 questions and this Written Statement, submitted on behalf of Gascoyne Cecil Estates, responds to those numbered 36 to 40 – Hatfield Town Centre Strategy.
2. Gascoyne Cecil Estates (the Estate) is a major landowner in Welwyn Hatfield, with the Estate Landholdings covering several thousand hectares and extends into Hertsmere, East Hertfordshire, and North Hertfordshire districts. The long term historic nature of this interest – built upon 400 years of stewardship - continues to influence the approach that the Estate takes when considering the most appropriate way to manage its land holdings.
3. As a key stakeholder, the Estate has a significant interest in the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan. This interest is not confined to the strategic allocations that are actively promoted by the Estate at Symondshyde (SDS6 – Hat15), North West Hatfield (SDS5/SP22 – Hat1), Creswick (HS2 – WGC1) and at Marshmoor (SDS7 – WeG4b).
4. The Estate has been for many years and remains proactive in advancing the principles of the Welwyn Hatfield Green Corridor, the protection of numerous heritage assets but most notably Hatfield House, the Old Palace (former Bishop's Palace), St. Etheldreda's Church and the Registered Park and Gardens, and in facilitating the provision of new infrastructure in the form of schools, local shops and employment, community facilities and open spaces, including public access to the wider Green Belt, and improvements to sustainable public transport.
5. It is with this approach in mind that the Estate and its advisers, welcomes the opportunity to engage with the Examination process and to assist the Inspector in finding the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan sound with further Main Modifications as may be required.



Response to the Inspector's Questions

Question 36 – Should the policy refer to the need to improve pedestrian and cycle links between the Town Centre and the rest of the Town?

Question 37 – Should the policy refer to the need to improve public transport links to the Town Centre and the development of a strategy that encourages greater use of public transport for journeys to and from the Town Centre?

Question 38 – Does the Policy adequately promote improvements to the connectivity of the Town Centre with the rest of Hatfield?

Question 39 – Should Figure 13 indicate proposed pedestrian and cycling routes into the Town Centre?

Question 40 – Does the strategy provide enough emphasis for the need to improve pedestrian and cycle accessibility within the Town Centre?

6. The Estate through its Regulation 19 representations (**see Part 3, Vol 1 sections 3 and 7 and the Estate's document 'Transport for Hatfield and Beyond in Central Hertfordshire', January 2016, found in Part 5**) and subsequent responses to the questions raised at by the Inspector during Stage 3 of the Examination is fully supportive of initiatives that are designed to encourage and support a modal shift away from the use of private vehicles. It therefore agrees that Policy SP20 should refer to the need to improve pedestrian and cycle links between the Town Centre and other parts of the town, including the university campus, the business park, the Galleria, and the railway station. In addition, it is supportive of initiatives to improve public transport provision between the Town Centre and these key destinations. The Estate also refers the Inspector to the AECOM Hatfield 2030+ Transport Strategy (**EX54**) which outlines a series of key alterations to the public realm throughout the town including more accessible cycle paths and walking routes.
7. Laudable as the intentions of Policy SP20 are, the Estate continues to have reservations as to how effective and sustainable transport links are to be achieved in the absence of a comprehensive Masterplan for the entire Town Centre. In the absence of such a Masterplan there is a risk that the importance of key links and the opportunities to improve connectivity will be lost. Whilst Figure 13 purports to



show primary pedestrian routes it does not show cycle routes or the way in which public transport services are to be accommodated. The WelHat Cycling Group have produced a series of informative maps and cycle routes with better signage and coherent information for users.

8. The Estate in its response to the Inspector's questions on Policy SP9 – Place Making and High-Quality Design – considered during Stage 3 of the Hearing stressed the importance of Master Plans and the need for such plans to consider areas that are likely to be subject to change in their totality, with a supporting vision and set of development objectives being articulated clearly.
9. The final section to Policy SP20 as drafted appears to suggest that individual proposals for the redevelopment of key sites in the Town Centre should be supported by a Master Plan. This would appear to suggest that piecemeal approach is being pursued which may not deliver the required sustainable transport links or other aims of the Town Centre Strategy.
10. In the absence of a comprehensive Master Plan for the Town Centre, the Estate remains concerned that future opportunities may be lost or not fully realised. The Estate has made separate representations on Policy SADM 23 and Policy SADM24 in this regard. The Estate has also underlined the importance of considering the wider impact of any proposals upon the environment if wider sustainability objectives, as expressed in the NPPF, are to be fulfilled. This includes the setting of Hatfield House and the Park which are significant heritage assets.