

Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan Examination

Round-Up session 12 March 2020

Further observations on Birchall Garden Suburb

Introduction

At the round-up session on 12 March 2020 I indicated that I had some concerns about the proposed residential development on the land between the eastern arm of Hatfield Hyde Brook and Burnside, in the context of the wider retained Green Belt to the south and the impact of noise from Burnside upon future residents residing close to the southern boundary of this part of the development. However, I also pointed out that I was confident that these matters could be resolved through mitigation. I have now had an opportunity to examine the noise reports with regard to Burnside and the suggested mitigation previously submitted to the Examination and would make the following observations.

The southern part of this site is currently a part of the wider Green Belt countryside that extends to the south of the A414 as far as West End and Essendon. This part of the proposal land is also clearly visible from the wider settings of Hatfield Park and the other heritage assets close by. Policy SP 19 and its supporting text needs to ensure that any development preserves the rural condition of the remaining parts of this Green Belt countryside. This is to be achieved through a landscaped screening bund.

In my view such a bund should appear as a natural part of the landscape, when observed from the remaining Green Belt countryside to the south of the A414. Artificial constructions such as high crib walls would represent the introduction of alien urban features into this rural countryside landscape and in such a prominent location would be harmful to the Green Belt and unlikely to lead to an appropriate visual outcome.

There is a construction materials recycling plant at Burnside, which is immediately to the south of this proposed central residential neighbourhood and immediately west of the adjacent southern neighbourhood. Some of the processes carried out at this site are extremely noisy. In consequence the screening bund and any other mitigation needs to be sufficiently robust to protect the living conditions of residents of the development that is close to Burnside, from the noise generated by that operation and without at the same time disfiguring the wider Green Belt countryside or resulting in a contrived residential layout. The proposal that is before the examination does none of these.

The fourth bullet point to paragraph 12.69, in explaining the Council's interpretation of the noise aspects of Policy SADM 18, says that "whilst design measures such as orientation, layout and double glazing can reduce noise within buildings, such measures are less effective in reducing the level of noise experienced in external amenity areas. As far as possible residents should have access to a peaceful (below 50dBA Leq) external amenity space". This is a location within a new development situated within open countryside and not one on an urban brownfield site where site constraints may necessitate noise standards at the margins of acceptability. The standard should therefore be seen as a location-specific absolute maxima and not something that is achieved across noticeable parts of the development. The operations at Burnside are by their nature very noisy and additionally some of the noise is also annoying tonal noise. The existence of such noise suggests that extra diligence needs to be applied to what is acceptable in a noise context.

Welwyn Garden City Objective 4 seeks to develop new neighbourhoods that are master planned according to Garden City Principles. These include the achievement of "beautifully and imaginatively designed homes set in gardens and attractive green spaces to create healthy and vibrant

communities". The mitigation of noise through the construction of lengthy solid walls to buildings, when combined with an orientation of habitable rooms within dwellings to a largely northerly aspect, is not conducive to the desirability of achieving "beautiful and imaginatively designed homes or attractive green spaces".

Additionally, the operations at Burnside include the crushing of concrete and its recycling as aggregate. This is a sustainable use of a waste product. The increased recycling of construction waste is encouraged by the National Planning Policy for Waste and in this climate, it is likely that such operations at Burnside would expand in the future rather than contract. High levels of noise within the consented limits could exist for longer periods in the future. The Framework also points out that existing businesses wanting to develop in continuance of their business should not have unreasonable restrictions put on them because of changes in nearby land uses since they were established.

Taken in the round I do not consider the likely proposals for residential development in the vicinity of Burnside utilizing a 60m off set which would include a 10m high crib wall, gabions and surface water attenuation ponds to be a sound outcome.

I would therefore invite the Council to reassess this element of the scheme in order to establish the depth of off-set from Burnside that would be necessary to enable dwellings to be constructed without the need for a contrived design and with some habitable rooms necessarily having northerly aspects, in order to achieve external amenity spaces having a noise environment below 50 dBA Leq. Such a scheme should have a naturally stable bund of a height that is sufficient to screen the development from the sight of persons enjoying the footpaths within Hatfield Park and the other area to the south of the A414. If this area also needs to contain attenuation ponds then its width is likely to be noticeably

in excess of 60 metres. The submission of improved and extended cross-sections to those shown on drawing ref 2284-4-4-1 no DR-0008 that have their southerly extent close to the 70 metre contour on the public footpath between Essendonbury and Hillend farms would be helpful.

In such circumstances it may also be opportune to revisit the proposed location of the wildlife corridor across this site or to assess the extent to which this area might compensate for the inevitable harm to wildlife that will result from the proximity of a large residential area, in addition to the existing one, next to the wildlife areas to the north.