



**WELWYN
HATFIELD**

**Colin Haigh
Head of Planning**

Reply to: address as below

Date: 18 December 2020

Email: s.tiley@welhat.gov.uk

Mr Melvyn Middleton
Planning Inspectorate
c/o Programme Officer
louise@poservices.co.uk

Dear Sir,

Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan - Site HS11 Land at South Way.

The Council writes further to its letter dated 6th October 2020 to provide you with further information on matters that were discussed by participants and requested by you at the Stage 8 Hearing Session on the 30th July 2020, in respect of the draft allocation of Site HS11 – Land at South Way.

These matters have been discussed at length with both Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) and the promoter of the site, to ensure common agreement on all matters. These include the highways infrastructure costs that may be required to support the future development of the site and its overall viability, the need to provide a new two form entry Primary School on the land, and the inherent sustainable nature of this location to provide new homes and a School to address identified needs within the Borough.

Despite the fact that the allocation provides for only 120 new homes, all parties agree that it is an important part of the new Local Plan, as it will assist in the delivery of a new Primary School, which is an essential piece of infrastructure that will support future growth in the Borough.

Highways Infrastructure Costs and Overall Viability

The promoter has provided cost estimates and plans prepared by their transport consultant for the following highway improvements that could be offered as part of a future planning application package:

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- 1) Partially or fully signalised junction options, with a toucan crossing on South Way;
- 2) Footway link upgrades between South Way and Lime Tree Court to the north; and
- 3) 2 metre pedestrian refuge to allow crossing further along South Way.

This information has been shared with HCC, as the Highway Authority, who have confirmed that the estimates are an accurate reflection of what these highway improvements will be likely to cost, and this is reflected in the enclosed letter provided by HCC.

Moving on to the overall viability of the development, the promoter's consultant (Turner Morum) has undertaken an independent viability assessment to appraise the ability of HS11 to viably deliver the highway improvements identified above, along with any required S106 and infrastructure contributions. Once these costs were factored into the viability model, it showed a good surplus that demonstrates that the scheme is technically viable at the assumed level of costs. The surplus also indicates additional headroom should further S106 contributions be required at the application stage, for example towards sustainable transport, health, community facilities or open space. As such, the promoter considers that the scheme is viable and deliverable, and there is no information currently before this Council or HCC that would suggest otherwise. Again, this is reflected in the enclosed letter provided by HCC.

The New Primary School

As you will be aware, following submission of the Draft Local Plan, land for a new two form entry Primary School was proposed within the Site HS11 allocation. The need to provide a new Primary School in this location was agreed with this Council and HCC, and this agreement was reflected within a Statement of Common Ground, signed in January 2018 (**EX55**). The Statement of Common Ground confirmed that it is necessary to include land for a new Primary School at HS11 to meet existing education needs in south Hatfield and to support wider growth identified in the new Local Plan. There are no other available sites in the right places to meet the education needs arising from the Local Plan in south Hatfield.

Given the period of time that has passed, and following the Stage 8 Hearing Sessions, this Council has again discussed this matter with the promoter and HCC, and all parties are still in agreement that there is a need for a new Primary School in this location.

The former New Barnfield site is not required to meet the educational requirements for the growth levels in the submitted Local Plan. However, if further growth is required to be provided in the new Local Plan, HCC has confirmed that the site is available to provide a new Secondary School (**EX57** – to be updated shortly to reflect changes in circumstances since submission). A full feasibility exercise for the site has not yet been completed by HCC, due to resource constraints and current uncertainty over the size of new secondary school required. HCC advises, however, that the site is not capable of also delivering an all-through school or separate primary school due to its size and constraints, therefore it is intended that HS11 will accommodate the new Primary School. This point is covered in the enclosed letter provided by HCC as the Education Authority.

Sustainable Development

All parties are in agreement that the site is a sustainable location for the new development identified within the HS11 allocation. The site has good access to public transport services and local facilities within reasonable walking or cycling distance, including the Primary School now proposed within the allocation. The plans that were submitted to you on the 6th October highlight the key connections to South Hatfield that will be available to future residents of the site and these will only be enhanced through the highway improvements that the development will deliver.

Green Belt

Whilst the Site is located within a strategic gap between Hatfield and Potters Bar, the restricted development of HS11 will ensure that a significant gap of approximately 4.2 kilometres will still exist between the closest points of these settlements. The Council is in agreement with the promoter that the HS11 allocation, which has been informed by topographical features and visibility analysis, will create no additional visual coalescence between Hatfield and Welham Green. Indeed, the view from Welham Green looking north will be of the proposed ridgeline route, which is aptly demonstrated by the section drawing that the Council submitted to you on the 6th October 2020.

The proposed Green Belt boundary will be the green infrastructure corridor along the ridgeline to the south of the Site. This will create a clear and strong definition of a new Green Belt boundary, preserve an open skyline in views from Hatfield and remove the threat of any future lack of containment of the settlement of Hatfield. Between the HS11 boundary and the ridgeline route would be public open green space and the playing fields associated with the School, which perform an appropriate and acceptable Green Belt function. The site promoter has confirmed that the public open green space could be transferred to a suitable public body for future ownership and maintenance, thereby protecting its amenity value and preventing further encroachment into the Green Belt to the south of the site.

In terms of the implications of the allocation of HS11 for any alteration of the wider Green Belt boundary in this area, including around the New Barnfield site, the Council's position on this has been set out in its hearing statement responses to Inspector's Questions 28 and 29 of the Welham Green/HS11 hearing sessions (please see extract enclosed). It is notable also that at the hearing session on 18th August 2020 concerning New Barnfield, HCC withdrew its former representations which argued for release of that site from the Green Belt specifically as a waste site allocation, and acknowledged that the site should remain in the Green Belt.

Following receipt of your Interim Report on 19th October, the Council has worked with the promoters of HS11, who have agreed to amend the boundary of the allocation in response to your comments concerning potential visibility of the development from the wider Green Belt, particularly to the west. The revised allocation boundary in the enclosed document prepared by the site promoter provides a less sinuous building line below the 106m contour, with a clear 'corridor' of public open space between the proposed allocation boundary and the ridgeline to the south. As a result, views from the Green Belt immediately to the south and west would be strictly limited, and screened by planting belts such that any harm to the Green Belt would be limited to the immediate surroundings. In views from the wider Green Belt, beyond the A1(M), the proposed development will be indiscernible beyond layers of intervening vegetation.

With reference to concerns raised at the hearing sessions about wider visual impact, St Albans Cathedral lies approximately 7.6km to the west of the Site, on the western side of St Albans. In views towards Hatfield from the Cathedral tower, the Site would be almost

impossible to distinguish from the built up area of South Hatfield, much of which is at a higher elevation than HS11. Proposed development within HS11 is below the 106m contour line, and as such will not form a new skyline feature and would not be discernible amongst the existing urban area of St Albans, Fleetville and South Hatfield.

The revision of the allocation boundary in the south west corner of the Site, coupled with supplementary boundary planting where necessary, will ensure that a development of up to two storeys in height would barely be discernible in views from the Green Belt immediately to the west, therefore reducing any harm to a minimal level. The heights, massing and mix of sizes of the proposed dwellings will be considered in detail at any subsequent planning application stage, in order to ensure that any visual impact on the wider Green Belt is minimised.

The Council trusts that these clarifications and additional information are helpful in your further consideration of HS11 and provide comfort that it is a site that is deliverable early in the Plan process. The allocation of HS11 is considered to be sound in the context of the National Planning Policy Framework and is fundamental to the delivery of the new Primary School.

If you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to raise them with the Council.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sue Tiley', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Sue Tiley

Planning Policy and Implementation Manager