

Examination of the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan

Council's Statement - Stage 8 Hearing session

Northern Settlements

Settlement: Woolmer Green

Policy Number: SADM27

Site References: HS15 (WGr1)

Matter number: 5

**Issues: Sustainability, employment,
Sustainability Appraisal**

Question Numbers: Q27-31



Policy SADM 27, Woolmer Green, Site HS 15 (WGr1), Land east of London Road

The Framework at paragraph 5 says that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.

Question 27: Is Woolmer Green a sustainable location for development?

Welwyn Hatfield Response:

- a) Yes, Woolmer Green is considered to be a sustainable location for a limited amount of new development which is compatible with the scale and character of the village.
- b) Woolmer Green is categorised in the Settlement Hierarchy to be a Small Excluded Village. The settlement has a limited range of employment opportunities, services and community facilities to serve the local population. Whilst the village itself does not have a railway station there is a station less than a mile away in Knebworth, the village is also served by a good bus service.
- c) The Sustainability Appraisal 2016 (**SUB/3**) identified that this site WGr1 which is proposed for residential development in Woolmer Green is within 400m of five bus stops on London Road which provide a six day a week service. Three bus routes run through Woolmer Green (301, 378 and 379) and provide up to four buses an hour at peak times.

Question 28: Are there opportunities for significant residential development within the existing settlement limits, thereby using brownfield land?

Welwyn Hatfield Response:

- a) During the Regulation 19 consultation for the Draft Local Plan 2016 the Council received a number of representations which objected to the allocation of site WGr1 due to the presumed availability of brownfield land within the settlement.
- b) Two opportunities for residential development have been made known to the Council. Both sites had been assessed and allocated as Employment Land, EA10 in the Draft Local Plan 2016.
- c) The two sites are the following: the Entech site on London Road which was allowed through appeal (6/2017/0848/MAJ) for 72 dwellings and, a brownfield site in the village was promoted through the Call for Sites undertaken in 2019.
- d) The brownfield site promoted to the Council during the Call for Sites (2019) is located at 51-53 London Road, Woolmer Green (HELAA 2019 reference WE100) and forms

part of a proposed employment area, EA10 in the Draft Local Plan 2016. This site was found suitable for residential development, during the 2019 site assessment work, as reported in the Updated Site Selection Background Paper (2019), with a capacity of 34 dwellings. Whilst, it was noted that as the primary use of this site is for a car dealership, its allocation would result in some loss of (non-B class use) employment land, but that overall this would be acceptable (refer to Background Paper for fuller description of Site Selection process).

- e) On this basis, there is a site that has been found suitable for 34 dwellings, but the Council is not aware of any further opportunities, and certainly not for 'significant' opportunities, for residential development on brownfield land within the settlement boundary. All three sites will be required if the OAN of 16,000 dwellings is to be met.

Question 29: What is the balance between local employment provision and economically active residents?

Welwyn Hatfield Response:

- a) The figures for jobs density (the ratio of local employment provision to working age population) are published at the Local Authority level by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on an annual basis. However, figures at lower geographic levels are only published every ten years, as recorded by the Census.
- b) As discussed at earlier hearing sessions and set out in the Economy Technical Paper EX102A (June 2019), Welwyn Hatfield has traditionally had a modest positive jobs density, which between 2000 and 2016 has ranged from 1.01 to 1.11, i.e. between 1% and 11% more jobs than working age population (between 16-64). However, this figure has risen considerably over the last two years to 1.25 in 2018. It is thought that recent increases in the number of jobs are to do with the way that one large employer, with headquarters in the borough, reports its figures.
- c) The figures for job density at lower geographic levels are recorded by the Census Workplace Population dataset (WP101EW). It should be noted that these workplace population figures use population aged 16-74, rather than 16-64 used in the annual jobs density figures. As fewer 65-74 year olds are likely to be working, the jobs density for this age group would be expected to be lower. Whilst including this may push the overall jobs density down slightly, it is not believed that this would have a significant impact on the figures.
- d) As would be expected, the overall borough figures reflect significant variations across wards and settlements, with the wards containing significant employment locations such as Hatfield Business Park, the University of Hertfordshire or the Welwyn Garden City Employment Area having high workplace populations.
- e) Woolmer Green sits in the ward of Welwyn East, along with the villages of Digswell, Oaklands and a small part of the northern end of Welwyn Garden City. The figures

for Welwyn East are presented in the table below – the jobs density of 0.27 indicates that the ward experiences a significant net outflow of people for work (Table 1).

- f) Similarly the figure for Woolmer Green at 0.39 also indicates a significant net outflow of workers (Table 1). Whilst Woolmer Green has some employment premises, a small amount of retail space as well as a school, the data shows the number of jobs is still well below the population for the area.
- g) It should be noted that this 2011 Census figure for Woolmer Green would have also included any employment at the Entech House premises, which has now been demolished. While a small amount of employment floorspace provision is planned as part of the development, it is not at a scale which would significantly alter the jobs density.
- h) It is of course important to remember that the Council is seeking to meet its housing need, in as sustainable way as possible, that seeks to minimise harm to the Green Belt and that is consistent with the Settlement Hierarchy. On this basis, the Council is seeking to balance the level of housing provision, with job creation and is focusing development at the main settlements. However, there is no requirement in national policy and no expectation that an exact housing and job balance will be achieved in all locations across the borough. Woolmer Green provides a sustainable location for development and benefits from good public transport connectivity, particularly to Welwyn Garden City, notably by a nearby railway station.

Table 1. Job Densities for selected locations in Welwyn Hatfield.

| 2011 Census | Woolmer Green* | Welwyn East (Ward) | Welwyn Hatfield |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Workplace population (16-74) | 379 | 1,149 | 68,426 |
| Total population (16-74) | 972 | 4,316 | 81,514 |
| Jobs density | 0.39 | 0.27 | 0.84 |

**Census 'Output Areas' making up Woolmer Green: E00121698, E00121699, E00121700, E00121701* Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS) via NOMIS

Question 30: Is the amount of employment land and number of businesses in Woolmer Green disproportionate to the amount of housing, existing and proposed?

Welwyn Hatfield Response:

- a) Please refer to the Council's response to Question 29. Overall, the Council is seeking to plan for an appropriate level of housing and employment across the borough and to support a sustainable pattern of development in accordance with the Settlement Hierarchy. The majority of development is therefore focused on the main towns and larger, relatively more sustainable, larger villages. Whilst there are local employment opportunities at Woolmer Green, there is no expectation that an exact balance between housing and employment will be achieved in all locations. The level of development proposed at Woolmer Green is proportionate to the scale of settlement and its role in the Settlement Hierarchy. Furthermore, the settlement is a sustainable location development that benefits from good public transport connectivity including the nearby railway station.
- b) Employment in Woolmer Green is not of a significant scale. There are currently only two premises falling within the B use class, and a car dealership which has a significant quantity of hard standing, so will have a fairly low density for its size. This site has been promoted for future development through the Call for Sites process as discussed in response to Q28 above and is included in the Council's current consultation on the proposed changes to the submitted Draft Local Plan 2016 (site allocations) 2020 as providing an opportunity for 34 dwellings. Alongside this, the premises generating employment in the village are three specialist retail outlets, two pubs and a takeaway, a school and a small scale conversion of agricultural buildings just outside the village, which all contribute to the settlement's sustainability. The submitted Draft Local Plan designates 4.1ha of B class use employment areas at London Road, Woolmer Green. However, this included the site at Entech House which was since approved at appeal for redevelopment. Whilst this development does incorporate some employment provision, 485sqm of B1 use and 657sqm of A1 use, overall there is a net loss at the site. This would result in designated employment land for B class use falling to 2.0ha (with any loss at the car dealership resulting in this figure falling further).
- c) As presented in Question 29, workplace population data indicates that the village already has a net outflow of people for work, with more working age residents than jobs.
- d) At the 2011 census there were 589 dwellings in the output areas making up Woolmer Green and a total population of 1,362. There have been 14 housing completions in Woolmer Green since 2011 and 78 commitments currently in the housing supply. The submitted Draft Local Plan included 150 dwellings and a further 34 dwellings proposed through the Call for Sites 2019 are currently being consulted upon. This would result in an increase to 865 dwellings in Woolmer Green. Whilst the number of persons per dwelling might be expected to see some decline, at the current rate of 2.4 persons per dwelling the population might be expected to increase to 1,990. With

an increasing population the jobs density would be expected to decline.

Question 31: Has this site been appropriately assessed in the sustainability appraisal?

Welwyn Hatfield Response:

- a) Yes, the site has been appropriately assessed in the Sustainability Appraisal, Examination Library document SA/6. The full assessment of this site can be found in Annex 1 of the 2016 SA Report (**SA/6a**) (**SUB/3**), pages 354 to 357. The appraisal was carried out in a way that was consistent with all other site assessments, in line with the SA Framework and assumptions used for all site assessments (Table 4.1 (pages 29 to 33) and Appendix 2 of the 2016 SA Report). An assessment of Policy SADM 27, which allocates this site, is presented in paragraphs 6.334 to 6.345 of the 2016 SA Report.