

## **Examination of the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan 2013-32**

### **Policy SP24 Symondshyde New village**

#### **INSPECTORS' MATTER AND ISSUES**

##### GREEN BELT QUESTIONS 16/17 SUPPLEMENTARY NOTE

In assessing the soundness of the plan, the Inspector is required to demonstrate that exceptional circumstances exist before finding individually that it is sound to remove areas of land from the Green Belt. Exceptional circumstances can be demonstrated in a number of ways. In the circumstances of Welwyn/Hatfield, its acute housing need and shortage of sites to meet this need, other than within the Green Belt, is an important consideration. However, other Green Belt considerations, including the comparative outcomes of the three Green Belt studies and government policy and guidance on Green Belt, must be a part of the equation, as should other planning considerations such as heritage or flood risk etc.

The questions are primarily for the Council to answer in the terms set out. The Inspector is aware that there are four railway stations within the Borough outside of the two main towns and that these locations are well served by public transport. Whilst not familiar with the detailed geography and planning considerations of their surroundings, it seems to him that there is land within walking distance of at least three of these stations (possibly all four) and within the Borough, that should be considered for release, in the context of paragraph 138 of the National Planning Policy Framework, before land that is not well served by public transport is assessed. Some of this is already proposed for development. A revised Sustainability Appraisal could well demonstrate that there are sound planning reasons justifying why other land cannot be removed from the Green Belt and that if the housing need being advanced by the Council is to be met, then less sustainable options from a transportation perspective, such as Symondshyde, should be considered.

It is for the Council to demonstrate that it has had proper regard to paragraph 138 in its site selection justifications. Any observations from third parties are likely to be more circumspect if composed in the context of the Council's response. In this context the Inspector is not inviting other parties to refer to sites not proposed for development that they consider could be walkable from a railway station. Other than in special circumstances, examination protocol does not permit Inspectors to consider sites not advanced by the Council. Consequently, any submissions from third parties that refer to Exception Sites will be returned.