

13 August, 2020

Mr. Colin Haigh,
Head of Planning,
Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council

By email only

Dear Mr Haigh

Welwyn/Hatfield Local Plan Examination Progress

Unfortunately you appear to have totally misunderstood the sentiment behind my offer to write an interim report on the soundness of the plan. I offered to prepare the interim report in order to further assist you in assessing the ways forward to make this plan sound, in an attempt to shorten the overall timescale rather than the reverse. My offer should not have been a signal to delay the presentation of new sites to the Examination, along with the accompanying Revised Sustainability Appraisal, material that has in any event been in the public domain since the end of 2019 and was deliberated and resolved thereon by your members in January 2020. Without the Revised Sustainability Appraisal my observations on the remaining Regulation 19 sites are likely to be imprecise and qualified, which I am sure you will agree will not be particularly helpful to you or to me.

Much of what my report will say has already been said previously either in writing or verbally. As you know, a number of the sites that are proposed in your Regulation 19 Plan are unusually controversial and their soundness overall is questionable in the context of the Sustainability Appraisal that is before me. Whether that will be the case when I have had sight of the Revised Sustainability Appraisal remains to be seen. However, I do not consider a useful outcome will transpire if I ignore that document. That is why I referred to the use of the Revised Sustainability Appraisal in my note of 13 February.

My assessment of this information will be time consuming and I would like to begin this work ASAP so that I can conclude an appropriate interim report that is based upon up to date information and at an early date.

As this information is already in the public domain and you now appear to be about to conclude your assessment of the consultation, I can see no reason why it should not be placed before the Examination in the near future.

I will have concluded my assessment of the Regulation 19 plan shortly and will then need to review where the Examination goes moving forward, assuming that it does. To that end, If you are unable to submit your Revised Sustainability Appraisal, with or without the additional sites and the consultation results, in the near future, then I would ask you to submit an explanation as to why you are unable to do so, together with an accurate commitment as to when the information will be presented to the Examination.

Moving forward it is now critical that we agree an end game for this Examination. I have asked the Programme Officer to arrange a Taking Stock virtual session on 27 August. From my perspective its purpose will be to publicly discuss the future of this Examination and hopefully to agree the necessary future actions that could lead to the adoption of a sound plan before too long. I would therefore be grateful if you would prepare a draft programme of the necessary steps that you consider you still need to take before adoption, for us to discuss on 27 August. I would be pleased to receive this by 24 August.

Yours Sincerely

Mel Middleton

Melvyn Middleton

INSPECTOR