

Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan Examination
Stage 5 Hearing Session Green Belt
Round Up Session

1. Green Belt round up

- Inspector confirmed he is not here to assess the soundness of the evidence. Having said that it is an important piece of evidence which informs decision making. He confirmed that he considers the methodology to be appropriate. He felt it would be helpful for decision making if the text were clarified in places to provide greater detail on how the study was undertaken. For example, it could be useful to clarify how harm assessments were concluded.
- The Inspector also noted that there should be an agreed approach to the shared Green Belt between Hatfield and St Albans.

Action: Clarify text in document as follows:

- a. Local Purpose, there is some confusion around the understanding of the methodology for local circumstances. This was largely set out in the Council's statements but would be useful if the text was in the document.
- b. Confirm where further sub-division of sites have been considered but not referred to as harm rating would be the same for both the larger and smaller parcels of land. It is noted that some development sites have not been subdivided from larger parcels (for example Birchall Garden Suburb) so would be useful if this could be clarified.

Green Belt Study Harm Assessments

- The inspector had concerns that some of the harm assessment may be inconsistent. He recognised that the consultation on the study had focused on the methodology rather than individual parcel assessments. He recommended that consultation should take place on the parcel assessment. There was some debate about how these should be reviewed. It was agreed that LUC would respond to the points already raised and any new comments on the harm assessment. The Inspector stated that he did not want there to be any outstanding matters on this at the village sessions.

Action: Further consultation to be carried out on the consistency of the harm assessments. LUC to review and provide a response to the examination. This will be published on the examination pages.

- In terms of how harm assessment should be used the Inspector considered that it should not be ignored that previously developed land and land in close proximity to transport nodes (railway stations) should be prioritised but that also sites assessed as high harm sites should not be excluded from that consideration.

Green Belt Boundaries and Safeguarded Land

- Consideration needs to be given to the permanence of the Green Belt boundaries beyond the plan period. The Inspector expressed concern that some strong Green Belt boundaries may be lost and replaced by weaker boundaries if they are moved from clearly identifiable, established features.
- Inspector considered that there was not a requirement in the NPPF to identify Safeguarded Land, although this would be the ideal. He confirmed that this was up to the Council to consider.

Washed over settlements

- The Inspector considers the work done by LUC is sound. Up to the Council to consider whether to take forward the recommendations as to which settlements to remove from the Green Belt.

2. Overarching Strategy, Council's letter and next steps in the examination.

3. Housing need

a. Full Objectively Assessed Housing need (policy off) / Latest Government Forecasts

b. Policy on housing need

Exceptional Circumstances and Housing need

- Plan as it stands is unsound as it is not meeting the OAHN – it is not meeting the OAHN due to the level of need identified and the growth strategy which has been advanced. The growth strategy needs to be balanced against harm to the Green Belt and the exceptional circumstances. The Inspector needs to justify exceptional circumstances on a site by site/area basis and this will be contentious.
- The Council has asked consultants to consider the latest (2016) population and household projections and the implications for the OAN along with previous household formation rates and are awaiting the results of this work.
- The Council need to consider what strategy will be pursued and whether the levels of economic growth/population growth in the 2014 projections will continue.

Inspector's Letter to Council

- Approach 2 (10 years' worth of sites and 5 years Areas of Search) not preferable and difficult to provide the evidence to support this.
- Approach 1 (Call for Sites) is preferred although this may take the longest timescale is the most likely to result in a sound plan.

Action: Report to be written for the Council's Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel to agree the way forward. Meeting set for December 2018.

- Question from Mr Bates (*Save Symondshyde*): What is the basis that the Plan is being taken forward? The evidence as submitted (Stage 1 and Stage 2 studies) or the new evidence submitted?

Answer: The evidence base is as submitted until either it is withdrawn or it is supplemented with new evidence. The Inspector required more Green Belt evidence to be submitted, it is up to the Council to use all three studies as appropriate.

4. Topic Specific policies – main modifications

Action: Updated main modifications to be submitted to the Inspector.

- Inspector notes changes to NPPF which have implications for development management policies.

Action: Sense check of NPPF and whether modifications are needed.

5. Settlement Policies (updates)

a. SP18 North East of Welwyn Garden City (Panshanger)

- A planning application has been submitted and masterplan prepared for a larger site area.

b. SP19 South East of Welwyn Garden City (Birchall Garden Suburb)

- LQM contamination evidence has been submitted as an Examination Document, further information on noise has been requested by the Council.

c. SP22 North West Hatfield

- Modifications are being prepared as agreed at a previous hearing session.

d. SP24 Symondshyde new village

- The Council has no strong view as to when this site should be examined. New evidence relating to ecology and sink holes on site has been submitted.

e. HS11 Land at South Way

- Discussion of the need for a secondary school on the New Barnfield site, dependant on housing numbers.

f. Villages

- Any debate on the village sites will need to wait until further work has been completed regarding new sites.