

**Examination of the Welwyn Hatfield
Local Plan**

**Council's Statement for the
Stage 4 Hearing on
Thursday 28th June 2018**

Session 17

**SADM26 HS9 Land at Onslow St Audrey's
School, Howe Dell**

HS11 South Way (note)



SADM 26 New Dwellings in Hatfield

HS9 Land at Howe Dell

- 41) **Is the permanent loss of these playing fields justified and in accordance with local and national policy that seeks to promote and maintain areas of open space?**

Welwyn Hatfield Response

- a) Site HS9, Land at Onslow St Audreys School in Hatfield is allocated in Policy SADM26 for 61 net dwellings. The allocation is within school grounds to the north and east of the existing building and would involve redevelopment of the games courts, hard play area and a playing field but lies outside the Urban Open Land designation UOL170 which covers the remaining sports pitches. Sport England raised concern about the loss of the playing fields during the 2016 Proposed Submission consultation, unless replacement pitches are provided to mitigate the impact.
- b) A planning application covering this site is currently under consideration by the Council. This site is part of a wider application site relating to the expansion of the school. This will involve residential development in HS9, alongside a science/teaching block, sports hall, a floodlit artificial pitch (AGP), refurbished tennis courts, an informal hard play space and parking, within school grounds to the south of HS9. In light of the sport facilities proposed Sport England raise no objection to the application.
- c) Both national and local policy recognise the importance and value of open space, including playing fields. Paragraph 74 of the NPPF states playing fields should not be built on unless they are surplus to requirements; or the loss would be replaced by equivalent provision; or the proposed development is for alternative sports and recreation provision. Submission Local Plan Policies SP 6 *Community Services and Facilities and Policy SADM7 New Community Services and Facilities and losses of community services and facilities* likewise seek to prevent the loss of sports facilities unless they are no longer required or an acceptable alternative is provided to meet local needs.
- d) Within this context, the loss of the playing fields at site HS9 is justified and compliant with local and national policy, for the following reasons:
- The playing pitches within HS9 have not been marked out for several years and have a steep gradient around the periphery, which reduces the quality of this area in terms of potential pitch use. They are not currently in use by the school or the community. In response to the recent planning application Sport England acknowledge the poor quality of the pitch and highlight that the sports' governing bodies have not raised concern about loss of these playing fields.
 - A Section 77 approval from the Department of Education has been granted on the basis of the playing field in HS9 being surplus to educational needs.
 - Taking into account the proposed planning application, all existing playing pitches on the school site will be maintained and there will be no impact on

formal community use. These pitches all lie outside site area HS9 and are designated as Urban Open Land. Furthermore the proposals for new and improved sports facilities will be accessible to the local community, so will result in local benefits that mitigate the loss of the unused playing pitch. Sport England state that at present, the range and quality of outdoor facilities at the school restrict substantive community use.

- e) It is therefore considered that the loss of this pitch is justified in the context of national and local policy.
- f) Sport England have proposed a modification to Table 10 which would clarify that the requirements of Policy SP6 Community Services and Facilities and SADM7 New community services and facilities and losses of community services facilities apply to this allocation. The Council would be happy to accept this proposed modification as the purpose of the table is to set out the key requirements which need to be addressed in the development of the site.

42) Has a robust analysis of the value and use placed upon this site by the local community and justifying its release for residential development been undertaken? If so what are the results?

Welwyn Hatfield Response

- a) As outlined above in response to question 41, the playing field within HS9 is of very limited value to the local community because the one pitch in HS9 has been unused by the school and the wider community in recent years. This is primarily because the gradient of the pitch limits its potential use for sport.
- b) The Assessment of Open Space, Outdoor Sport and Recreation reviewed the quantity and quality of the sports provision around the borough (OSC/2). The study concluded that generally playing pitches at Onslow St Audrey were of average quality, which was typical of the school provision at the time of the assessment. However, this did not distinguish between specific pitches on the site and this pitch was not in use for sport.
- c) In terms of the analysis of the specific pitch, there has not been a formal assessment produced by the Council. However, it was anticipated that this would need to be addressed at the planning application stage, in line with the policy context. Indeed, the applicants have produced an assessment as part of the recent planning application, and Sport England's comments on this issue are particularly relevant. Sport England acknowledge that the turf pitch has not been marked out for some years and, due to the slope of the land, it has reduced quality as a potential pitch. Paragraph d) of the Council's response to Q41 explains the justification for the loss of the pitch in detail, outlining that it will not have a negative impact on the community.

Please note: The Inspector has decided to defer the following matter from the Stage 4 Hearings to the Stage 5 Hearings. The Inspector proposes to consider this matter in the context of Welham Green (please see below):

HS11 South Way

43. Has the removal of this site from the Green Belt been effectively assessed? If not then its importance to the purposes of the Green Belt and the effectiveness of South Way as an edge to the Green Belt should be a consideration of the Green Belt Review.

NB: HS11 appears to be in North Mymms rather than Hatfield. Given the Green Belt issues concerning this site, I will defer discussion until there is a clearer understanding of the way forward on the open breaks between the Boroughs urban centres. HS11 will consequently be discussed in the context of other proposals in Welham Green.