

WELWYN HATFIELD DISTRICT PLAN

WRITTEN STATEMENT

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CONTENTS

	<u>Page No.</u>
Index of Policies	3
1. INTRODUCTION	8
2. OVERALL STRATEGY	16
<u>DISTRICT-WIDE POLICIES</u>	
3. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	24
4. GREEN BELT AND SETTLEMENT PATTERN	26
5. RESOURCES	31
6. MOVEMENT	59
7. DESIGN	75
8. IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING	87
<u>POLICIES FOR URBAN AREAS</u>	
9. HOUSING	92
10. OPEN SPACE	107
11. COMMUNITY, LEISURE AND TOURISM	113
12. EMPLOYMENT	127
13. RETAILING AND TOWN CENTRES	142
14. HATFIELD AERODROME SITE	178
<u>POLICIES FOR RURAL AREAS</u>	
15. RURAL AREAS	185
Glossary	208
<u>APPENDICES</u>	
Appendix 1 - Wildlife Sites	215
Appendix 2 - Listed Buildings	220
Appendix 3 - Historic Parks and Gardens	232
Appendix 4 - Areas of Archaeological Significance	233
Appendix 5 - Housing Land Supply	239
Appendix 6 - Urban Open Land	240
Appendix 7 - Planning Policy Guidance Notes	245
Appendix 8 - STRAP Area Map	246

INDEX OF POLICIES

Page No.

DISTRICT-WIDE POLICIES

3. Sustainable Development

SD1	Sustainable Development	25
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4. Green Belt and Settlement Pattern

GBSP1	Definition of the Green Belt	28
GBSP2	Towns and Specified Settlements	28
GBSP3	Area of Special Restraint and Structural Landscape Area	30

5. Resources

R1	Maximising the Use of Previously Developed Land	34
R2	Contaminated Land	35
R3	Energy Efficiency	36
R4	Renewable Energy Sources	37
R5	Waste Management	38
R6	River Corridors	39
R7	Protection of Ground and Surface Water	40
R8	Floodplains and Flood Prevention	41
R9	Conservation of Water Resources- Supply and Disposal	41
R10	Water Conservation Measures	42
R11	Biodiversity and Development	43
R12	Special Areas of Conservation	43
R13	Sites of Special Scientific Interest	44
R14	Local Nature Reserves	44
R15	Wildlife Sites	46
R16	Protection of Species	46
R17	Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows	47
R18	Air Quality	47
R19	Noise and Vibration Pollution	48
R20	Light Pollution	49
R21	Telecommunications Development	50
R22	Development in Conservation Areas	52
R23	Demolition of Buildings in Conservation Areas	53
R24	Character Appraisals and Enhancements	53
R25	Works to Listed Buildings	54
R26	Alternative Uses for Listed Buildings	55
R27	Demolition of Listed Buildings	55
R28	Historic Parks and Gardens	56
R29	Archaeology	57

6. Movement

M1	Integrating Transport and Land Use	61
M2	Transport Assessments	62
M3	Green Transport Plans	63
M4	Developer Contributions	63
M5	Pedestrian Facilities	64
M6	Cycle Routes and Facilities	65
M7	Equestrian Facilities	65
M8	Powered Two-Wheelers	65
M9	Bus and Taxi Facilities	67
M10	Passenger Transport Interchanges	68
M11	Rail Freight Depots	69
M12	Operational Transport Land	69
M13	Motorway Service Areas	70
M14	Parking Standards for New Development	73
M15	Panshanger Airfield	74

7. Design

D1	Quality of Design	77
D2	Character and Context	79
D3	Continuity and Enclosure	79
D4	Quality of the Public Realm	80
D5	Design for Movement	81
D6	Legibility	81
D7	Safety by Design	83
D8	Landscaping	84
D9	Access and Design for People with Disabilities	85
D10	Public Art	85
D11	Design Statements	86
D12	Development Briefs	86

8. Implementation and Monitoring

IM1	Non-Land Use Strategies	88
IM2	Planning Obligations	89
IM3	Monitoring and Review	90

POLICIES FOR URBAN AREAS

9. Housing

H1	New Housing Development	95
H2	Location of Windfall Residential Development	97
H3	Loss of Residential Accommodation	98
H4	Conversion of Residential Accommodation	98
H5	Conversion of Commercial or Vacant Buildings to Residential Accommodation	99
H6	Densities	100
H7	Affordable Housing	102
H8	Dwelling Type and Tenure	103
H9	Special Needs Housing	103

H10	Accessible Housing	104
H11	Student Accommodation	104
H12	Travelling Showpeople's Quarters	105
H13	Gypsy Sites	106
10. Open Space		
OS1	Urban Open Land	108
OS2	Playing Pitch Provision	109
OS3	Play Space and Informal Open Space Provision in New Residential Development	111
OS4	Allotments	111
11. Community, Leisure and Tourism		
CLT1	Protection of Existing Leisure Facilities	114
CLT2	New and Expanded Leisure Facilities	116
CLT3	Stanborough Park	116
CLT4	Arts and Cultural Facilities	117
CLT5	Tourist Facilities	118
CLT6	Hotels	118
CLT7	Community Use of Education Facilities	119
CLT8	New and Extended Education Facilities	120
CLT9	Use of Redundant Education Facilities	121
CLT10	Nurseries and Childcare Facilities	122
CLT11	Library Services	122
CLT12	New Community Facilities	123
CLT13	Loss of Community Facilities	124
CLT14	Places of Worship	124
CLT15	Health Centres and Surgeries	124
CLT16	Queen Elizabeth II Hospital	125
CLT17	Care in the Community	126
12. Employment		
EMP1	Employment Areas	130
EMP2	Acceptable Uses in Employment Areas	132
EMP3	Other Employment Generating in Employment Areas	133
EMP4	Car Sales and Showrooms	133
EMP5	Mix of Unit Sizes	135
EMP6	Small Business Units	135
EMP7	Provision for 'Dirty User' Industries	136
EMP8	Employment Sites Outside of Employment Areas	136
EMP9	Training	137
EMP10	Childcare Facilities	138
EMP11	Local Recruitment	138
EMP12	University of Hertfordshire	139
EMP13	Design Criteria for Employment Development	140
EMP14	Live-Work Schemes	141
13. Retailing and Town Centres		

TCR1	Retail Development In Town Centres and Edge of Town Centre	148
TCR2	Retail Development in Village and Neighbourhood Centres	149
TCR3	Out of Centre Retail Development	149
<u>Welwyn Garden City Town Centre</u>		
TCR4	Town Centre North Development Site	153
TCR5	Campus East Development Site	154
TCR6	Land at the Southern Side of the Town Centre	154
TCR7	Retail Frontages	156
TCR8	Mixed Use Frontages	157
TCR9	First Floor Uses	157
TCR10	Acceptable Uses Outside of the Primary Retail Core (The Campus)	158
TCR11	Acceptable Uses Outside of the Primary Retail Core (Parkway and Church Road)	158
TCR12	Transport Infrastructure In Welwyn Garden City Town Centre	159
TCR13	Environment of the Town Centre	160
<u>Hatfield Town Centre</u>		
TCR14	Redevelopment of Land at Eastern End of Town Centre	163
TCR15	Redevelopment Elsewhere in Hatfield Town Centre	163
TCR16	Retail Frontages	165
TCR17	Mixed Use Frontages	165
TCR18	First Floor Uses	166
TCR19	Acceptable Uses Outside of the Primary Retail Core (Lemsford Road)	167
TCR20	Acceptable Uses Outside of the Primary Retail Core (The Common)	167
TCR21	Transport Infrastructure in Hatfield Town Centre	168
TCR22	Town Centre Environment	168
<u>Other Centres and Shopping Facilities</u>		
TCR23	Large Neighbourhood Centres	170
TCR24	Old Hatfield	171
TCR25	Small Neighbourhood Centres	172
TCR26	Large Village Centres	172
TCR27	Small Village Centres	173
TCR28	Loss of Individual Local Shops	174
TCR29	Markets	175
TCR30	Car Boot Sales and Other Temporary Sales	175
TCR31	Amusement Centres	176
TCR32	Petrol Filling Stations	177

14. Hatfield Aerodrome Site

HATAER1	Sustainable Development of the Site	180
HATAER2	Mixed Use	180
HATAER3	Requirement for a Master Plan	182
HATAER4	Land Use Proposals	182

POLICIES FOR RURAL AREAS

15. Rural Areas

RA1	Development in the Green Belt	186
RA2	Development in Settlements within the Green Belt	187
RA3	Extensions to Dwellings in the Green Belt	187
RA4	Replacement of Dwellings in the Green Belt	188
RA5	Major Developed Sites in the Green Belt (Limited Infilling)	189
RA6	Major Developed Sites in the Green Belt (Redevelopment)	189
RA7	Royal Veterinary College	191
RA8	Brookmans Park Transmitting Station	192
RA9	Cemeteries and Memorial Gardens	192
RA10	Landscape Regions and Character Areas	193
RA11	Watling Chase Community Forest	194
RA12	Protection of Village Facilities	195
RA13	Mixed Uses in Villages	196
RA14	Rural Exceptions Sites	197
RA15	Agricultural Land	197
RA16	Rural Employment and Diversification	198
RA17	Re-use of Rural Buildings	198
RA18	New Agricultural Buildings	199
RA19	Temporary Agricultural Accommodation	200
RA20	Permanent Agricultural Dwellings	201
RA21	Leisure and Tourism in the Countryside	202
RA22	Golf Courses	203
RA23	Motor Sports and Other Noisy Recreational Activities	204
RA24	Riding and Livery Stables	204
RA25	Public Rights of Way	205
RA26	Bridleways	206
RA27	Greenways	206
RA28	New Development using Rural Roads	207

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Plan

- 1.1 This document is the new local plan for the district of Welwyn Hatfield for the period up to 2011. It replaces the current statutory local plan, the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan Alterations No.1. It contains the local planning framework, policies and proposals, which will guide the development and use of land in the district over the next 10 years and against which the Council will consider planning applications.
- 1.2 This document is the result of a full review of the current District Plan. There are several reasons why a comprehensive review was necessary:
 - (a) The former Plan was first prepared in the early 1990s. Although alterations to it were adopted as recently as 1998, these were limited to certain parts of the Plan to roll it forward to 2001, pending the completion of the Structure Plan Review. The former Plan was therefore reaching the end of its 'lifetime' and needed a complete review.
 - (b) The County Council adopted a new Structure Plan in 1998 (shortly after the alterations to the current District Plan were adopted) setting out a revised strategic framework for Hertfordshire for the period through to 2011 based on the principle of sustainable development. The new Plan has been updated to accord with this.
 - (c) There have been significant changes in Government planning policies. In particular, sustainable development, design quality, maximising the use of 'brownfield' land and reducing the need to travel have become central objectives of the planning system. Greater emphasis has also been given to diversifying the rural economy and development in town centres. These have required a fundamental review of the Plan's strategy, objectives and key policy areas.

Scope and Status of the Plan

- 1.3 This Plan is a legal document. Together with the Structure Plan, the Waste Plan, and the Minerals Local Plan, it forms the statutory development plan for the district. The Structure Plan provides the strategic policies for the district; this Plan provides the local policies. This plan must be in general conformity with the Structure Plan and accord with national and regional planning guidance. The Plan has been prepared within this overall policy context, which is summarised in paragraphs 1.14 -1.18 below.
- 1.4 As the adopted statutory local plan, its policies and proposals may only relate to the development and use of land. This is stipulated by planning legislation. However, a wide range of social, economic and environmental issues were taken into account in preparing the Plan, including the objectives of other non-land use strategies mentioned in the policy context below. Where appropriate, relevant non-land use issues and strategies are explained in the supporting text to policies.
- 1.5 The Plan only deals with those planning issues that are the responsibility of Welwyn Hatfield District Council. It does not cover mineral excavation and

waste disposal, which are 'county matters' and are addressed in separate Minerals and Waste Local Plans produced by the County Council.

- 1.6 In accordance with Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 applications for development must be determined in accordance with the policies in the adopted development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. This does not mean that **every** planning decision should be made in strict accordance with the policies in this Plan, but it does mean that there must be a good planning reason to justify relaxing or departing from a policy. All decisions taken as a consequence of the policies and proposals set out in this Plan will be made having regard to any relevant provisions of the Human Rights Act.

Content

- 1.7 The Plan is made up of two parts:
- (a) Written Statement - this document, which sets out the overall strategy of the Plan and contains all of its policies (printed in bold) and their supporting text or 'reasoned justifications'.
 - (b) Proposals Map - based on an Ordnance Survey map of the district showing the site-specific proposals and policy areas to which the Written Statement refers. It is made up of 5 sheets at 1:10,000 scale covering the whole district and a series of inset maps at 1:2,500 scale for Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield Town Centres, the former Hatfield Aerodrome site and the Major Developed Sites in the Green Belt.
- 1.8 The Written Statement is divided into four main parts - District-Wide policies, policies for Urban Areas, policies for Rural Areas, and the Appendices. The purpose of this structure is to offer a more coherent grouping of policies, based on the land use characteristics of the district. However, the Written Statement should be read as a whole; policies are often interdependent and satisfaction of one policy does not guarantee satisfaction of others.
- 1.9 The adopted Plan is supported by supplementary planning guidance and a number of technical reports which contain much of the detail upon which policies are justified and which have been excluded from the Written Statement to keep it as concise as possible. Where relevant the guidance or reports are referred to in the policies or supporting text. The key ones include - the Residential and Employment Land Availability statements, a Study of Urban Potential for Housing (urban capacity study), a Housing Needs Study, Retail Capacity Study, Economic Profile, Habitats Survey, an Open Space Survey, a Playing Pitch Study, the Interim Car Parking Standards, the Supplementary Design Guidance and Town Centre studies. In addition, a number of site-specific proposals in the Plan are supported by supplementary planning guidance in the form of planning briefs or master plans which provide the detail of the proposals. It is important that the Plan is read in the context of these supporting documents.
- 1.10 Finally, the Plan has been subjected to a full Sustainability Appraisal, in line with Government advice in PPG12, in order to assess the likely environmental, social and economic impact of the policies in the Plan. The

results of the appraisal and the methodology used have been published in separate documents that sit alongside the Plan.

Plan Period

- 1.11 This Plan has been prepared to cover the period up to 2011, in accordance with the time period for the adopted Structure Plan Review. Its housing allocations were drawn up to satisfy the housing requirements in the Structure Plan for the period 1991-2011, which in turn are based on household forecasts and housing requirements for the south east region for this period.

Timetable and Process for the Review

- 1.12 Since this is a statutory plan, the procedures for its review are legally defined in the Town and Country Planning (Development Plan) Regulations 1999. The key stages in the preparation of this Plan were as follows:

<i>Quality of Life Community Workshops</i>	<i>May-Sept 1998</i>
<i>Public Consultation on Key Issues</i>	<i>Sept-Nov 1999</i>
<i>Plan 'on deposit' for formal representations</i>	<i>Jan-March 2001</i>
<i>Consideration of objections by Council</i>	<i>March 2001-April 2002</i>
<i>Revised Plan 'on deposit' (second deposit)</i>	<i>June-July 2002</i>
<i>Public Local Inquiry</i>	<i>May-November 2003</i>
<i>Inspector's Report received</i>	<i>April 2004</i>
<i>Proposed Modifications to Plan 'on deposit'</i>	<i>Autumn 2004</i>
<i>Adoption of Plan</i>	<i>Spring 2005</i>

Policy Context

- 1.13 The adopted Plan has been prepared in the context of a wide range of existing plans, strategies and guidance. In particular, the Council has had regard to national and regional planning guidance and the Structure Plan, but it has also taken account of the plans of other agencies and other Council strategies, where these are relevant to land-use planning and need to be co-ordinated with the District Plan.
- 1.14 National planning policies are contained in a series of *Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs)* and *Planning Policy Statements (PPSs)* issued by the ODPM, on behalf of the government. These set the national priorities for the planning system and give guidance on policies which should be included in local plans. In particular these give guidance on how plans should contribute to achieving sustainable development. Where relevant, PPGs and PPSs are referred to in the supporting text of the Plan. A full list of the current relevant PPGs and PPSs is attached at Appendix 7.
- 1.15 The current regional planning guidance for this area is contained in the *Regional Planning Guidance Note for the South East (RPG9)* published in March 2001. This supersedes the earlier version of RPG9 published in May 1994 which set the regional framework for the current Structure Plan and in particular for its housing requirements up to 2011. The new RPG9 has been

prepared for the period up to 2016. It sets a regional framework for sustainable development and a new housing requirement for Hertfordshire for the period from 1996-2016. The District Plan has been prepared in the context of both the 1994 and 2001 versions of regional guidance. However, with specific regard to its housing requirement, the reference point is the earlier RPG9, published in 1994, upon which the housing requirement in the adopted Structure Plan for the period 1991-2011 has been based. Until such time as the new RPG9 has been incorporated into a new Structure Plan, the District Plan cannot take account of its housing requirements.

- 1.16 The current Structure Plan for the district is the Hertfordshire Structure Plan Review 1991-2011, which was adopted in April 1998. This provides the strategic policies for Welwyn Hatfield. Amongst other things, it requires that all development in Hertfordshire should be consistent with the principles of sustainable development and sets the housing requirement for the district for the period from 1991-2011. The District Plan has been prepared to conform with its policies. They are not repeated in this Plan, but are referred to throughout wherever they provide a strategic context to a particular policy.
- 1.17 There are a number of other plans and strategies, which have provided an important context in the preparation of this Plan:
- (a) Local Transport Plan (LTP) - prepared by the County Council, this sets out a rolling 5-year programme for transport improvements in Hertfordshire. It is reviewed and published annually. PPG12 advises that development plans and local transport plans should complement each other to ensure integration of transport and land use policies. The current LTP is for the period 2001/2 to 2005/6, published in July 2000. It includes countywide programmes for road safety, cycling, passenger transport and rural areas and an area plan for Mid-Hertfordshire, which contain proposals affecting Welwyn Hatfield. Policies in this Plan for Movement, Town Centres and Hatfield Aerodrome, in particular, have taken account of the LTP.
 - (b) Local Environment Agency Plans (LEAPS) - these are non-statutory plans, prepared by the Environment Agency, which set out an integrated programme of action for environmental improvement, dealing with water resources, floodplains, air quality, pollution controls, biodiversity and waste. They are based on river catchment boundaries. Welwyn Hatfield falls into three catchments - the Upper Lee, Colne and North London. Account has been taken of relevant proposals in the LEAPS for these three areas in preparing the policies in this Plan, in particular for Resources.
 - (c) Welwyn Hatfield Environmental Strategy - published by the Council in 1996 as an early Local Agenda 21 strategy and action plan for sustainable development, this provides a broad framework for actions by the Council and its public, private and voluntary sector partners on environmental, social and economic issues. It covers biodiversity, woodlands, water, the atmosphere, rural and urban environments, transportation, waste management, public health, economic development and environmental education. In particular, it has provided a context for the Resources policies in the Plan.

- (d) *A 50 Year Vision for Wildlife and Natural Habitats of Hertfordshire* - the local Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) for Hertfordshire published in 1998, which sets the overall targets and framework for the conservation and enhancement of species and habitats in the county. The BAP has provided a basis for the review of policies on biodiversity in the Plan and in turn these policies should help to achieve some of the BAP's objectives.
- (e) *Nature Conservation Strategy for Welwyn Hatfield* - published by the Council in 1996, this provided a strategy and action plan for the protection, management and enhancement of nature and wildlife resources. It formed a context for the policies on Biodiversity in the Resources section of the Plan. This Strategy has now been superseded by the Welwyn Hatfield BAP.
- (f) *Watling Chase Community Forest Plan 1995, Forest Plan Review 2001 and Forest Plan Landscape Supplement 2001* - prepared by Watling Chase Community Forest. The 1995 plan is a visionary blueprint for the period 1995-2025 containing policies and proposals for implementation. The Review is a supplement to the plan, assessing achievements to date and setting the agenda for the next decade. The Landscape Supplement completes the landscape study and assessment of parts of the Forest not covered in the original plan.
- (g) *Housing Strategy* - prepared by the District Council, this sets out the objectives of the Council as the local housing authority for meeting housing needs and managing its housing stock, including any building or improvement programmes. The strategy is reviewed annually and covers a five-year period. The current version is for 2001-2006 and was published in September 2000. The policies in this Plan for the development of housing are consistent with this strategy.
- (h) *Economic Development Strategy* - this is a statutory plan produced annually by the District Council, which sets out the steps to be taken to promote the development of the local economy. The current strategy, published in March 2000, covers the period from 2000-2005. It proposes action to attract and support businesses, encourage an adequate supply of business premises and revitalise town centres. It is important that the policies in this Plan on employment, retail and town centre development are consistent with the strategy.
- (i) *Town Centre Strategies* - strategies for both Hatfield and Welwyn Garden City town centres have been prepared by the Council and its partners. These provide the overall vision for the future of the two town centres. The Plan has been prepared alongside these strategies, particularly the policies for Retailing and Town Centres, and will be important to achieving their objectives.
- (j) *Leisure Strategy* - again prepared by the District Council, this assesses the need for facilities and sets out the strategy for leisure provision, and increasing participation in sports and leisure. The current version was published in 1999 and covers the period 1999-2005. It contains proposals affecting leisure and cultural facilities, tourism, parks and

open space and has informed relevant policies in this Plan. This Strategy was updated in 2003 by the Cultural Strategy for the district titled 'Enjoying Life'.

- (k) Health Improvement Programme - prepared by the Welwyn Hatfield Primary Care Group, this contains the local plan of action to improve health and modernise health services. It has links with housing conditions, employment and health facilities and is therefore relevant background to policies in the District Plan.

Consultation and Public Participation

1.18 In preparing this Plan, the Council has consulted widely with the local community in Welwyn Hatfield and with local businesses, landowners, voluntary organisations, conservation and amenity groups, statutory agencies and other local authorities. Throughout this the Council's aim has been to give people the opportunity to have their say in shaping the pattern of development in their area. Six stages of consultation have taken place:

- (i) Community Workshops

At the start of the process, between May and September 1998, a series of consultation workshops were held with local community groups and organisations. The purpose was to consider the principle of sustainable development and identify the key elements contributing to quality of life in the district, which the District Plan should seek to address.

- (ii) Key Issues Papers

From the results of the Community Workshops, a set of Issues Papers was published in September 1999, defining the key issues which the new Plan should address. The papers covered Sustainable Development, Resources, Rural Issues, Housing, Design and Open Space, Movement and Economy. A leaflet summarising the key issues was sent to every household in the district and comments were invited up to the end of November 1999. Comments received were taken into account in preparing the deposit version of the Plan.

- (iii) Deposit Version of the District Plan

The deposit version of the District Plan, containing the proposed land use policies and proposals for the district, was published in February 2001. A six-week period for formal consultation on the Plan took place between February and March 2001. These representations were all formally considered and taken into account in preparing the second or revised deposit version of the Plan.

- (iv) Revised Deposit Version of the District Plan

The Revised Deposit Version of the District Plan was published in June 2002. A six week formal consultation period ran from the 19th June to the 30th July 2002. These representations were all formally considered and taken into account when preparing the Pre-inquiry Changes to the Plan.

- (v) Pre-inquiry Changes to the District Plan

Pre-inquiry Changes (PICs) to the Revised Deposit Version of the District Plan were published in December 2002. An extended consultation period to allow for the Christmas season ran from the 11th December 2002 to the 24th January 2003. Representations to the PICs were formally considered by the Inspector in his report.

(vi) Proposed Modifications to the District Plan following the Inspector's Report

The report into the objections to the District Plan was released by the Inspector on the 13th of April 2004 and was later published by the Council. The Council's Statement of Decisions with regard to the Inspector's recommendations was published alongside the proposed modifications to the Plan and a period of six weeks given for public comments on the documents. The representations were all formally considered prior to the adoption of this Plan.

- 1.19 The content and results of the pre-deposit consultation exercises (points i and ii above) have been summarised more fully in a separate document entitled 'Statement of Public Consultation', which was published alongside the deposit version of the Plan, in accordance with Regulation 21 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Plan) Regulations 1999. The schedule summarising the representations received to the deposit version of the Plan and the Council's response was also published alongside the revised deposit version of the Plan.

Statement of Conformity With the Structure Plan



Environment

Director: **Charlie Watson**

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22 May 2002

Dear Mr ~~Conway~~ *Chris*,

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT, SECTION 46(2) AS AMENDED

STATEMENT OF CONFORMITY BETWEEN WELWYN HATFIELD DISTRICT PLAN REVIEW TO 2011 – REVISED DEPOSIT VERSION AND THE ADOPTED STRUCTURE PLAN REVIEW, 1991-2011

I refer to your letter dated 26 April 2002 and the enclosed Welwyn Hatfield District Plan Review, Revised Deposit Version and the amended Proposals Maps (hereafter referred to as 'the proposals').

I am pleased to confirm that the proposals are considered to be in general conformity with the Structure Plan Review 1991-2011. Therefore please treat this letter as the County Council's formal response in accordance with the Town and Country Planning Act Section 46(2) as amended.

Once the Plan has been placed on formal deposit, there will be some detailed matters about which the County Council will be making representations. However, the County Council hopes that these can be resolved through discussions prior to the Local Plan Inquiry.

Yours sincerely

Charlie Watson
DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT

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OVERALL STRATEGY - SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

2.1 The overall aim of the District Plan is to improve quality of life in the district by providing for sustainable development. This is now the central theme of national and strategic planning policy and it has been identified as a key issue in Welwyn Hatfield through consultation with the community in preparing the Plan.

2.2 The concept of sustainable development is fundamental to the future of people's lives. It is concerned with ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, both now and for generations to come. Simply put, it means:

'Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.

(World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987).

2.3 The UK strategy for sustainable development 'A Better Quality of Life' identifies four key objectives underlying sustainable development:

- (a) Social progress which recognises the needs of everyone;
- (b) Effective protection of the environment;
- (c) Prudent use of natural resources;
- (d) Maintaining high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.

Achieving sustainable development means addressing these four objectives equally, both for present and future generations.

2.4 In addition the UK strategy identifies ten guiding principles for Government policy to take account of:

- (a) Putting people at the centre;
- (b) Taking a long term perspective;
- (c) Taking account of costs and benefits;
- (d) Creating an open and supportive economic system;
- (e) Combating poverty and social exclusion;
- (f) Respecting environmental limits;
- (g) The precautionary principle;
- (h) Using scientific knowledge;
- (i) Transparency, information, participation and access to justice;
- (j) Making the polluter pay.

2.5 The strategy recognises the important role of the planning system in securing sustainable development, whilst accepting that it is not the sole means by which it can be achieved. This is reinforced by government planning policy guidance. The planning system exists to provide for the current and future development needs of the population, such as homes, places of work and other buildings, but also to control the way that land is used and developed to meet these needs,

whilst at the same time conserving and enhancing the built and natural environment. PPG1 requires this to be done in a way that is 'consistent with the principles of sustainable development'.

- 2.6 At the heart of the planning system is the development plan, the purpose of which is to set the planning policy framework to guide future development at the local level. In Welwyn Hatfield, the development plan comprises the Structure Plan, the County Minerals Plan, the County Waste Plan and the District Plan. The strategy for the Structure Plan is based on sustainable development. It sets a framework for sustainable development in Hertfordshire and all development is expected to be consistent with its principles. The overall strategy for the District Plan is set within this national and strategic policy framework.
- 2.7 At the same time, it is important to recognise that there are many factors influencing sustainability and people's quality of life which are beyond the scope of the planning system. Some of these are controlled by other legislation or agencies, but ultimately the Plan can only control the development and use of land. In implementing the Plan and its policies, the Council will consult with other agencies and seek to take account of wider issues where they are relevant to planning.

KEY PLANNING ISSUES FOR THE DISTRICT

- 2.8 As a result of its own unique location, geography, social characteristics and economic structure, Welwyn Hatfield has a particular range of needs, which the District Plan aims to address. These have been identified through consultation with the local community in preparing the plan.

Protecting the Environment and Preserving Natural Resources

- 2.9 Welwyn Hatfield is an area that experiences considerable development pressure, particularly for housing, but also business and other uses. Its proximity to London and attractive environment make it a desirable place to live. Whilst it is important that the district remains attractive and competitive, the resultant threat to the countryside and wildlife, the district's natural resources, its historic environment and the quality of the environment in its towns and villages are major concerns. It is essential to identify those elements of the environment which are irreplaceable or valuable and therefore need to be protected in their entirety, but also those elements which although able to accommodate some change need to be protected or enhanced to avoid their degradation. The District Plan seeks to integrate the need for housing and other development with protecting the natural and urban environment. The strategy must be to concentrate development into the main towns and villages, mainly on land which has already been built upon, and to identify those elements of the natural and historic environment which need to be preserved or enhanced, so protecting the quality of the district's environment in both town and countryside.
- 2.10 It is also important that the level and type of development occurring in the district is sustainable in terms of available natural resources. Water resources, minerals, fossil fuels, clean air and wildlife are all naturally-occurring resources, which once used or destroyed cannot be renewed. The Plan seeks to ensure that development is located and designed to conserve

these resources, for example through water conservation and energy efficiency measures and through policies to reduce the need to travel. Protecting these assets is important for the health of the local community as well as the quality of its environment.

Maintaining and Developing a Sense of Community

- 2.11 A key issue in maintaining quality of life and sustainability is the importance of a strong community spirit, both within existing settlements and neighbourhoods in the district and in new developments. The environment in which people live can have a strong influence on the strength of a community and its identity. The Plan has an important role in shaping future living environments in a number of ways. Community facilities, such as meeting halls, places of worship, shops, sports and entertainment centres, schools and health facilities, play areas and recreation grounds, are important to the life, health and identity of communities. The Plan seeks to protect these facilities and ensure they are provided as an integral part of any significant new developments. The redevelopment of Hatfield Aerodrome is the major development in the district, for which the master plan seeks to create a new community with facilities to support itself. The design and layout of development has an important impact on sense of place and community. Environments which are attractive and well designed, with public spaces which people can enjoy and where they feel safe, can generate civic pride and help to counteract vandalism and anti-social behaviour. The Plan gives priority to this in new development.
- 2.12 Sense of belonging and community is strengthened if people are able to live and work in the same town. As new towns, both Hatfield and Welwyn Garden City were planned to be self-contained, with most people living and working in the same town. However, today 43% of those resident in the district who work now travel outside the district to work, the largest proportion to London. By the same token a significant proportion of the jobs in the district are taken by people who live outside and commute in each day. Welwyn Hatfield is a net importer of labour, with 51,000 jobs and only 48,000 economically active residents. This pattern is due in part to the success of the district's economy, the strategic importance of its two main towns as employment centres for the county, its good north-south transport links and its proximity to London's employment market. But it does not help to strengthen the community spirit, nor does it help to reduce the need to travel. Whilst the Plan cannot control where people choose to live or work, it can seek a more even balance between jobs and houses to try to influence overall commuting patterns.
- 2.13 Community participation and empowerment are also crucial to building sustainable communities. This is recognised by the government in its sustainable development strategy and it has been an ongoing feature of the review of planning policies and development schemes in Welwyn Hatfield. The Council wishes to encourage greater involvement of local people in the future in shaping and taking ownership of plans and proposals for their communities.

Reducing the Need to Travel and Dependence on the Car

- 2.14 Welwyn Hatfield is a heavily car dependent district. In 1999 the County Council undertook a survey of journeys in the district. It found that just over 71% of journeys were made by car, 8% by bus, 4% by train, and 14% walk or cycle. Whilst enabling personal mobility, the dominance of the car has widespread, negative impacts on people's quality of life, in terms of pollution, noise, congestion, pedestrian safety and health. Road traffic accounts for up to 75% of certain pollutants in the district and congestion occurs on key roads, such as the A1(M) and A414 at peak times.
- 2.15 Clearly, the growth of car ownership and the increased freedom and mobility which it offers are the biggest factors in this. However, the nature and pattern of settlements and the distribution of jobs and services in Welwyn Hatfield generates significant travel demands within and through the district. The district has a number of small and medium sized towns and villages, none of which are completely self-contained. As a result people often need to access employment and services outside their place of residence. The other key factor is the limitation of public transport services in the district. Welwyn Hatfield has good north-south rail services and good bus services within towns, but generally bus services between towns are less frequent and take much longer than the same journey by car.
- 2.16 To tackle these issues, a holistic approach is required, integrating planning and transport policies. The objectives are to reduce the overall need to travel and encourage a modal shift from the car to other means of travel, using 'carrot and stick' measures. The Local Transport Plan (LTP) for Hertfordshire sets out a programme of investment by which this can be achieved. The role of the District Plan is to ensure that the planning and design of development accords with this objective, by locating it where it is accessible by a range of modes, giving priority to pedestrians and cyclists, improving public transport services and reducing car parking provision in new development.

Meeting Local Housing Needs

- 2.17 Welwyn Hatfield will continue to need houses, jobs, shops and other facilities to meet the needs of its residents and maintain quality of life both now and in the future. A key purpose of the Plan will be to provide for the development required to meet these local needs. In terms of housing, the County Structure Plan requires the district to provide some 5,600 new dwellings between 1991 and 2011, to meet the growth in the number of households locally. Whilst a number have already been built or granted planning permission, sites for some 3,500 dwellings are identified in the Plan. Government guidance in PPG3 makes clear that the priority should be to provide these on previously used land to minimise the use of 'greenfield' land.
- 2.18 A significant proportion of the new housing will need to be 'affordable' dwellings, since house prices in the area remain high and there continues to be a problem of affordability for some households. In addition, some will need to be built to standards which meet the needs of elderly people, as the population continues to age, and for disabled people. The Plan will aim to help reduce inequalities in

access to housing.

Maintaining Economic Prosperity and Jobs

- 2.19 Although Welwyn Hatfield has a prosperous economy with low unemployment, there is still a need to encourage economic development that will maintain prosperity and is socially inclusive, enabling all sections of the community to participate in the economy. Therefore, it is important that the district remains attractive to businesses and can offer jobs of the right type and skills to local people. The Plan will have a central role in enabling development to secure this.
- 2.20 Over the past 10 years the district's economy has strengthened and diversified, with growth in services and 'knowledge-based' activities to offset the decline which has occurred in manufacturing and aerospace. It is important that this diversity is maintained, to avoid over-dependence on any one business sector. As business practices change, so the amount and type of floorspace required will change. It is important that the district's employment areas are able to offer land and floorspace of the right quality and quantity to meet the expansion or modernisation needs of local firms. This includes the specific requirements of small businesses and other business sectors whose requirements are under-provided for. The redevelopment of the former Hatfield Aerodrome site will be a key to achieving this, but the Plan must also enable redevelopment and flexibility for a wider range of employment uses within the existing employment areas.

Sustaining the Countryside and Rural Communities

- 2.21 The district contains substantial areas of countryside and a number of rural communities, ranging from villages like Essendon and Northaw to hamlets like Bell Bar and Swanley Bar. Whilst there is a closer dependency between the rural and urban communities in Welwyn Hatfield than in more remote rural areas, the countryside here sustains economic and social activity, which must be maintained in its own right. As such, the Plan seeks to enable people to continue to live and work in the countryside. This means supporting agriculture and other rural business, allowing for recreational and leisure pursuits in the countryside on which the rural economy depends, protecting and providing for village shops and community facilities, and ensuring affordable rural housing for those who must live in the countryside.
- 2.22 At the same time the whole of the district's rural areas lie within the Green Belt where there is a presumption against inappropriate development in an effort to contain urban growth. The countryside also contains attractive landscapes and is important in supporting semi-natural habitats and their associated wildlife, which need to be preserved, both for their intrinsic value and their importance for people's health and informal recreation. Therefore, the Plan attempts to protect the Green Belt and quality of the countryside, whilst allowing limited development to sustain rural communities.

Revitalising Town and Village Centres

- 2.23 Town centres and village shopping centres are vital to the sustainability and quality of life of their communities. They provide shopping, services,

community facilities and entertainments which meet the needs of local residents. They are a major source of employment; over 20% of jobs in the district are in the retail distribution and services sector. In addition, they offer the greatest potential for reducing car travel, since they usually have the best public transport access and offer a range of facilities all within walking distance of each other. The growth of out of town shopping during the 1980s and 1990s has threatened the viability of town and village centres, which have been unable to compete with the greater car accessibility and cheaper land values of out of town sites. However, government policy has now changed, directing shopping and leisure development back into town and village centres.

- 2.24 Within Welwyn Hatfield, all of the main villages retain some local shops and services, perhaps the most vibrant centre being Welwyn village. The Plan seeks to protect their core shopping and service function and enhance their accessibility. The main centres in the district are Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield, which have different requirements. Welwyn Garden City town centre has remained the most competitive, thanks largely to the development of the Howard Centre shopping centre and the continued presence of John Lewis. It is now one of the main retail centres in the county, recognised in the Structure Plan as a 'minor sub-regional centre' and an historic centre. The Plan seeks to ensure that it remains competitive by creating opportunities for additional retail floorspace and enabling it to offer a wider range of services to the local community, particularly restaurants, pubs and leisure, without harming the amenities of nearby residential areas. Hatfield town centre, on the other hand, has experienced significant decline as a retail centre over the past 10-15 years. Its smaller size and ageing new town infrastructure have limited its attractiveness and competitiveness. However, it continues to perform a vital shopping and service function for the community of Hatfield, but needs regeneration. The Plan aims to respond to this by creating the opportunity for a comprehensive redevelopment scheme, which will build upon the confidence generated by the new Asda supermarket and exploit the opportunities for new community, leisure and residential uses in the centre.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PLAN

- 2.25 In the light of these issues and to achieve the overall aim of securing sustainable development in the district, the Plan has the following objectives.

To:

1. *Preserve and enhance the district's wildlife and biodiversity, landscape, urban open land and historic environment, and minimise the use of natural resources.*
2. *Provide for development to meet the recognised needs of local people in terms of housing, jobs, shopping, leisure, services, health and community facilities, education and training.*
3. *Maintain the Green Belt and concentrate development within the main towns and villages of Welwyn Garden City, Hatfield, Welwyn, Oaklands and Mardley Heath, Digswell, Woolmer Green, Welham Green, Brookmans Park, Cuffley and Little Heath, in particular on previously developed land.*

4. *Seek to sustain the countryside and rural communities, allowing development in rural areas where this helps to sustain the rural economy and community life, preserves the quality of the countryside and supports the purposes of the Green Belt.*
5. *Minimise the overall need to travel by encouraging more balanced and self-contained settlements, promoting mixed-use development and locating development where it is accessible.*
6. *Reduce dependence on the car by requiring development to be located and designed so it is accessible by and gives priority to pedestrians, cyclists and public transport.*
7. *Maintain and enhance the quality of the urban environment by protecting open space and requiring good quality, sustainable design in all new development.*
8. *Foster a 'sense of community' through the protection and provision of services and facilities and through careful design of new development.*
9. *Maintain and improve the vitality and viability of Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield town centres and the district's village and local centres, by protecting their primary shopping functions and encouraging a greater diversity of uses.*
10. *Increase economic prosperity through the regeneration of key areas of the district, in particular Hatfield Town Centre and the former Hatfield Aerodrome site.*

2.26 The policies and proposals in the Plan seek to implement this strategy. In preparing these policies the Sustainability Appraisal has been used to ensure that they are sustainable.