

Examination into the soundness of the East Herts District Plan 2011-2033 and the Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council Local Plan 2013-2032

Birchall Garden Suburb

Hearing Tuesday 30 January 2018

POST HEARING NOTE FROM THE WELWYN/HATFIELD INSPECTOR

Policy SP19, as well as allocating land at Birchall Garden Suburb to accommodate 1,200 dwellings within Welwyn Hatfield Borough, establishes a set of parameters that are intended to guide the preparation of a detailed masterplan. A strategy diagram, which is intended to inform the Masterplan is also a part of the policy. It is essential that there is no conflict between the parameters and the information on the strategy diagram. Additionally, to avoid subsequent misinterpretation, the strategy diagram should only identify the specific uses of various parts of the site where this is a definite intention of the plan.

The East Hertfordshire part of BGS is likely to be the subject of Main Modifications and Adoption before that part in Welwyn Hatfield. In this context it is essential that any Main Modifications adopted by East Hertfordshire that are of relevance to the entire site are taken on board by Welwyn Hatfield.

Green Belt

The Inspector does not consider there to be a sound evidence base that justifies exceptional circumstances for the removal of the land east of Burnside and south of the landfill site from the Green Belt. It would be helpful if the Council could assess the land to the east of Burnside and south of the series of wooded areas north of the A414 as a separate Green Belt parcel using the methodology that underpinned its phase 2 Green Belt Assessment.

Additionally an assessment of the contribution that this area makes to the Green Belt Objectives of safeguarding the countryside from encroachment, preserving the setting and special character of historic towns and maintaining the settlement pattern, in the context of Phase 1 Parcel GB47, would be useful. Parcel GB47 is immediately to the south of the A414 and scores significant when assessed against these purposes. It is also noted for its very low level of built development and visual openness. The southern part of BGS is clearly visible from adjacent parts of this parcel and in some views from this area it is a part of the same countryside landscape.

Green Corridor

The area depicted as Green Corridor has changed between the version of the strategy diagram advanced in the Submission Local Plan and that presented to the BGS Hearing session. The nature and general location of the Green Corridor at BGS should be re-examined in consultation with appropriate stakeholders, recognising that its establishment is a strategic policy (SP 12) and that it is intended to be a multi-purpose route for both human and wildlife movement. In this connect the route chosen should be capable of meeting the needs of all

potential users and in the context of its use by wildlife securing genuine overall net gains to biodiversity. Either through specific designation or the use of parameters the policy should ensure that the route that is eventually designated does not lead to harmful impacts on the area's current ecological assets in the form of wildlife sites and ancient woodland and that there are open routes of adequate width to allow birds and mammals to cross BGS on open land that is not heavily influenced by human activity. The appropriateness of the proposed Green Corridor bisecting the proposed residential area on a narrow strip of land requires careful consideration.

Minerals

The policy should be amended to require all economically viable mineral resources below this site to be extracted before any development takes place on the area that they occupy.

Southern part of the site

In addition to the additional Green Belt information discussed above, there needs to be a comprehensive examination of the suitability and availability of the parcel south of the landfill and east of Burnside for residential or educational development in the context of noise from Burnside and the A414, pollution levels from the A414, the proposed 50-80 metre amenity strip next to the A414, surface water attenuation requirements, seepage/leaching from the landfill into this area and other environmental mitigation. Occupiers of residential properties in a new development such as this should be able to enjoy their gardens on summer evenings without recourse to excessively high acoustic fences and their indoor living environment with open windows. A plan at an appropriate scale defining a notional amenity strip with its likely components and the remaining developable land north and south of the woodland would be helpful. Detailed evidence as to the proven southern limits of the tipped area and the potential for residential development thereon would also be useful in assessing the potential layouts achievable between the woodland and the actual tipped areas and their appropriateness.

Retail/community facilities

The proposed location(s) for retail and community facilities should be reviewed in the context of the area that is likely to be developed for residential purposes and adjacent residential areas. The general location(s) should only be indicated on the strategy diagram if there is a reasonable degree of certainty. A parameter based approach alone would be preferable if there is locational uncertainty.

Gypsy and Traveller site

Waste

During the course of the discussion it became apparent that the Council had recently appointed consultants to independently verify the reports and conclusions of Royal Haskoning's initial assessment, of the landfill site, on behalf of Tarmac. The Council said that this evidence superseded that prepared by the Council's Environmental Health Officer's Position Statement of 24 October 2017 EX59B to accompany the Council's position statement on Waste at the Hearing.

The Inspector asked to see a full copy of their report and appendices. He will consider this and review the other evidence relating to the landfill site, including that on ground water and respond further in due course.