

Examination of the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan 2013-2032

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Hearing Sessions:- Stage 6, Strategic Matters

Inspector's Post Hearing Advice

This note sets out advice relating to the strategic matters discussed at the Hearing Session on Tuesday December 17, 2019. In line with standard practice I have not set out the detailed reasoning behind my advice. Where still relevant, this will be contained in my final report, which I will submit to the Council at the end of the Examination.

Housing Need

I consider that the evidence set out in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment Update 2017, together with that in the subsequent review that was undertaken in the context of the 2016 sub-national population and household projections, justifies a Full Objective Assessed Housing Need (FOAHN) of 800 dwellings per year for the duration of the plan period and that this requirement is consistent with national policy. In reaching this conclusion I have had regard to all of the evidence submitted in response to the Stage 6 pre-hearing consultation and that submitted in 2019 after the close of the Hearing.

However, the Council should be aware that revised population and household projections (2018) are expected in 2020. As national policy requires housing forecasts to be based on the most up-to-date information available, it may be necessary to revisit this unless progress towards the plan's adoption is sufficient to deem it inappropriate.

Plan Period

In order to guarantee a plan period of at least 15 years post adoption, as required by national policy and in the context of the Examination's progress, the extension of the end-date of the plan period to 2036 is justified. In the context of the revised FOAHN, the rolling forward of the start date to 2016 is also justified.

Employment

I consider the methodology used to produce the revised employment floorspace supply and need forecasts that are set out in tables 1 and 2 of the 2019 Employment land need assessment and its explanatory note, to be justified. I accept that their achievement is likely to require the release of some Green Belt land to accommodate new employment floorspace. The forecasts will require an update to reflect the extension of the plan period to 2036. It will be necessary to demonstrate exceptional circumstances, individually, for the removal of sites from the Green Belt for employment development.

Next Steps

The Council has already done a considerable amount of work, comparatively assessing the contributions land within the Green Belt makes to its purposes. Having considered the outcome of

this work, alongside other planning considerations, additional sites with potential for Green Belt release and subsequent development are shortly to be publicised.

Unless there are sound planning reasons for not doing so, in the first instance, the totality of all of the dwellings assumed to be built during the plan period, on sites put forward in the adopted plan, must be capable of meeting, as a minimum, the FOAHN for at least the plan period.

In addition, and in accordance with national policy, a satisfactory housing delivery trajectory that clearly demonstrates that the sites proposed for development, when considered as a whole, will be capable of maintaining a five-year supply of housing land throughout the plan period, should be submitted. The requirement for the first five years should include the appropriate buffer. In achieving this, the Council will need to demonstrate that all of the sites included are developable and deliverable within the timescales suggested in the trajectory.

The trajectory should be based on robust evidence and clearly capable of accommodating slippage in site development or delivery failure. In accordance with national policy, the trajectory should also demonstrate that the under-delivery in the plan years prior to adoption can be confidently made up in the first five years post adoption.

M Middleton

Melvyn Middleton

INSPECTOR

6 January 2020