

Policy SP 24 New Village at Symondshyde

Note from Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council

December 2020

Introduction

The Inspector has requested further information from the Council in relation to the submitted local plan allocation at Symondshyde. This broadly covers the following matters.

- Further justification for the allocation of the new village as compared with other Green Belt releases.
- A re-examination of the northern and eastern extents of the potential expansion areas with particular reference to Green Belt impacts and the definition of an optimum Green Belt boundary.
- Consideration of land for safeguarding if it cannot be developed in this plan period.

In responding to these questions the Council must emphasise that it no longer supports the allocation of Symondshyde within the local plan. The Councillors considered the Inspector's interim report at meetings in November 2020 culminating in a full council meeting on November 23rd. They supported an Objectively Assessed Need of 690 dwellings per year (13,800 over the plan period) – see the Council's letter to the Inspector EX215. In that context, the Councillors recommended a package of additional sites and site removals primarily aimed at reducing overall Green Belt harm and improving the sustainability of the plan. Part of that package was the recommended removal of Symondshyde new village from the local plan. The comments in this paper need to be read in that context.

Further Justification for Symondshyde

The Inspector notes in paragraph 92 of the Interim Report '*the submitted evidence suggests to me that if the overall housing requirement can only be met by the establishment of a new village within the Borough, then an expanded village on this site would appear to be the most appropriate solution.*' Subsequently to this the Council has concluded that a lower OAN for the Plan period (2016-2036) may be considered more appropriate¹ and as a result, the new village at Symondshyde would not be required to meet the housing need of the borough. Without the requirement to meet the OAN through delivering a new village in this location the Council consider that there are no longer sufficient Exceptional Circumstances to release land for the proposed allocation, or any further extensions, from the Green Belt.

Based on this new position, it would not be appropriate for the Council to submit any further evidence or information seeking to justify the allocation of this site.

The Sustainability Appraisal will need to be updated to reflect the modifications to the Plan required to make the Plan sound. This would be in the context of other alternatives considered at the hearing sessions.

Green Belt Boundaries

The Council has provided additional information in response to the Inspector's earlier questions concerning a potential expansion of the new village, prepared in conjunction with the site promoters. The key issue examined was an eastward expansion of the new village, with new boundaries which allowed for 1,500 homes and the retention of a significant green

corridor between the site and the edge of Hatfield. See Examination documents EX202 – EX202H.

The Council has considered the request to reconsider the inclusion of two areas to the north (areas A and B) which are in different ownerships from the main new village site. The Council has sought to determine their availability for development. One of the sites is unregistered while the other owner has not responded to the Council's attempts to contact them. Therefore it has not been possible to confirm deliverability.

Nevertheless, if the Symondshyde new village is allocated, it is accepted that the Green Belt purposes of these two areas would become limited. They are topographically contained within the Symondshyde "bowl" behind the low ridge which runs to the north of the site. They could be appropriate locations for safeguarding as potential future expansion land should the village come forward.

The extent of the sites A and B are indicated in the updated HELAA proforma for the site, provided with this note.

The additional areas of land (labelled areas D and E in EX202D) which would extend the allocation south-eastwards towards Hatfield have also been considered in the HELAA update, combined and referred to as D/E. The areas are considered to be suitable, available and deliverable. However, the land comprises open undeveloped countryside and the land is currently being worked for mineral extraction, as approved in 2005 and not expected to be fully restored until workings have been finalised. Due to the working on the land, and the overall lack of any boundary features in this location, few distinctive landscape features have been retained and it accepted that the D/E boundary does not follow any such feature.

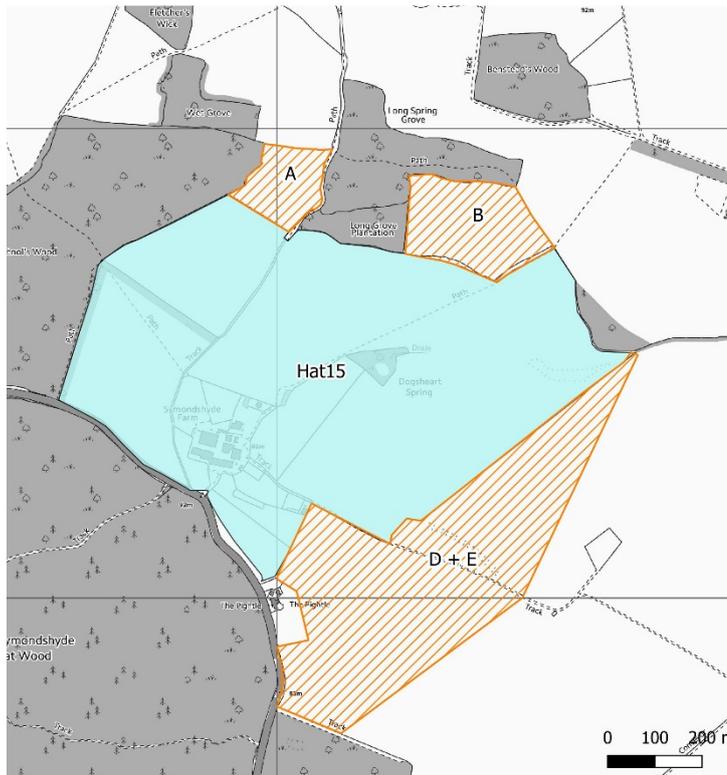
In the light of the Inspector's comment concerning the "high harm" Green Belt area which extends into the D/E area, the Council has reviewed the appropriateness of the specific expansion area proposed.

A number of footpaths and narrow tracks cross the land and the area is mainly surrounded by open countryside, with the proposed allocation of Symondshyde to the west with woodland beyond and Hatfield to the east. The land is also relatively flat. Any Green Belt boundary formed by the removal of further land from the Green Belt would require landscape boundary features to provide visual separation and containment of the allocation from the wider countryside and from views of Hatfield. The proposal to extend the allocation would narrow the gap between Symondshyde and Hatfield and require further Green Belt release into land which is considered to be High harm².

Plan 1 overleaf indicates an alternative expansion area which would only allocate land in Moderate – High harm, avoiding any High Harm Green Belt release. These boundaries would follow existing tracks and hedgerows giving an existing landscape structure to strengthen. It takes account of the landscape vision produced by the site promoters (see Examination document EX52) which promotes a green corridor and entrance into the site along Great Braitch Lane. The area of this potential expansion land is 18.8 ha compared with the 22.3 ha of areas D/E. This minor reduction in size should not, in the opinion of the Council, impact on the potential to develop 1,500 dwellings overall since the overall density is still below the HELAA guideline of 25 per hectare.

² LUC Green Belt Study 3 (2019)

Site Reference: Hat15 / SDS6 Site name: Symondshyde (New Village)



Site details

Settlement:	Rural Areas
Ward	Hatfield Villages
Site area	Site SDS6 = 56.5 ha (developable area 44ha) Area A = 2.3ha Area B = 5ha Area D&E = 22.3ha

Site context

Green Belt / Urban:	Green Belt
Previously developed:	In part (farmhouse)
Land use/character	Agricultural/farmhouse
Surrounding land uses and character	The site and potential extensions adjoin areas of agricultural land, local wildlife sites and woodlands.

Site promotion

Source of promotion	Landowner
Land use promoted	Residential with new primary school and associated community facilities/services.

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Site suitability considerations

Comments

Policy framework:

- Adopted Development Plan
- Submitted Local Plan
- Waste/Minerals Local Plan
- National policy

- District Plan (2005): Green Belt (GBSP1); Biodiversity and Development (R11); Wildlife Sites (R15); Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows (R17); Historic Parks and Gardens; (R19) ; Archaeology (R29); Integrating Transport and Land Use (M1); Landscape Character Area (RA19)
- Draft Local Plan (2016): Settlement Strategy and Green Belt boundaries (SP3); Highway Network and Safety (SADM2); Sustainable Travel (SADM3); Protection and enhancement of critical environmental assets (SP11); Amenity and Layout (SADM11); Flood Risk and Surface Water Management (SADM14); Heritage (SADM15); Ecology and Landscape (SADM16)
- Minerals LP (2007): The site lies within a sand and gravel belt and Preferred Area Symondshyde.
- Waste Local Plan: Policy 12: Sustainable Design, Construction and Development
- NPPF (2019): Section 9 Promoting Sustainable Transport; Section 15 Conserving and enhancing the Natural Environment; Section 16: Conserving enhancing the Historic Environment, Section 17: Facilitating the sustainable use of minerals

Physical constraints:

- Access to the site
- Infrastructure location/capacity
- Ground conditions
- Contamination
- Pollution
- Flood risk
- Hazardous risk
- Other

- Existing vehicular access to the site is provided via unclassified Symondshyde Lane (Hammonds Lane) to the south-west. It is expected that suitable vehicular access arrangements, which may require one or more new access roads from the site to Coopers Green Lane and Green Lanes will be provided to the south-east. HCC Highways consider a substantial investment in sustainable transport would be necessary to make Hat15 a sustainable development option as discussed at the Stage 7 Hearings. The promotor has submitted evidence on Sustainable Public Transport.
- Several Public Rights of Way run through site SDS6 and the areas of extension proposed.
- Wastewater: Network capacity in the area unlikely to support demand. Upgrades to the existing drainage infrastructure are likely to be required ahead of the development. Upgrades can take around 18 months to 3 years to design and deliver and could include upgrades to STW (Mill Green preferred).
- Flood risk Zone 1 (lowest risk)
- No identifiable contamination, pollution or hazardous risks but Environmental Health recommend air quality modelling of impact of new settlement due to its size, and a Health Impact Assessment.
- The site lies within Groundwater Protection Zone 3 (Total Catchment) It is noted that if contaminative development is proposed on site this will require EA consultation.
- Potential for the existence of sink holes on the site however a comprehensive geophysical assessment has not been undertaken at this stage
- Minerals: The site is adjacent to 'MLPCS001 – Cromer Hyde' however this site has not been identified in the emerging Waste Local Plan/will not be taken forward for minerals extraction.

<p>Potential environmental impacts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landscape capacity/sensitivity • Landscape character/features • Nature conservation • Heritage conservation • Residential environment/amenity • Other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two Landscape Character Areas cover the site and characteristics of these are displayed within the site. LCA 31: De Havilland Plain –large open arable landscape, parkland and horticulture landscape, existing and restored minerals workings, incoherent and jumbled landscape. The site also includes bordering hedgerows/trees with some gaps, dissecting the site into individual arable fields. LCA32: Symondshyde Ridge – extensive woodland areas which border site, individual property (farmhouse) assimilated into landscape, large fields with relic hedgerows and narrow lanes. • Local Wildlife Sites (and Ancient Woodlands) are located around the site and the extended areas: WS45 to south, WS44 to west and WS64 to north. Wildlife sites and woodlands will require protecting and tree/hedgerow corridors maintained. • Herts Ecology advised in 2016 that there was evidence of bats and potential for nesting birds on site Hat15. For the extended areas HCC Ecology notes the potential for protected species (badgers, bats, Great Crested Newts and butterflies) in adjoining woodlands however these are not considered a absolute constraint. • In an Impact Zone for SSSI Sherrardspark Wood, however residential development in this location would not trigger Natural England Consultation at planning application stage. • Area of Archaeological Significance (AAS33) covers the land at the farmhouse. • Symondshyde Farmhouse (Grade II listed building) is located within the site. Areas A and B would move the site boundary in closer proximity to Brocket Hall Grade II Registered Park and Garden, however this would be separated from development by areas of woodland/Local Wildlife Sites. Historic England consider that areas D&E could be developed without any additional harm to the historic environment. 		
<p>Contribution to regeneration priority areas</p>	<p>N/A</p>		
<p>Likely market attractiveness for the use proposed</p>	<p>Likely to be attractive to the market due to rural location and setting, close to A1(M) and towns Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield with associated facilities and services.</p>		
<p>Availability</p>		<p>Site capacity</p>	
<p>Site ownership</p>	<p>Multiple Landowners A single landowner owns site Hat15 and Areas D&E</p>	<p>Promoted by landowner/ promoter</p>	<p>1,500-1,640 dwellings</p>
<p>Any known constraints</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>HELAA Scenario/ methodology</p> <p>Other comments</p>	<p>>6ha so 25dph</p> <p>Landscape buffers required to adjoining Wildlife Sites, Ancient Woodland and to wider landscape. Need to protect heritage asset (Symondshyde Farmhouse and setting) and Brockett RPG to the north.</p>

Achievability and deliverability			
Landowner timescales	Not stated.	HELAA capacity	1,500 dwellings (Site Hat15 and areas D&E)
Comments	Timing of wastewater infrastructure upgrades and highway upgrades, mineral workings and the scale of development influence delivery timescale.		
Viability issues	Cost of upgrading wastewater infrastructure; cost of highway upgrades and sustainable transport package.	HELAA density	22-25dph
Deliverability estimate	Site SDS6 is considered in the Plan trajectory for delivery in years 6-10/11-15. Additional areas of development may extend the estimated delivery beyond the Plan period.		

Conclusions

In the 2016 HELAA, site Hat15 (shown on map with a red outline) was assessed and found to be suitable, achievable and deliverable for 1,130 dwellings and allocated in the Draft Local Plan 2016 as Strategic Development Site 6. Development of the site is constrained by the need to protect the heritage assets (Symondshyde Farmhouse and Brocket Estate), adjoining local wildlife sites and the need to provide landscaped buffer areas. The site, as a strategic development is also required to accommodate essential community facilities, education facility, sustainable drainage measures, rights of way corridors, and open space (full details provided in SP24). It has also been agreed that the Gypsy and Traveller site (HS34) proposed at Coopers Green Lane would be removed from the plan and 6 pitches would be provided in the Hat15 site. The allocation would be amended to 1,136 to reflect this provision.

The site was discussed at the Stage 7 Hearing Sessions in March 2020, following this session the Inspector indicated concerns regarding the sustainability of the development given its location and scale. It was suggested that the Council consider increasing the mass of development to be delivered to provide greater sustainability benefits on site. A number of areas surrounding the site for their potential to be included in the allocation is now being considered, these areas included in this assessment are shown on the above map as hashed areas A, B and D/E. Area C which was located to the north-east has not been advanced at this stage.

Area A (2.3ha)

This area adjoins site allocation SDS6 along its northern boundary in the area between Tinol's Wood, Wet Grove and Long Grove Plantation/Long Spring Grove (Local Wildlife Sites/Ancient Woodlands). A Public Right of Way runs along the western boundary of Area A adjoining the LWS, which any proposed layout would need to accommodate. A precautionary easement has been applied at this plan making stage to be included within the landscape buffer required for the LWS/AW. Allowing for the landscape buffers needed a potential development area of approximately 1.8ha is found to be suitable and at the estimate dwelling capacity of 25dph this equate to 45 dwellings.

This parcel of land is owned by a separate landowner to site Hat15, the Council has been unable at this stage to determine if this site would be available for development within the plan period.

Area B (5ha)

This area also adjoins site allocation SDS6 along its northern boundary but is located to the east of Area A on the western boundary of Long Grove Plantation/Long Spring Grove (LWS/AW). A landscaped buffer will be required to protect the Ancient Woodland/Wildlife site. A Public Right of Way runs from site SDS6 along the south-western boundary of Area B towards Lemsford Village, as above any proposed layout would need to accommodate the PROW and a precautionary easement has been applied at this plan making stage. Allowing for the landscape buffers needed a potential development area of approximately 4.4ha is found to be suitable and at the estimated dwelling capacity of 25dph this equates to 110 dwellings. This parcel of land is owned by a separate landowner to site Hat15, the Council has been unable at this stage to determine if this site would be available for development within the plan period.

Area D/E (22.3ha)

This area adjoins site allocation SDS6 along its south-western boundary and extends towards Hatfield Town and site allocation SDS5 (Hat1). A Public Right of Way crosses the land of Area D/E along the new transport link proposed as part of allocation SDS6. Historic England responded to the Inspector's Consultation following the Stage 7 Hearing Session and considered the potential areas of expansion in their response. HE notes that expansion of the site in area D&E would have less impact on Brockett Hall estate than expanding the site to the north and that it is likely that the additional land could be developed without any additional harm to the historic environment in and around Symondshyde. Area D would also need to accommodate the proposed primary access for allocation SDS6 which is sited along the edge of Area D and SDS6. Allowing for the landscape buffers to the Wildlife Site/Ancient Woodland required, a potential development area of approximately 22ha is found to be suitable and at the estimated dwelling capacity of 25dph this would deliver an estimated 550 dwellings. Parcels D and E fall under the same ownership at the proposed allocation Hat15 and the landowner has put forward these parcels for consideration. This area is therefore considered to be suitable, available and achievable for development.

The additional of areas D and E to the proposed allocation of SDS6 would result in a potential dwelling capacity estimate of 1,580 dwellings. The landowner has proposed that the dwelling capacity of around 1,500 dwelling would provide the critical mass to sustain the proposed local facilities and services. This capacity is considered appropriate due to the likely need for the land at areas D&E to provide a landscaping buffer to its south-east boundary to maintain the wider Green Belt. It is considered that a robust boundary will be required as the adjacent Strategic Green Corridor to be provided through the Local Plan is located between Areas D/E and site Hat1 (SDS5).

Suitable	Yes	Available	Yes (in part)	Achievable	Yes	Deliverability timescale	6-10/11-15 years (delivery of extended areas may be delivered beyond the plan period.)
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