

Birchall Garden Suburb Masterplan FAQ's

What is Birchall Garden Suburb?

Birchall Garden Suburb is a large strategic site to the southwest of Welwyn Garden City straddling the boundary between Welwyn Hatfield and East Hertfordshire. The area within East Hertfordshire was removed from the Green Belt and allocated for development in the East Herts District Plan (adopted in 2018). The area within Welwyn Hatfield is proposed in the draft Local Plan for partial removal from the Green Belt and allocation for development. Unlike the land in East Hertfordshire, some parts of the development within Welwyn Hatfield will remain in the Green Belt. All land within Welwyn Hatfield remains in the Green Belt until the adoption of the draft Local Plan.

Policy SP19 of the Welwyn Hatfield Draft Local Plan (2016, incorporating proposed modifications 2023) and Policy EWEL1 of the East Herts District Plan 2018 allocate the site for development of a sustainable community incorporating Garden City principles. 1,950 homes are to be delivered over the plan period, 1,350 in East Herts District and 600 in Welwyn Hatfield Borough. The identified 600 homes in Welwyn Hatfield is a reduction from the 1,200 proposed in the submitted Draft Local Plan (2016) as through the Examination of the Draft Local Plan the Inspector concluded that development on the area by the A414 would be unsound.

What is the Birchall Garden Suburb Masterplan?

Policy SP19 of the Welwyn Hatfield Draft Local Plan (2016, incorporating proposed modifications 2023) and Policy EWEL1 of the East Herts District Plan 2018 set out that a joint masterplan should be prepared to ensure the site is planned comprehensively to create a new sustainable community incorporating Garden City Principles. The Masterplan should set out the quantum and distribution of land uses, access and sustainable transport measures, sustainable design and layout principles, the approach to character areas and site density, treatment of ecological and heritage assets including key views, the approach to land remediation, locations of Gypsy and Traveller sites, and phasing and delivery of development.

Masterplanning is not a one-size-fits-all approach, the process is based upon a collaborative approach to identifying and resolving issues, creating a vision for what the site aspires to achieve, testing design options and consulting upon preferred solutions. The output of this process is a Masterplanning Framework or Masterplan which is presented to members for consideration.

The policy position of the adopted East Herts District Plan and emerging Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan is that any application for development should be preceded by, and be consistent with, a masterplan.

How has the Birchall Garden Suburb Masterplan been produced?

The document has been produced by Consultants Allies and Morrison who were jointly commissioned by Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council (WHBC) and East Herts District Council (EHDC). The consultant team have worked closely with officers from both authorities, Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) and a number of other statutory and community stakeholders.

Following analysis of a wide range of background and contextual site information, the consultant team worked closely with statutory and local stakeholders to analyse site constraints and opportunities and develop a vision for the site and outline the parameters of the masterplan. A series of technical workshops were held with council officers and colleagues from Hertfordshire County Council to identify key issues and help shape draft proposals for the site in line with best practice guidance for placemaking.

A project Steering Group was established to oversee and guide development of the Masterplan via a series of meetings/workshops. This group comprised Local and Parish councillors from both authorities, a representative from Friends of Panshanger Park, and the landowner Tarmac.

Draft Masterplan proposal was also presented and tested at the Hertfordshire Design Review Panel, an independent and impartial process for evaluating the design quality and sustainability of development proposals in Hertfordshire. Following a site visit the panel of multidisciplinary experts reviewed the draft masterplan and gave constructive criticism, the feedback from which has enabled the design to be further refined and improved.

How will the Masterplan be used?

The Masterplan is in the final stages of production and once finalised will be taken forward for endorsement by both Councils to be used for Development Management purposes. The strategic masterplan provides a framework to guide future sustainable development of the site and should help to shape development proposals by setting standards for layout, design quality and phasing of development in the interests of the community. The masterplan will provide a useful tool for officers when negotiating with developers and landowners, and ultimately determining applications for development on site and as such should reduce the risk of uncoordinated poor-quality development coming forward.