

31 October 2019

Mr. Colin Haigh,
Head of Planning,
Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council
The Campus,
Welwyn Garden City
AL8 6AE

BY EMAIL ONLY

Dear Mr Haigh

Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan Examination

I refer to your letter of 9 October outlining a revised timetable. With the exception of the need for a further Hearing into the issues relating to that part of Birchall Garden Suburb away from the A414, about which the Programme Officer has already written to you, I will accept your revised proposals in principle. The Birchall Garden Suburb Hearing is likely to be held on December 11 2019.

However, having thought about the processes discussed in your letter and the extent of the additional material that you will be submitting to the Examination, particularly that which relates to new sites, I have doubts as to whether it is appropriate to just post the additional information on the Examination website. Some people will inevitably want to make representations. Without a round of formal consultation, in which anyone concerned about a new proposal can make representations and if necessary, appear at a subsequent Hearing session, then the examination process could, in my view, be flawed and open to challenge. There could be persons, who have not been involved in the process to date and who are directly affected by a new proposal. If that is the case, then they ought to be given the opportunity to make representations unless you consider that they have already had that opportunity.

I note that you consulted on the "call for sites" but am not clear as to whether this is sufficient to meet the principle of "fairness". Did it potentially catch everyone who might be concerned about the allocation of a particular site for example and does it enable the Programme Officer to easily identify who wants to appear at a Hearing session into each new site, including persons not previously involved in the examination?

Additionally, I am presuming that there will be significant changes to the Sustainability Appraisal and perhaps some to the Habitats Regulations Assessment as well? Will people have had sufficient opportunity to comment on these?

I would therefore ask you to consider the appropriateness of a further round of consultation restricted to the revised sustainability appraisal, the habitats regulation assessment (if appropriate) and any new sites or major policy changes that you bring forward. If the public is made aware of your draft changes in early December, and they are accompanied by a note about your Council's timetable, the potential for changes and the intention to follow that with a formal consultation period, then a four-week period should be sufficient. If this commenced on or about 8 January, then the responses should be back in sufficient time to enable any additional participants wishing to appear at a Hearing to do so in the week of 16 March. Further Hearings could be held to consider as yet unconsidered sites that remain in the plan, including Symondshyde and the part of Birchall Garden Suburb that is adjacent to the A414, in the week of 24 February.

Would you please consider the above and let me have your thoughts?

Yours Sincerely

Mel Middleton

Melvyn Middleton

INSPECTOR