

Examination of the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan

Council's Statement - Stage 8 Hearing session

Southern Settlements

Settlement: Brookmans Park

Policy Number: SADM31

Site References: HS22 (BrP4)

Matter number: 2

Issue: Infrastructure

Question Numbers: Q85-98



Matter 2 – Infrastructure

Significant concern has been raised by representors concerning the provision of the infrastructure necessary to develop this site particularly in the context of that required to provide for the needs of its residents but also because of the need for off-site mitigation in particular but not exclusively in relation to the highway network to the west of the site.

85) Has the impact of the proposal on local infrastructure been effectively considered?

Welwyn Hatfield response:

- a) Yes, the impact of infrastructure has been considered, at both a local and more strategic level. The Council has worked on a continuous basis with a wide range of statutory consultees and infrastructure providers such as Hertfordshire County Council (HCC), as Education and Highway Authority and others.
- b) The results of this are set out in the Site Selection Background Paper 2016 (**HOU/20 and 20a**).

86 If so what are the outcomes?

Welwyn Hatfield Response:

- a) The existing primary school in Brookmans Park will need to be expanded from 1.5 FE school to 2 FE to accommodate growth from this site. A new pedestrian and cyclist bridge would be required as well as highway improvements. Contributions would also be required for health care provision.

87) Where are the schools that children living on the development would attend?

Welwyn Hatfield response:

- a) A primary school is located in Brookmans Park, on Bradmore Way, approximately 600m to the north-east of the site. The primary school has 1.5FE and is within a ten minute walk of the site and as set out above would need to be expanded to accommodate children from this site.

Paragraph 21.4 says that the dwelling capacity has been limited to reflect the limited opportunity for expanding the existing primary school.

88) Why is an expansion of the existing school the only solution to a lack of primary school capacity?

Welwyn Hatfield response:

- a) The County Council has indicated that providing a new school in combination with the number of dwellings proposed on site would not be feasible due to the highway constraints. Capacity at the site has been reduced to 250 dwellings as a consequence, and this relates to the expansion capacity of the existing school.
- b) The existing primary schools at Brookmans Park and Welham Green have limited capacity for expansion because of the constrained nature of their sites. A new primary school could only be provided if there were sufficient cumulative development in the area and a suitable site identified to meet the need.

89) Is there sufficient capacity within local health services to meet the primary health care needs of the persons who would reside in the development?

Welwyn Hatfield response:

- a) Health provision is a matter for the local Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and partner NHS organisations. Typically, provision associated with new development would be provided through a combination of expanding capacity at local GP surgeries and through longer-term strategic planning for local health centres. Increasingly however, the preferred approach to providing for health care is through more strategic hubs that serve a wider catchment than traditional surgeries as they provide a more cost effective approach to delivering health care and provide synergy and critical mass to enable provision of more specialist facilities in the community, thus reducing pressure on hospitals. It is understood that the CCG and partner organisations are keen to align their own planning with the Local Plan process in the future. The CCG has not raised any issues associated with the proposed level of growth per se, although they have made it clear that any development would need to make a pro-rata contribution towards delivering an appropriate increase in services.
- b) The health centre at Potterells between Welham Green and Brookmans Park currently meets the needs of the two villages

90) If not, what extra capacity is required and where would it be located?

Welwyn Hatfield response:

- a) Please refer to response in Q.89.

91) Would it be viable to provide a local convenience shop on this site?

Welwyn Hatfield response:

- a) No, as the site is located close to an existing local centre, which already provides a range of shops and is within walking distance.

92) Are any community facilities likely to be proposed on the site?

Welwyn Hatfield response:

- a) No community facilities have been proposed on site. However it is in close proximity to a local centre, which has a small convenience store and other shops.

93) What are the off-site highway ramifications of this proposal?

Welwyn Hatfield response:

- a) Development of the scale envisaged at BrP4 will generate significant levels of movement and consistent with national and local policy, the opportunities for sustainable travel modes and safe and suitable access to the site for all people have been considered as part of the plan-making process.
- b) The Highway Authority has advised that improvements for pedestrian and cycling connectivity will be necessary to provide for a sustainable development. Accordingly, and as set out in the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) 2016 (HOU/19), a new bridge across the railway would be required providing pedestrian and cyclist connectivity between the site and the village.
- c) There is no room within the limits of the existing road bridge to widen it to facilitate improved accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists. A separate footbridge currently crosses the railway line¹. However, this provides limited width and only provides for pedestrians (not cyclists)².

¹ The existing footbridge is maintained by HCC Highways, who consider it to form part of the highway.

² The rights granted to HCC Highways in perpetuity allow (amongst other things) for such a bridge to be used for pedestrian use only

- d) A new bridge will require a new agreement with Network Rail³. The HELAA 2016 noted that the principle of this was acceptable to the promoter, Network Rail and the Highway Authority, subject to further technical work and agreement. Since 2016, the promoter has been working with Network Rail and the Council has been advised that a Memorandum of Understanding has been agreed between Network Rail, the promoter and its development partner⁴.
- e) At the time of the 2016 HELAA, an indicative masterplan submitted by the promoter as part of the consultation on the Local Plan 2015 (**lpc1162, figure 6.6**)⁵ indicated primary access from Station Road with secondary access from Bradmore Lane. The Highway Authority did not object to the site being allocated for up to 300 dwellings (the maximum that can be served from a single major access point) and detailed matters such as visibility would be dealt with at the planning application stage.
- f) Since 2016, the promoter has sought to explore further access options for the site including via Bradmore Lane. The conclusion of more recent consideration by the Highway Authority finds expression in the **HELAA 2019 (appendix 3)**⁶. Any primary or secondary point of access onto Bradmore Lane would only be supported if its design is carefully considered such that it does not encourage vehicles to arrive/depart from the west, and ensures that the junction of Bradmore Lane/Station Road is improved.
- g) The site remains suitable in Highway terms for a maximum of 300 dwellings at the plan-making stage, subject to the aforementioned matters noted above.
- h) On a cumulative basis, Hertfordshire County Council considers (**dlpps 2025**) that the overall level of development proposed at Brookmans Park (sites HS21, 22, 23) is likely to impact on two key junctions, the A1000 Great North Road/Georges Wood Road and A1000/Great North Road/Swanley Bar and recommends that minor mitigation measures be investigated
- i) This is a matter that principally relates to the management of localised congestion issues at peak hours. Any junction improvement measures that may ultimately be deemed necessary, would address matters of highway safety at the relevant design stage. This settlement level matter was addressed in the Council's Housing Sites Selection Background Paper 2016 (**HOU/20**) at paragraph 17.9:
- j) *The two Priority junctions of Georges Wood Road (which is a private road)/A1000 (The Great North Road) and Swanley Bar Lane /A1000 have been identified by the Highway Authority as having current congestion issues in peak hours. Improvement measures such as a right turn lane may be required.*

³ An agreement is currently in place between HCC and Network Rail.

⁴ The MoU contains a set of shared principles to deliver the site for housing (including access), to agree on improvements to pedestrian and cyclist connectivity between Brookmans Park village centre and the site, and facilitate the delivery of infrastructure (the bridge) subject to Network Rail's normal approvals process/possession orders.

⁵ https://welhat-consult.objective.co.uk/portal/planning_policy/local_plan_consultation_january_2015/local_plan_consultation_january_2015?pointId=s1421325348608#section-s1421325348608

⁶ https://www.welhat.gov.uk/media/15920/22-Appendix-3-HELAA-Dec-2019-Promoted-alternative-capacities-DLP2016-sites/pdf/22_Appendix_3a_HELAA_Dec_2019_Promoted_alternative_capacities_DLP2016_sites.pdf?m=637151091600300000

94) If they include unacceptable harm to Bradmore Lane and other roads to the west, how is this to be mitigated?

Welwyn Hatfield response

- a) It is not considered that an 'unacceptable harm' will arise to Bradmore Lane or other roads to the west.
- b) Consistent with **LTP3**, which was relevant in 2016, and **now LTP4 2018 policy 5**, the Highway Authority will resist development proposals which would either significantly affect the rural character of a road or right of way, or would significantly affect safety on rural or local roads or rights of way especially for vulnerable users.
- c) Bradmore Lane is a narrow country lane and proposals that would affect the nature of this road, and encourage vehicles to route along it, would result in considerable conflict and would be contrary to Highway Authority's rural roads policy.
- d) The **HELAA 2016 (HOU/19)** noted that the current width of Bradmore Lane is too narrow to serve a major access, as per the highway authority's design standards, without significant highway upgrades and a concern was expressed that such upgrades could (along the full stretch of the road) change its character from a rural country lane to a suburban road. The capacity of the site was limited to 300 dwellings, the maximum that can be served by a single major access point, with the principal access envisaged to be (at that time) from Station Road.
- e) Since 2016, the promoter has sought to explore the access options for the site including via Bradmore Lane. The conclusion of more recent consideration by the Highway Authority is that it would be more open to an access onto Bradmore Lane but only if it is carefully designed.
- f) An emergency only access from Bradmore Lane would be acceptable, and / or measures along the length of Bradmore Lane to discourage rat running may be acceptable (provided an access can be designed so that it does not change the character of Bradmore Lane beyond its first few hundred metres). A minor modification is proposed to the supporting text of the plan to clarify this position:
- g) **Proposed modification to paragraph 21.4.**

~~In line with advice from the Highway and Fire and Rescue Authorities, there will be a single point of access for site HS22 (BrP4). A secondary access using Bradmore Lane will be resisted as it would need to be widened and upgraded which would change its rural character. The estimated dwelling capacity of HS22 has been limited to around 250 dwellings to reflect the limited opportunity for expanding the existing primary school by 0.5FE from 1.5FE to 2FE.~~

Access arrangements will be examined in further detail as part of the planning application process to ensure the delivery of a high quality residential environment. An access from Bradmore Lane will only be permitted if it can be shown to maintain the rural character of Bradmore Lane, and comply with the relevant highway safety standards and provide the necessary mitigation measures.

95) Is it practical to widen the roads in the vicinity of Water End?

Welwyn Hatfield response

- a) This is not an option that has been explored and neither is it considered necessary to make the plan sound.
- b) The Highway Authority has not objected to the principle of up to 300 dwellings on the site and there is no technical reason why road widening in the vicinity of Water End would need to be explored to facilitate the level of growth envisaged in the locality.
- c) Such a 'proposal', would in any event be contrary to the Highway Authority's rural roads policy. Road widening would change the character of the environment and would be likely to encourage greater use of roads for local access or as a distributor route towards the M25 / A1 (M).

96) If there would be unacceptable harm to highway safety and the free flow of traffic? Are there alternative solutions other than widening and/or straightening the existing network?

Welwyn Hatfield response

- a) The Highway Authority has not identified any unacceptable harm to highway safety or the free flow of traffic.
- b) The Highway Authority has not objected to the principle of up to 300 dwellings on this site. A full Transport Assessment will be required at the planning application stage and detailed consideration will be given to highway matters at that time including the precise design of junctions and highway safety for all users.
- c) Some road widening may be required to facilitate development within the first five hundred metres of Bradmore Lane, but the Highway Authority raises no in principle objections to this possibility and this would allow the remainder of Bradmore Lane to retain its rural character
- d) There is no policy requirement to 'straighten' the existing network.
- e) At the time of preparing the Draft Local Plan 2016, the promoter's LPC submission in 2015 (**lpc1162**) indicated at page 27 a 'potential highway realignment' as part of an indicative site layout; e.g. realigning the road to the west of its current position and introducing a wide bend in a north/south direction. This 'realignment' is referred to in Table 15 of the Draft Plan in the context of providing 'safe access to the site'.
- f) Full details would however be considered as part of the planning application process. There remains the need (as set out in the Council's responses above) to improve the junction of Bradmore Lane / Station Road, and this includes providing appropriate visibility commensurate for the speed limit in this location. Realigning Station Road may be supported by the Highway Authority in achieving this, however the detailed design for this has not yet been presented to the Highway Authority for review but it can be appropriately addressed at the pre-app/planning application stage.

97) Is the proposal's overall viability sufficient to be able to support the required significant highway and drainage improvements as well as any other required improvements to infrastructure and facilities?

Welwyn Hatfield response:

- a) Paragraph 173 of the NPPF requires Local Planning Authorities to ensure that Plans will be deliverable and that the scale of obligations and policy burdens will not threaten the viability of sites. The Council has carried out extensive and proportionate viability testing (VIB/5, Combined Policy Viability Update 2016) and this indicates that competitive returns should generally be achievable on sites such as this.
- b) Whilst the development of BrP4 will need to accommodate the costs of a new bridge for pedestrian and cyclist use across the railway, the promoter has appointed a development partner, who is committed to bringing the site forward as soon as possible. Brookmans Park has some of the highest land values in the borough and the relevant development partner has confirmed to the Council that it has undertaken due diligence work to satisfy itself that the site is deliverable and viable.
- c) The HELAA 2016 (**HOU/19**) notes that whilst Thames Water had no concerns about waste water infrastructure if this site came forward in isolation, this may need to be reviewed at a more detailed planning stage, and in light of the overall quantum of development eventually planned for at Brookmans Park. Should wastewater upgrades be required, these are not anticipated to result in an 'unusual' costs, in so much as these are costs that any development would need to bear where Thames Water considered this to be necessary.
- d) There are no other unusual development costs associated with the development of this site.

98) If not what other options have been considered?

- a) Please see the Council's response to Q.97 above.