

Welwyn Hatfield Green Belt Purposes Review: Stage 2

Addendum June 2016



Introduction

Nearly 80% of Welwyn Hatfield comprises land in the Green Belt (approximately 10,200ha). The remaining 20% consists of the existing built-up areas of the borough's towns and villages. Although there is some capacity to accommodate a limited number of new dwellings on previously-developed land within the urban areas, it is very likely that some land will need to be released from the Green Belt to accommodate housing requirements to 2032 and beyond if the need for housing is to be met.

The Green Belt Review forms an important part of the evidence base for the Council's Local Plan. If it is decided that exceptional circumstances exist for altering the Green Belt boundary it will be necessary to take the findings of this review into account alongside the need to promote sustainable patterns of development. This report is an Addendum to the Welwyn Hatfield Green Belt Review Stage 2, October 2014, and should be read in conjunction with that report. The Stage 2 Review followed on from the Strategic Green Belt Review, November 2013, carried out by SKM for Dacorum Borough Council, St Albans City and District Council and Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council.

Addendum

The Stage 2 Review Addendum comprises a Green Belt and a local purposes assessment of an additional 10 sites identified as suitable through the Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment 2016 and was carried out in 2016 by the Council using the methodology developed by Jacobs (formerly Sinclair Knight Merz (SKM)) for the original Stage 2 Review.

The key output from this work is a site assessment proforma completed for each site through a combination of desk study and fieldwork which assesses the extent to which each site contributes to the following four purposes set out within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) together with a local purpose identified in the Strategic Green Belt Review:

- NPPF Purpose 1: To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- NPPF Purpose 2: To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another
- NPPF Purpose 3: To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- NPPF Purpose 4: To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and,
- Local Purpose: To maintain the existing settlement pattern.

The fifth NPPF purpose is to assist in regeneration and has been discounted from the Review in the Strategic Green Belt Review, as the local policy review demonstrated there was a limited supply of available or unallocated brownfield sites in the districts, the Green Belt as a whole had fulfilled this purpose. Therefore it would not be a differentiating factor between sites.

The assessment of each site records the following information:

- Site Context – this included a document review of the key findings from the Part 1 Study, any relevant designations and landscape features;
- Site and Landscape Appraisal – included a document review of WHBC Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study and on-site appraisal to assess land use, topography, land cover, boundary review, levels of enclosure and levels of openness;
- Green Belt Purposes Assessment – considered the contribution each site makes towards each of the Green Belt purposes identified above;
- Other considerations - identified the potential for cumulative impacts (as a result of site grouping), potential for adjustments to the boundary and identification of the possibility for cross-boundary issues; and
- Summary – an overview of key assessment findings.

Levels of contribution have been classified as either ‘significant’, ‘partial’ or ‘limited or no’. Sites designated as Green Belt are not required to meet all 5 purposes as set out in NPPF. It is possible that a piece of land meeting only one of the purposes may be suitable for Green Belt designation. Sites that make only a limited or no contribution to most or all of the purposes may still make a valuable contribution, but the key factor that limits the contribution may be the size of the site. Sites that are surrounded by Green Belt may not be appropriate for release unless they form part of a larger release i.e. the release of a small isolated site in the Green Belt may be illogical.

What the Green Belt Review does not seek to do is balance Green Belt purposes with sustainability objectives and therefore reach conclusions on whether there should be amendments to the Green Belt boundaries. This is the role for Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council to perform taking account of other evidence base work.

Relationship between Strategic Green Belt Review and Stage 2 Review

In order to understand the cumulative impacts associated with groups of sites the relationships between key strategic and local gaps, the strategic parcels and the sites are shown in Table 1. Please note that the original Stage 2 Review site assessment proformas of individual sites have not been revisited to consider any cumulative impacts associated with the new sites assessed in the 2016 Addendum.

Table 1 Relationship between strategic parcels and sites

Strategic Gap / Local Gap	Strategic parcel	Stage 2 sites	Stage 2 Addendum
Welwyn Garden City - Stevenage	56, 57, 58, 59, 60 (part)	Dig4, GTLAA04, OMH3, OMH4, OMH5, OMH6 North, OMH6 South, OMH7, WGC2, WGC8, WGr1, WGr2, WGr3, WGr4, WGr5	
Welwyn Garden City - Hertford	46, 55	Dig1, GTLAA06, WGC3, WGC5 (part), WGC7, WGC8	
Hatfield – Welwyn Garden City	43A,43B, 44, 46	Hat1, WGC1,	GTLAA09, Hat15 GTLAA08
Hatfield – St Albans	35, 36	Hat2, Hat3, Hat4, Hat5, Hat12,	
Hatfield – Potters Bar	45, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52	BrP7, BrP9, BrP10, BrP12, BrP13, BrP14, Cuf4, Cuf5, Cuf7, GTLAA01, GTLAA02, GTLAA03, GTLAA07, Hat11, LHe1, WeG1, WeG2, WeG3, WeG4a, WeG4b, WeG6, WeG10,	BrP7 extension, WeG12, Land at Bell Bar North East of Brookmans Park, WeG15,
Potters Bar - Cheshunt	52, 53	Cuf4, Cuf5, Cuf6, Cuf7	
Welwyn Garden City / Digswell - Tewin	55	Dig1, GTLAA06, WGC7, WGC8	WGC4
Cuffley - Enfield	53	Cuf1, Cuf3, Cuf6	
Welwyn Garden City - Welwyn	41 (part), 57	Wel4 (part), WGC6 (part)	Wel15, Wel16
Welwyn - Codicote	41 (part), 60 (part)	Wel1, Wel2, Wel6, Wel11	
Welwyn Garden City - Wheathampstead	42	WGC6 (part)	
Not in a strategic or local gap	41 (part), 47, 54	BrP2, BrPTS, Cuf2, Wel3, Wel5,	

Findings of the Stage 2 Review and the 2016 Addendum

For the first national purpose – preventing the sprawl of London, Stevenage or Luton and Dunstable – the methodology acknowledges that because this is a very strategic purpose of the Green Belt, and the sites being considered are typically relatively

small, no single site is likely to make a significant contribution to this purpose. However, eight sites make a partial contribution because they abut or are close to the boundaries of Greater London or Stevenage. These sites make up only 4.8% of the land in strategic parcels that was identified in the Part 1 Review as making a significant contribution to this national purpose.

The second national purpose, preventing towns from merging, has proved to be the most important in this assessment. In the Strategic Review 7.9% of all the Green Belt land in Welwyn Hatfield was found to make a significant contribution to this purpose. Sites in the Stage 2 Review that rate as significant make up 18.5% of the land in strategic parcels that was identified as making a significant contribution to this purpose – in other words, sites making a significant contribution (Stage 2) located within parcels making a significant contribution (Stage 1) make up 1.5% of all the Green Belt land in Welwyn Hatfield. There are a further two sites that make a partial contribution to this purpose and are located within the strategic parcels that make a significant contribution, accounting for a further 8.7% of that land.

Within the strategic parcels that make a partial contribution to the second national purpose, 33 Stage 2 sites make a partial contribution. A further 7 Stage 2 sites make a partial contribution to the second national purpose, but are not located within strategic parcels that do.

Nearly half of all the sites assessed also make a significant contribution to the third national Green Belt purpose of protecting the countryside from encroachment. This is a probable reflection of the fact that, when they were originally defined, Green Belt boundaries were chosen carefully and that, since their definition, the local planning authority has been rigorous in preventing inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

However, sites that rate as being significant in terms of their contribution to the third national purpose only make up 5.2% of the land in strategic parcels that was identified in the Strategic Review as making a significant contribution to this national purpose. This is a consequence of the small scale of the sites in relation to the relatively large parcels such that, in general, their development would not result in significant encroachment.

Only three sites make a significant contribution to the fourth national purpose - to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns, with a further nine making a partial contribution. It is notable that two of significant sites both fall with the same parcel that scores significant for this purpose. A further six parcels in the Strategic Review scored significantly for this purpose, only one contains no sites that score significantly in the Stage 2 Review. So it is clear that this purpose is not the most important consideration for Welwyn Hatfield.

Thirty-five of the 76 sites assessed make a significant contribution to the local purpose of helping to maintain the settlement pattern. A further 29 make a partial contribution. This is to be expected given that the towns and villages in the borough are relatively close together - some local gaps are relatively fragile.

Seven sites made a limited or no contribution to all of the national or local Green Belt purposes – see table 2.

Table 2 Sites which make a limited or no contribution to the Green Belt purposes

Site reference	Location
Cuf2	38-44 The Ridgeway, Cuffley
GTLAA03	The Willows, Marshmoor Lane, Welham Green
LHe1	Land north of Hawkshead Road, Little Heath
OMH3	Land behind Worth House, Danesbury Park Road, Oaklands
OMH7	Land at 22 The Avenue, Oaklands
WeG1	Welham Manor House, Welham Green
WeG2	South of Welham Manor, Welham Green

A further twelve sites did not contribute significantly to any of the national purposes but made a significant contribution to the local purpose.

Table 2A Sites which do not contribute significantly to the national purposes but make a significant contribution to the local purpose

Site reference	Location
Dig4	Junction of Digswell Land and Bessemer Road
GTLAA01	Fox's Lane, Welham Green
GTLAA04	Four Oaks, Great North Road, Oaklands and Mardley Heath
GTLAA07	Thunderbridge Yard
OMH4	Land at 9 The Avenue, Oaklands and Mardley Heath
OMH5	Land rear of 2-12 Great North Road, Oaklands and Mardley Heath
Wel3	School Lane, Welwyn
Wel4	Sandyhurst, The Bypass, Welwyn
WGC2	Digswell Pumping Station, Off Bessemer Road, Welwyn Garden City
WGr4	Twin Foxes / Heath Road, Woolmer Green
WGr5	Twin Foxes / Heath Road, Woolmer Green
	Land at Bell Bar North East of Brookmans Park

A further eighteen sites did not significantly contribute to any of the Green Belt purposes but made a partial contribution to one or more of the national or local purposes – see Table 3.

Table 3 Sites which make a partial contribution to the Green Belt purposes

Site reference	Location
BrP2	Land NE of Great North Road, Brookmans Park
BrP13	West of Golf Club Road, Brookmans Park
BrP14	East of Golf Club Road, Brookmans Park
BrPTS	Brookmans Park Transmitting Station
Cuf7	Wells Farm, Cuffley
GTLAA02	High Dene, Great North Road, Welham Green
WeG12	Land at Pooleys Lane, Welham Green
GTLAA04	Four Oaks, Great North Road, Oaklands
OMH4	Land at 9 The Avenue, Oaklands
OMH5	Land rear of 2-12 Great North Road, Oaklands
WeG4a	Land at Marshmoor
WeG10	Dixons Hill Road, Welham Green
WeG15	Potterells Farm, Welham Green
Wel3	School Lane, Welwyn
Wel4	Sandyhurst, Welwyn By-Pass Road, Welwyn
Wel5	Reserve School Site, Tudor Road, Welwyn
Wel6	Gravel pit site, Kimpton Road, Welwyn
GTLAA08	Barbraville and Surrounds, Hertford Road

A further six sites made a partial contribution to one or more of the national purposes and made a significant contribution to the local purpose.

Table 3A Sites which make a partial contribution to the national Green Belt purposes and make a significant contribution to the local purpose

Site reference	Location
BrP1	Upper Bell Lane Farm, Bell Bar
BrP5	Land west of Brookmans Park, north of Bradmore Lane
Wel11	Vineyards, 15 Codicote Road, Welwyn
WGC1	Creswick, south west of Welwyn Garden City
WGC3	The Holdings, Cole Green Lane, Welwyn Garden City
WGr3	Land adjacent to 52 London Road, Woolmer Green

Eighteen sites were identified that offered the potential to be subdivided by having potentially strong or moderate boundaries within them. These are identified in Table 4. No detailed analysis has been undertaken for sub-divided areas.

Table 4 Sites with potential for sub-division

Site reference	Location
BrPTS	Brookmans Park Transmitting Station
GTLAA02	High Dene, Great North Road, Welham Green
WGC1	Creswick, Welwyn Garden City
WGC5	Land south east of Welwyn Garden City
WGC6	East of Digswell Hill, west of Welwyn Garden City
WGC8	South of Hertford Road, Welwyn Garden City
GTLAA06	North west of Panshanger Airfield, Welwyn Garden City
Hat1	Stanboroughbury Farm, north and west of Hatfield
Hat2	West of Hatfield
Hat3	West of Ellenbrook, Hatfield
Hat4	South and west of Ellenbrook
Hat5	West of junction 3 of the A1(M), Hatfield
Hat11	South of Hatfield
Hat12	Nast Hyde Farm, Ellenbrook, Hatfield
Hat15	Symondshyde Farm
WeG12	Land at Pooleys Lane , Welham Green
WeG15	Potterells Farm
	Land at Bell Bar North East of Brookmans Park

Five sites were identified where a stronger Green Belt boundary existed just beyond their boundaries – see Table 5.

Table 5 – sites where stronger Green Belt boundaries existed just beyond their boundaries

Site reference	Location
Wel4	Sandyhurst, Welwyn By-Pass Road, Welwyn
Wel5	Reserve School Site, Tudor Road, Welwyn
GTLAA03	The Willows, Marshmoor Lane, Welham Green
WeG4a	Land at Marshmoor, off Great North Road
WeG4b	Land at Marshmoor, off Great North Road

Conclusions and next steps

The findings of the Stage 2 Review and Addendum generally accord with the overall conclusions of the Strategic Review. It is clear that the Green Belt in Welwyn Hatfield continues to play an important role against the national purposes and the local purpose.

The council will have to take a number of steps in determining which, if any, areas of land would be best to release from the Green Belt. In this context, it needs to be borne in mind that, of the 10,200ha of Green Belt land in Welwyn Hatfield, Part 2 (including this addendum) only considers 929ha, which is about 9.1% of the total. Whilst the results of this review are generally consistent with the Strategic Review by focusing on sites that are much smaller in area than the strategic parcels, this Stage 2 Review has resulted in assessments that have a much wider range of results.

Boundaries

Paragraph 85 of the NPPF indicates the need to retain strong Green Belt boundaries, assisting in defining a permanent and appropriate boundary between the developed area and the countryside beyond. If it is decided that exceptional circumstances exist for altering the Green Belt consideration will need to be given to defining clear strong boundaries wherever possible using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent.

Strong boundaries are those that are expected to remain permanent over the long term, foreseeable future and are extremely difficult to alter or destroy by physical means or by planning decision, for instance by planning consent or planning decision at appeal. Examples of strong boundaries include motorways or railways. Weaker boundaries are those that are visible but can more easily be altered or destroyed by physical means.

A separate assessment has therefore been made of whether the new boundary resulting from the release of a site from the Green Belt will be as good as the existing one or better which has taken account of the recommendations from the Stage 2 Review which recommended that following be considered:

1. How penetrable the boundary is by development.
2. Does the boundary feature type indicate whether it is strong or weak?
3. Establish consistency of boundary.
4. Make an assessment between the two to assess if new boundary is stronger.
5. How long term is the boundary, can it be maintained beyond the plan period?

The results of the boundary assessment are reported in the Housing and Employment Site Selection Background Papers