

Comments on the 2018 Welwyn Hatfield Green Belt Review

In General, the more detailed work in this review is welcome and a considerable improvement on previous reviews, but there are still some areas which I would query. Having only had a brief time to read it, I have simply identified several inconsistencies in the report which I would like to bring to the Inspectors attention and also make some other comments on parts of the report.

- Nearly all the strategic sites are moderate –high harm or worse which seems to be too high a price to pay for losing the greenbelt. How can the council decide which moderate to high harm areas can be sacrificed when the definition itself implies that they should all be retained in the Green Belt to avoid doing moderate to high harm to the Borough's countryside.
- Whilst the assessment of harm is judged both on individual parcels and combinations of parcels in most cases, there has been no consideration of those parcels and sites outside the borough. So in the case of Birchall Garden Suburb, no consideration has been given to the cumulative effect of the proposed sites in East Herts, which is considerable. Sites in the north of the borough also need to consider what sites in Knebworth have been proposed and those to the West and North-west of Hatfield also need to take into account the settlements within St. Albans district.
- When considering the local Green Belt purpose, no consideration is given to proposed neighbouring developments, only existing developments. This factor has therefore not been properly considered in the system of comparing neighbouring parcels and means that what could be a significant contribution to maintaining the settlement pattern when other areas are built on, is effectively ignored.
- There are much larger areas of high harm defined in the Stanborough area than previously and I do not feel the various combinations of these parcels (43, 42 and 41) with the Symondshyde parcel (45) alongside parcels 38, 44 and 46 have been fully assessed.
- I feel insufficient weight has been given to the visual openness of proposed development around Stanborough and Symondshyde as seen from existing and proposed developments as well as from Welwyn Garden City itself. As the land between is essentially flat, the distance is less important than the visual impression all this development will make and this should be reflected in the local greenbelt purpose designation. If developed, it will seem as though all this area is covered in housing when looking in any direction, where it is now countryside views. It will also detract from the visual countryside contribution of the woodlands at Symondshyde, which will be obscured by building. If all the moderate to high harm areas in this area were built on, the area would resemble a whole new sprawling town, but without the infrastructure a new town would require.
- There still seems to be areas of inconsistency in the report. For instance, the written assessment between Symondshyde (parcel 45) and the one to the east of Brookmans Park (parcel 75) does not appear to be very different, yet the category given to parcel 75 is high harm compared to the category of Symondshyde of moderate to high harm. Is this simply because parcel 75 has not been subdivided in the same way as parcel 44-45. A new settlement equivalent to the size of Symondshyde could easily be accommodated in the eastern part of this parcel with seemingly no real differences in assessment to parcel 45.
- In Figure 7.1 parcels and sub-parcels are listed with the minimum designation for each parcel. This can give a misleading view on how much harm might actually be done by building in certain areas when considered alongside neighbouring parcels.
- The darkest green colour on Figure 8.2 is not explained. Is it significant?