

Settlement Appraisal

East of Welwyn Garden City

1. History

- 1.1 The [Supporting Document](#) to the Preferred Options District Plan records the various assessment stages that were undertaken to inform the Preferred Options Draft of the District Plan. It therefore provides an essential background to this current Settlement Appraisal. Chapter 4 of the Supporting Document explains the process of shortlisting or 'sieving' options or 'Areas of Search'. Chapter 5 considers two further appraisal stages based on urban form and economic development.
- 1.2 Chapter 6 considered issues such as the Duty-to-Co-operate, whether there are any designated wildlife assets in the area, education capacity at primary and secondary level and the deliverability of the site as a potential development. The chapter also discussed matters of mineral resource, the need to avoid sterilisation and the potential impact this would have on the deliverability of the site and its potential future phasing within the overall development strategy. The chapter then set out the conclusions for the land to the East of Welwyn Garden City in terms of whether it would form part of the emerging District Plan.
- 1.3 It was determined that given the complexities of the site's cross-boundary nature, the likely need for mineral extraction and subsequent land remediation, the site would need to be comprehensively masterplanned. This detailed masterplanning would be best dealt with through the preparation of a Development Plan Document (DPD) following the adoption of the District Plan. The DPD approach would set out the Council's intention to deliver development at the location during the latter part of the Plan period, but would enable further work to be undertaken to define Green Belt boundaries, infrastructure requirements and delivery, and to enable a more collaborative approach to cross-boundary working.
- 1.4 As such, land East of Welwyn Garden City was identified as a Broad Location for Development in the Preferred Options District Plan to accommodate around 1,700 new homes and supporting infrastructure. Given the need for prior mineral extraction, it was estimated that only 450 homes would be completed by 2031.

2. Consultation Responses

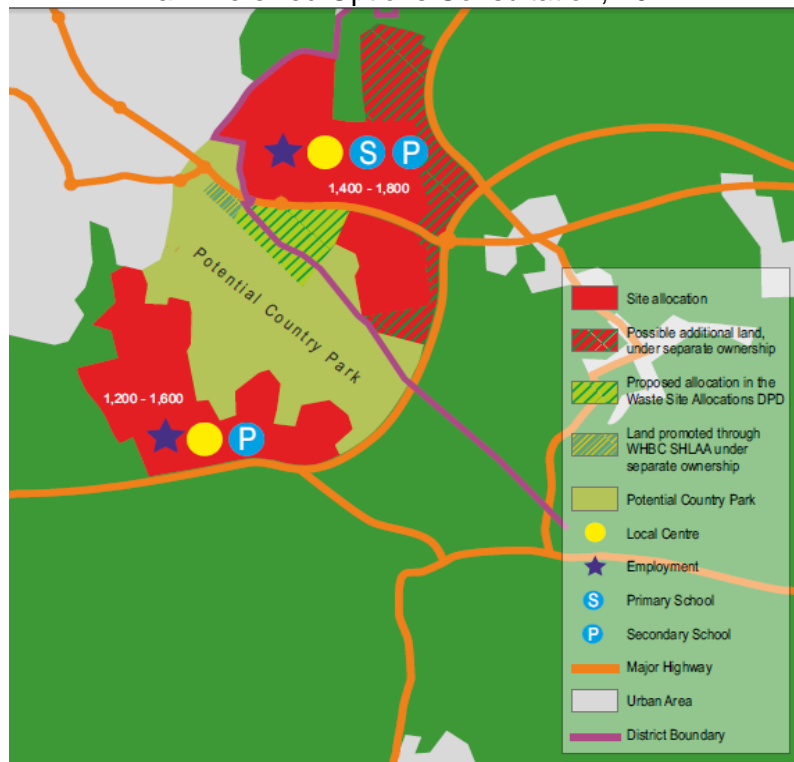
- 2.1 Comments were received to the 2014 Preferred Options Consultation both in support and against development to the East of Welwyn Garden City. Where objections were received, these focused on the loss of land from the Green Belt and the issue of coalescence between Welwyn Garden City and Hertford, leaving only Panshanger Park separating the two towns.
- 2.2 A full summary of the issues that were raised in respect of the draft Policy EWEL1, land to the East of Welwyn Garden City and the Officer proposed responses to them were considered by Members at the District Planning Executive Panel meeting

on 21st July 2016. These can be viewed via the following link:

<http://democracy.eastherts.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=151&MId=2951&Ver=4>

- 2.3 The two largest land owners; Lafarge Tarmac (now Tarmac) and Gascoyne Cecil Estates submitted lengthy responses detailing how their sites should form part of the development strategy. English Heritage (now Historic England) indicated that a further detailed assessment of the potential impact of development on the Grade II* registered Panshanger Park should be undertaken.
- 2.4 David Lock Associates on behalf of Tarmac submitted indicative plans for the site, which they called Birchall Garden Suburb, which included a transport assessment and utility report. They also objected to the creation of a Development Plan Document, which they suggested would add an unnecessary delay to bringing the site forward for development, suggesting that the site could be delivered within the first five years of the Plan period.

Figure 1: Tarmac Rpresentations to the East Herts District Plan Preferred Options Consultation, 2014



- 2.5 Gascoyne Cecil Estates (GCE) submitted an objection to the site on the basis that it conflicted with their wider interest in retaining a green infrastructure corridor comprising wider estate landholdings along an east-west axis. GCE were supportive of the Broad Location and DPD approach as a means of comprehensively considering the cumulative impacts of development on this site and in the wider area around Welwyn Garden City. GCE also submitted an alternative approach to development in the form of a village expansion programme called 'The Greens'. This alternative is considered in section 10 below.

Figure 2: Green Infrastructure Corridor (Gascoyne Cecil Estates submission to the East Herts District Plan Preferred Options Consultation, 2014)



3. The Emerging Strategy

- 3.1 Following the consultation, further work has been undertaken on the District Plan, which has led to the reconsideration of some elements of the proposed strategy.
- 3.2 In January 2016, the Council met with a Planning Inspector who advised that the Council needed to provide more certainty over the delivery of its emerging strategy. This was in the context of the approach to Broad Locations and the use of Development Plan Documents. The Inspector suggested that where the emerging strategy included very large strategic sites which made up a large proportion of the overall housing number, where it was possible, these locations should become allocations in the District Plan. In the case of land to the East of Welwyn Garden City, as the area would form part of two local plans, an allocation and a joint policy approach within the two plans would provide certainty and show the commitment of both authorities to bringing the site forward for development. The potential to review Green Belt boundaries along clear defensible features was considered a strength, along with a large amount of available land.
- 3.3 In order to support this approach, Officers from both authorities have undertaken detailed discussions, including the consideration of Green Belt boundaries and heritage impacts among other issues. These technical assessments are summarised below. Following these assessments Officers now consider that there is sufficient evidence in place to support an approach which confirms that the site will be allocated in both the East Herts District Plan and Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan, supported by a jointly prepared detailed policy setting out the expectations for the site. The joint policy will be supported by a concept diagram which will form the

starting point of a masterplanned approach to the development. The masterplan will be prepared collaboratively, i.e. between the local planning authorities, the developers and other community groups and stakeholders. This process can be undertaken prior to the examination in public in order to support the Plan through the examination. In this way, there will be no delay in the submission of a planning application once the Plans have been adopted. Until both Plans are adopted the site will remain in the Green Belt.

4. Technical Assessments

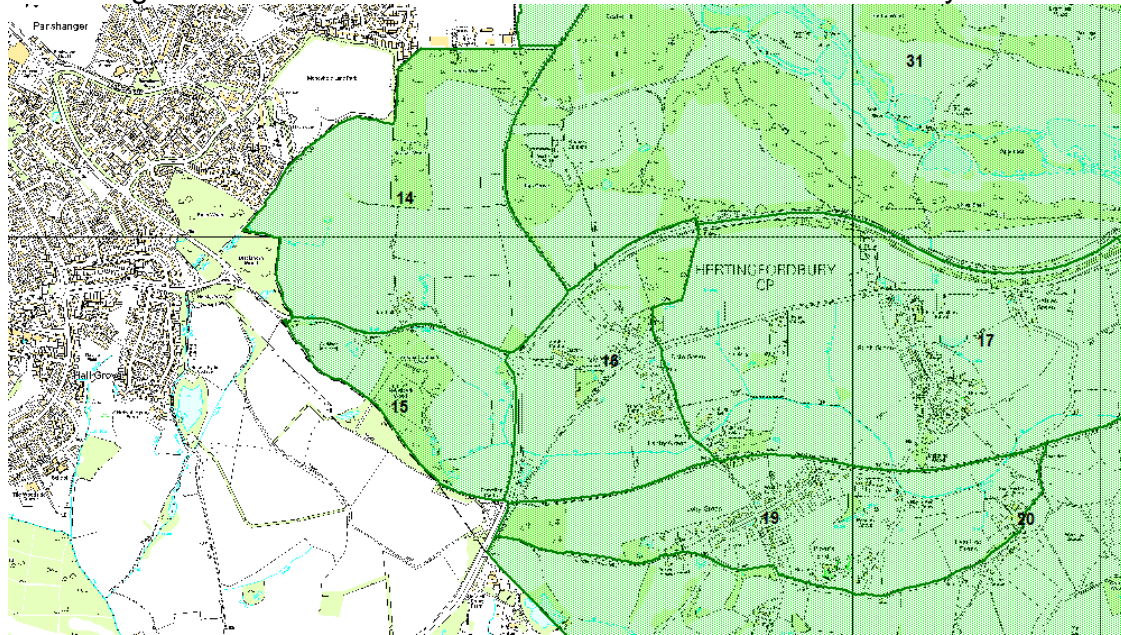
- 4.1 The following sections summarise the various technical evidence based assessments that have been undertaken to assess this site alongside the wider Plan preparation process.

East Herts Green Belt Review 2015 (Peter Brett Associates)

- 4.2 The 2015 East Herts Green Belt Review assessed land to the East of Welwyn Garden City. Parcel 14 covered the land north of the B195 to Panshanger Lane in the east and the built up western edge of Welwyn Garden City. The parcel was considered of paramount importance in checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas, which in this case was Welwyn Garden City; was of slight or negligible importance in preventing neighbouring towns merging; was of paramount importance in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment; and no contribution to preserving the setting and special character of historic towns. The parcel scored very low in terms of its overall suitability as an area of search based on its contribution to the Green Belt purposes.
- 4.3 Parcel 15 covers land within the East Herts boundary and the B195. The parcel was considered of major importance in checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas, which in this case was Welwyn Garden City; was of slight or negligible importance in preventing neighbouring towns merging; was of paramount importance in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment; and no contribution to preserving the setting and special character of historic towns. The parcel scored low in terms of its overall suitability as an area of search based on its contribution to the Green Belt purposes.
- 4.4 It is common in Hertfordshire that 'countryside' activities and land uses immediately about the urban edge, therefore any development on the edge of a town will conflict with Purposes 1 and 3 of the Green Belt (checking unrestricted sprawl and protecting the countryside from encroachment). Whilst the development extending out from the town could be considered as separate and unrelated to the town due to the presence of woodland blocks and open spaces, these assets also provide an opportunity to link in to the existing residential areas of the town. Planned development is also not sprawl, particularly when the development itself will create a new outer edge through land uses and structural planting. By redefining the Green Belt along the A414 and Panshanger Lane the strongest possible boundary features will be used, creating a more robust Green Belt boundary. It is the view of Officers that while development will extend into currently agricultural land, the creation of a large common with new and enhanced connections through the site to the countryside beyond offsets the loss of agricultural land which is largely

inaccessible.

Figure 3: East Herts Green Belt Review Parcels identified by PBA



Welwyn Hatfield Green Belt Review 2014

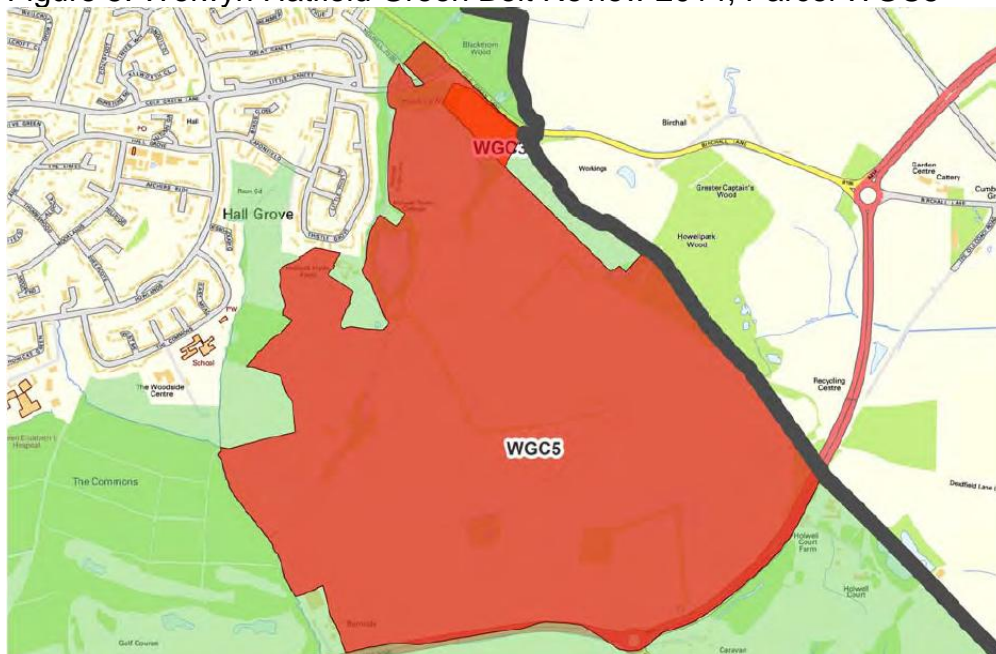
- 4.5 Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council completed their two-stage Green Belt review in October 2014. The Welwyn Hatfield Green Belt Review took a different approach to assessing the purposes of the Green Belt. For example, Purpose 1 considered the contribution a parcel made to checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas, which for the purposes of this assessment, were defined as London, Luton, Dunstable and Stevenage.
- 4.6 Parcel WGC3 covers the land at the Holdings, which lies immediately adjacent to the built-up edge of Welwyn Garden City, south of the B195. This site was considered to have limited or no contribution to checking sprawl in this context; made a partial contribution to preventing towns from merging, made a partial contribution to safeguarding the countryside from encroachment; and had limited or no contribution to preserving the setting and special character of historic towns. A fifth purpose was assessed which considered whether the site maintained the existing settlement pattern. This site was considered to contribute significantly to this assessment.

Figure 4: Welwyn Hatfield Green Belt Review 2014, Parcel WGC3



- 4.7 Parcel WGC5 covers the remaining land between the B195, the A414 and the eastern edge of the town. This site was considered to have limited or no contribution to checking sprawl in this context; made a partial contribution to preventing towns from merging, made a significant contribution to safeguarding the countryside from encroachment; and had limited or no contribution to preserving the setting and special character of historic towns. A fifth purpose was assessed which considered whether the site maintained the existing settlement pattern. This site was considered to contribute significantly to this assessment. The assessment for this site indicated that the significant contribution to safeguarding the countryside from encroachment arises from its visual and physical openness and the lack of development within the site.

Figure 5: Welwyn Hatfield Green Belt Review 2014, Parcel WGC5



- 4.8 It should be noted that neither the East Herts nor the Welwyn Hatfield Green Belt Reviews considered land within the other neighbouring authority and there is therefore no single assessment that consistently assesses the whole of the land under consideration in this appraisal. What both Reviews show is that the current open nature of the area means that any development would have an impact in terms of countryside encroachment, but that potentially strong boundaries exist that could redefine the edge of the town.
- 4.9 Advice received from the Planning Inspector in January 2016 stated that to plan positively for the delivery of this site, the Green Belt boundary would need to be amended at this stage along defensible boundaries and indicated as such within the two local plans. Officers from the two authorities have conducted on-site assessments and have determined appropriate locations for a revised Green Belt boundary which will provide a firm outer edge to development, thus reducing the need to revise boundaries again in this location beyond the Plan period of the two local plans. These are shown on the Concept Diagram within the Draft Chapter.

Transport Modelling

- 4.10 David Tucker Associates, working on behalf of Tarmac have produced a Transport Assessment which they submitted as part of their representations to the Preferred Options District Plan. This assessment suggests that the majority of vehicle movements associated with the development of homes in this location would travel westbound, either to locations within Welwyn Garden City or to the A1(M) and beyond. The assessment tested approximately 3,000 homes (1,200 homes within Welwyn Hatfield and 1,800 homes within East Herts), and assumed that some trips would be contained within the development due to the provision of services and facilities within the site reducing the need to travel to meet day-to-day needs. The development will be supported by a transport strategy to deliver high quality public transport/cycle connections to key destinations (railway stations, town centre, hospital and key employment areas in Welwyn Garden City and Hertford).
- 4.11 In addition to the assessment of the site through the County's Diamond Model in 2013, the developer has commissioned a detailed run of the WHASH Model (Welwyn Hatfield, Stevenage and Hitchin Model). This model will need to be considered in relation to the wider Hertfordshire County Council County-wide transport model known as COMET. COMET seeks to bring together the plethora of models used by district and borough councils and those developed through individual commissions for particular sites or settlements in response to planning applications or proposals. The County Council has advised that they have no objection in principle to the allocation of this site for future development.
- 4.12 Hertfordshire County Council Highways has advised that there are no issues that are unsurmountable, but detailed modelling will need to be undertaken by the developers to assess the feasibility and potential impacts arising from proposed junction alterations. The primary concern is that the alignment of roads and the introduction of new junctions do not cause highway safety concerns for users. Mitigation measures will need to be tested and incorporated into the masterplan in

due course.

Heritage Impact Assessment for Panshanger Park and its Environs

- 4.13 Beacon Planning Ltd was jointly commissioned by East Herts Council and Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council in October 2015 to prepare a Heritage Impact Assessment to consider the potential impact of development to the East of Welwyn Garden City and west of Hertford on the significance of Panshanger Park and heritage assets in the vicinity of the Park. This work follows the publication of each authority's Local Plan consultation in 2014 and 2015, and resulted from representations made by Historic England to each consultation. Historic England advised that they would like to see further evidence gathered as to the significance of heritage assets in the vicinity of potential site allocations presented in each Plan.
- 4.14 The Panshanger Park is a Grade II* Registered Park and is considered by Historic England to be most at risk from development, but other historic assets were also highlighted in the Historic England representations, including the Grade II listed Holwellhyde Farmhouse and Grade II listed Birchall Farmhouse, Barn and Stables. The Panshanger Aerodrome buildings are of local importance but are also noted for their historic significance and setting.
- 4.15 Nearby Grade I listed Hatfield House and Palace and Grade I listed Historic Park and Garden (and ancillary Grade II listed buildings) is a key heritage asset. There are wide reaching views out of and towards the House from surrounding landscapes, and the wider rural character of this area forms part of the setting of the House. Therefore the southern-most part of the Birchall Garden Suburb proposed development (within Welwyn Hatfield) may encroach into this setting, although the distance would mitigate the potential impact to a reasonable degree.
- 4.16 The assessment therefore recommends that areas of undeveloped land are incorporated into the Masterplan for the site to ensure there is a landscape buffer between heritage assets and built development. This will particularly affect Holwell Hyde Farmhouse, Birchall Farm and Panshanger Park. These issues are reflected in the Concept Diagram contained in the Draft Chapter.

Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Needs Assessment and Identification of Potential Sites Study

- 4.17 The Council commissioned an Accommodation Needs Assessment in 2014 to identify the needs of Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople. The Council also commissioned an Identification of Potential Sites Study in 2014. Subsequent to the publication of revised Government guidance in August 2015 ('Planning Policy for Traveller Sites'), the Council commissioned an update to the Accommodation Needs Assessment in 2016. The Assessment concluded that five Gypsies and Travellers pitches were needed over the Plan period, with two of these to be delivered within the first five years of the Plan. Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council has also identified a need for 61 Gypsy and Travellers pitches, of which 19 will need to be provided in the first five years of the Plan.

4.18 Land to the East of Welwyn Garden City is considered a suitable location for the delivery of a site due to the ease of access to the principal road network and because, being a strategic scale development, a site could be planned comprehensively as part of the wider masterplan. As such, Officers are considering the potential for a joint site to meet the respective Gypsies and Travellers needs as part of the emerging masterplan, to meet both short term and longer term needs of both authorities. Therefore a site should be provided which is large enough to accommodate a site for 15 pitches. A proportion of both Welwyn Hatfield's needs (11 pitches) and East Herts' needs (4 pitches) will therefore need to be accommodated through development to the East of Welwyn Garden City.

5. Stakeholder Engagement

5.1 In order to move towards the inclusion of the site as an allocation or safeguarded site, it was necessary to consider the wider implications and infrastructure requirements arising from development in this location. Therefore, representatives from the proposed developments to the east of Welwyn Garden City and west of Hertford were invited along with other statutory stakeholders to a Stakeholder Workshop which was held on 16th May 2015 to discuss the potential for around 3,000 to the east of Welwyn Garden City. In addition to East Herts Council Officers, the following stakeholders were represented:

- Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council officers
- Herts County Council – Highways (Development Management, Transport Modelling, Passenger Transport, Strategy and Programme Management)
- Herts County Council – Education
- Herts County Council – Property
- Herts County Council – Minerals and Waste
- NHS England / NHS Hertfordshire
- Thames Water
- JB Planning Associates (for Gascoyne Cecil Estates)
- John Duffield (for Lafarge Tarmac)
- Wardrop Minerals Management (for Lafarge Tarmac)
- David Lock Associates (for Lafarge Tarmac)
- Savills (for David Lock Associates)
- DTA Transport (David Lock Associates)
- London and Regional (for land West of Hertford, North of Welwyn Road)
- Woolf Bond Planning (for land West of Hertford, South of Welwyn Road)

5.2 The aim of the meeting was to identify the main issues requiring further testing through the District Plan. The following matters were particularly relevant:

Housing

- As the site straddles the district boundary a close working relationship will be required between the two authorities in the production of any policy documents.
- Masterplanning would need to be undertaken to inform the assessment of the site within each local plan.

Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople

- The site should make provision for either a Gypsy and Traveller site or a site for Travelling Showpeople which should be designed in accordance with the Good Practice Guide.

Transport

- In terms of highways, Paramics modelling was being undertaken which indicated that mitigation measures would be required on the A414 roundabouts and on the B195. Detailed discussions would be required between the landowner's consultants and the County Council on the appropriateness of baseline data and assumptions.
- In terms of buses, there is an existing bus network in the area which may require diversions. These routes should ensure connectivity to Hertford North Station and Welwyn Garden City Station. Bus priority measures should be designed in to the development to encourage bus use and to ensure they are self-sufficient.
- New cycle routes should be provided, particularly towards the railway stations.
- In terms of rail networks, it was anticipated that additional capacity could be provided through Thameslink services but pressures exist down the line towards London boroughs.

Waste Water

- In terms of sewage capacity, previously anticipated growth has not been realised, therefore Rye Meads Sewage Treatment Works would have some capacity. With the beneficial impacts arising from changes to the way sewage is treated, the works would have capacity up to 2036. However, connections to existing or new on-site storage tanks would be needed to mitigate and manage flows to avoid impacts downstream.

Education

- The development will need to accommodate all primary education needs arising from the development on-site. This was likely to require two primary schools of two forms of entry.
- At secondary level, a development of 2,500 homes would require a secondary school constructed to accommodate 6 forms of entry.
- To the west of Hertford, all local primary schools were at capacity and 550 homes would require the expansion of existing schools by at least one form of entry. At secondary level the Hertford and Ware school planning area was expected to reach capacity by 2017 so further provision would be needed.

Biodiversity

- In terms of wildlife sites, Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust had been in contact with landowners to undertake ecological surveys. Given the cross-boundary nature of the site, such information would need to be cognisant of the development as a whole.

Healthcare

- NHS England would require a new healthcare facility. As there is an existing demand for additional capacity, new facilities should be provided in tandem with development. Therefore discussions with NHS England GP Premises Team and the East and North Herts Clinical Commissioning Group should be undertaken to inform the masterplanning process.

Community Facilities

- Contributions towards other community facilities would be expected including the provision of community facilities on-site.

Minerals and Waste

- As the land is situated in the Hertfordshire Sand and Gravel Belt Hertfordshire County Council would seek to prevent underlying minerals from being sterilised and minerals would need to be extracted prior to development.

6. Developer Meetings/ Information

- 6.1 Since the Stakeholder Workshop several meetings have been held with David Lock Associates and representatives of Tarmac. Each meeting has been attended by both East Herts and Welwyn Hatfield Council officers and focused on discussions over the principal of development and what an evolving masterplan should consider.
- 6.2 In order to assist in its deliberations, the Council invited further information from landowners, developers and agents in the form of Delivery Statements which would form the basis of draft Statements of Common Ground. These statements contain details about required infrastructure and utilities and would be used to support the submission of the Plan to the Planning Inspectorate. They also form the basis of the delivery assessments below.

7. Deliverability Assessment

Introduction

- 7.1 This deliverability assessment section sets out answers to typical queries raised by Inspectors at examination stage. It is a useful way of illustrating that a site is deliverable and that if issues have been identified, that mitigation options are employed and that if mitigation is possible but not yet resolved, there is a clear mechanism for addressing these issues.

Aims & objectives

- 7.2 Development on land to the East of Welwyn Garden City, known as Birchall Garden Suburb will create a sustainable urban extension to Country's second pioneering Garden City. The development will provide approximately 2,550 homes straddling the local authority boundary, of which 1,350 will be within East Herts and 1,200 within Welwyn Hatfield.
- 7.3 The development will comprise a mix of new homes and community facilities including schools, new employment land and open spaces and a site for Gypsies and Travellers.

Identification of site constraints

Green Belt

- 7.4 The site is currently located within the Green Belt, with the inner Green Belt boundary which is drawn tight against the built-up edge of Welwyn Garden City. By

allocating this site in the District Plan the Green Belt boundary will be re-drawn. It is not considered necessary to seek to compensate for the loss of Green Belt by the creation of new Green Belt in this location. Local concern is that the development of this site will cause coalescence between Welwyn Garden City and Hertford and will cause the loss of any separation between adjacent villages and the town.

Minerals

- 7.5 The site is situated within the Hertfordshire Sand and Gravel Belt. It is clear from discussions with Hertfordshire County Council in their capacity as Minerals and Waste Authority, that the known mineral asset within the East Herts element of the site should not be sterilised through built development.

Land Contamination / Former Landfill

- 7.6 Starting in the 1930s, a vast artificial plateau was created to the south of Birchall Lane when a gravel extraction complex was filled with waste material from London. Since then the land has returned to secondary grassland and arable use. Recent testing of the site has indicated that part of the land is unsuitable for development, though areas around the outskirts of the former landfill area are not affected by the waste material and are therefore developable.

Surface Water Flooding

- 7.7 The site is in proximity to the River Lea to the south of the A414 and the River Mimram to the north of the site beyond the former Panshanger Aerodrome site. There are a number of brooks that run through the development site following existing land contours. Evidence of surface water flooding exists and will therefore need to be taken into account during the masterplanning of the site. There are therefore opportunities to integrate these features, making them into multi-functional green spaces rather than to rely on engineered solutions.

Heritage Assets

- 7.8 There are a considerable number of heritage assets within and around the site. The most notable of these include the Grade II Historic Park at Panshanger Park, Grade II* Hatfield House and Gardens, Listed Buildings at Holwell Hyde Farm and Birchall Farm and Conservation Areas at Essendon and East End Green. These assets have been considered in detail through the Heritage Impact Assessment for Panshanger Park and its Environs. The Assessment indicates that mitigation will be required to minimise impacts on the closest heritage assets.

Landscape

- 7.9 The area wraps around the edge of Welwyn Garden City, where urban fringe land uses and activities including mineral extraction and recreation. Much of the historic alluvial floodplain and estate pattern of the landscape has been disturbed or lost to development, mineral extraction or World War II disturbance. The landscape has been used to locate utilities necessary for nearby urban centres, with a lack of coherence in terms of land uses. Such uses (minerals, landfill, utilities such as pylons and road networks) are the main visual impacts in the location. Mature hedgerows and woodland break up views across the landscape and define field boundaries. The Commons woodland block is regarded as a unique area ecologically. While the Lea Valley Walk/Cole Green Way and other cycle networks provide connectivity between Welwyn Garden City and Hertford providing links to the countryside beyond the two towns.

7.10 The condition of the landscape is considered poor with a moderate sense of character, which should be improved and restored. This could be achieved through increasing hedgerows, expanding woodland areas and through buffer planting between uses. The assessment indicates that should further mineral extraction occur the restoration should conform to existing landform and land use. Therefore it will be necessary to address matters such as extraction methods, development phasing and land restoration to an appropriate development platform as part of the masterplanning work.

Environmental Impact Assessment Scoping

7.11 The Developer submitted an Environmental Impact Assessment Scoping Opinion, in response to which, East Herts, Welwyn Hatfield and Hertfordshire County Council prepared a joint response. The joint response raised a number of issues that would require further consideration prior to the submission of a planning application. These include the treatment of energy conservation, water management and waste minimisation and a full technical assessment of the possible waste arisings that may be generated during constructional and operational phases of the development.

7.12 In addition, the joint response raises the issue of the cumulative impacts from this site in relation to a number of sites in Welwyn Hatfield Borough and East Herts District. The response also states that infrastructure required whether on or off site will need to be confirmed, including the provision of a site for Gypsies and Travellers. Furthermore, a Construction Management Plan will be required including a Code of Construction Practice setting out phasing and duration of development and a detailed programme of activity on the site. This is particularly necessary given the proposed mineral extraction and progressive restoration/development strategy being considered.

7.13 It is the view of Officers that these issues can be satisfactorily resolved through a collaborative approach to masterplanning the development. This will ensure that all necessary considerations are resolved in advance of the planning application process. Through the masterplan, the following land uses and proposals will be established.

Land uses and proposals

7.14 The development will comprise a mix of tenures, including affordable and aspirational homes as well as specialist residential provision for older people (such as retirement bungalows and apartments, flexi-care and residential care homes). In addition, a site will also be provided for Gypsies and Travellers. The new homes will be supported by a range of community facilities located around two neighbourhood centres (one in East Herts and one in Welwyn Hatfield). A two-form entry primary school with early years provision will be located within the Welwyn Hatfield part of the site, while an all through-school of six-forms of entry at secondary level and two forms of entry at primary level with early years provision will be located within the East Herts part of the site. Importantly, the through-school site will provide sufficient flexibility to accommodate up to eight forms of entry at secondary level and three forms of entry at primary level should future needs arise.

- 7.15 Important heritage assets within and in the vicinity of the site will be protected through adequate mitigation which will include maintaining open or landscaped areas where necessary. Land uses which can contribute towards maintaining these buffers will be located where required, such as locating the all through-school or public open space or sports pitches to the eastern edge of the site where the built form can provide a clear boundary, with the visually less intrusive features of the playing fields contributing to the softer edge of the development as well as a buffer between the development and heritage asset of Panshanger Park.
- 7.16 Open spaces will be provided which provide multi-functional drainage solutions as well as space for recreation, creating connections to green infrastructure corridors including the Mimram and Lea Valleys. Formal open spaces will be provided through the creation of a large common/informal parkland utilising the former landfill part of the site within Welwyn Hatfield. The site will also make provision for playing pitches and play spaces as well as community orchards and allotments. Areas of ecological importance will be protected and enhanced through appropriate buffer planting and an appropriate land management strategy.
- 7.17 Sustainable Urban Drainage will be incorporated into the layout of the development and will create multi-functional green spaces. The site will incorporate Garden City principles, supported by a masterplan and Supplementary Planning Document which will set out details such as character and design. A key aim of the two authorities is the retention and enhancement of the green corridor which runs through the site connecting east and west between St Albans and Hertford and beyond. Areas of woodland and hedgerows will be extended through buffer planting and will contribute to wider ecological networks. Areas of open space and community orchards and allotments will also contribute to this green infrastructure. Street trees should also be an integral part of the design of the site creating not only pleasant urban greening but to create a net gain in terms of biodiversity across the site, which is currently arable farmland.
- 7.18 Development within the East Herts part of the site to the north of Birchall Lane will be a more compact urban form, while land to the south of Birchall Lane is likely to take the form of connected villages in order to fit well within the landscape. The larger neighbourhood centre will be located to the north of Birchall Lane where access can be achieved from the main road. A smaller local centre will be located to the south of the site where it can be co-located with the primary school, thus creating a natural centre to the development.
- 7.19 An important aspect of the development will be its connectivity within the site and to the existing town. Walking and cycling and bus connectivity will be prioritised over car users to encourage a shift towards more sustainable means of transport. Existing Rights of Way will be enhanced, improving links within the site and to the countryside beyond. Existing bus routes can be extended into the site creating bus connectivity to Welwyn Garden City town centre and train station. Local education, health and retail opportunities will serve to make the development sustainable, reducing the need for travel as well as providing local job opportunities. This will have multiple benefits including contributing to the health and wellbeing of residents.

- 7.20 New employment land has recently been granted permission by Welwyn Hatfield Council at the Holdings, Birchall Lane. The masterplan will seek to increase this employment land to the site currently occupied by BP Mitchell. Birchall Lane is a key route in to Welwyn Garden City from the east; therefore employment space will be highly visible and will contribute towards the creation of a new employment corridor.

Infrastructure needs

- 7.21 The County Council's latest evidence indicates that there are existing capacity issues within local schools at both primary and secondary level, and that the expansion of secondary schools within Welwyn Garden City would not meet the needs arising from the existing population. When taking the cumulative needs arising from development within and around Welwyn Garden City, there will be a forecast need of 11.5 forms of entry. Whilst the evidence indicates that a development of 2,550 homes would trigger the need for five forms of entry a site will need to be provided to accommodate up to 8 forms of entry at secondary level, which will need to be delivered in a phased approach in tandem with the earliest phases of development. This development would also be expected to provide in full the primary level needs arising from the development on-site. As such, two primary schools (both with two forms of entry, one of which can be expanded to three forms), one of which could be co-located with the secondary school. Approximately 12 to 15 hectares of land will be required for the secondary school and between 2.6 and 3 hectares for the primary schools. The detail of location, access and layout will be determined through the masterplanning process.
- 7.22 An important part of any neighbourhood is access to local primary healthcare facilities such as doctors and dentists. This will be particularly necessary given the site will need to deliver a range of housing type and tenure, including housing for older and vulnerable people, which have a greater demand for local healthcare services.
- 7.23 The site will require upgrades to the B195, Birchall Lane in terms of new roundabouts and road realignment. There will also need to be upgrades to the A414 roundabouts to mitigate additional vehicle movements arising from the development. In the short term the improvements to Birchall Lane will be required to facilitate vehicle movements arising from the mineral extraction process.
- 7.24 The provision of utilities to serve the proposed development has been assessed as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment. Evidence submitted indicates that that there were no anticipated issues with regards to the provision of utilities and that improvements to and connections to existing utility infrastructure are feasible. The development will integrate communications infrastructure into the design of the site to ensure good broadband connectivity for both residents and community and commercial properties.
- 7.25 Thames Water has confirmed that the Rye Meads Waste Water Treatment Works has the capacity to serve the development. The sewerage implications of the proposed development have also been assessed through the Environmental Impact Assessment. The Water Company (Thames Water) has designated Rye Meads as the relevant sewage treatment works, located approximately 18km downstream of

the site. Even without new capacity at these works, capacity is available to deliver the proposed development through attenuation of sewerage flows from the development. Two options for achieving that attenuation, both of which are under the control of Tarmac, include enlarging a section of tank sewer downstream of the site and creating a balancing tank at an adjacent foul water pumping station.

- 7.26 The site will incorporate opportunities for surface water attenuation such as suds and swales making use of natural landscape features before using engineered solutions. It is therefore important that the post-mineral extraction landscape is restored to an appropriate development platform which respects the current landform.

Delivery Study

- 7.27 The East Herts Strategic Sites Delivery Study, September 2015 is a technical document which assessed the financial viability and deliverability of the proposals contained in the Preferred Options District Plan. The Delivery Study assessed development to the East of Welwyn Garden City for 1,700 dwellings within East Herts, acknowledging the further development within Welwyn Hatfield, which was, at the time of the Study, between 1,400 and 1,800 dwellings. The Study appraised viability based on high level cost assumptions for the East Herts portion of the development.
- 7.28 The Study concluded that deliverable solutions to critical infrastructure (particularly sewage, utilities, site access and provision of a secondary education) needed to enable the development to take place have been identified and shown to be achievable for the joint scheme incorporating the Welwyn Hatfield portion of development. Mechanisms will be needed to ensure contributions across the local authority areas are managed appropriately. It also suggests that mechanisms should be in place for the sustainable management of woodland and open space to ensure their longer term maintenance. This could be in the form of a community trust, embracing the Garden City principles that first founded the town. The detail of phasing and delivery will be contained in the Supplementary Planning Document, which will also set out the approach towards planning obligations or a Community Infrastructure levy if appropriate.

Implementation Route Map: Masterplan, Phasing and Delivery

- 7.29 Given the complexities of the site such as the need to extract mineral reserves and the fact that the site straddles two authorities, there is sufficient justification to prepare a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for the site in order to plan for these issues appropriately. The site will be allocated in each local plan with land removed from the Green Belt to facilitate the development. This will provide assurances that the Councils are committed to bringing the development forward. The SPD approach ensures that there are sufficient opportunities to engage interested parties in the planning of the site.
- 7.30 There are risks involved in this approach, namely that the landowners will not wish to engage in this process and may instead seek to progress straight to a planning application. However, there are risks to the applicant in this route, namely that the

proposal would not have the support of the community or the relevant planning authorities.

- 7.31 Once Welwyn Hatfield and East Herts Councils have launched their Pre-Submission Local Plan consultations, officers will start the process of agreeing Delivery Statements or Statements of Common Ground as appropriate with landowners/developers in support of the Examination in Public of each Local Plan. These will form the basis of the SPD which importantly introduces the opportunity to engage interested parties in the preparation of the masterplan for the site, which is a key aspect of Garden City principles.
- 7.32 The preparation of the SPD will occur in the months intervening the submission of the two Local Plans to the Planning Inspectorate and the Examination in Public and subsequent adoption. By using this approach there will be no delay to the determination of the planning application.
- 7.33 The start date of development is subject to the adoption of the Plan, with the first year of delivery discharging conditions and setting each site up in terms of infrastructure. Tarmac suggest that construction will commence in 2018, with the first occupations assumed in late 2018 / early 2019. Completion of the proposed development is assumed in 2031. This presupposes an annual average build rate of 200 homes per year delivered by up to three house-builders on site plus an affordable housing constructor.
- 7.34 Land to the north of Birchall Lane will be subject to a period of mineral extraction and land remediation lasting at least 5.5 years. Residential development will follow in a phased manner while later stages of mineral extraction are still underway. However, areas to the south of Birchall Lane will be able to come forward at an earlier stage in the Plan period.
- 7.35 Given the cross-boundary nature of the site, there needs to be careful consideration of the phasing of new homes and the delivery of community infrastructure, in particular the schools which will be required from the earliest occupation. The neighbourhood centres and bus networks will also need to be delivered alongside the homes to ensure that new residents will have access to an appropriate level of services and facilities and to encourage the use of non-car modes of transport.

8. Duty to Co-operate

- 8.1 Several Duty to Co-operate meetings have been held at Executive Member level and Officers have a very good working relationship, meeting regularly to discuss a range of subjects. Records of each Member level meeting are reported to the East Herts District Planning Executive Panel and collectively serve as demonstration of the Council's commitment to fulfilling the Duty to Co-operate in full.
- 8.2 A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been jointly prepared to assist with each council moving forward to examination. It sets out how the two authorities will work together with regards to the Birchall Garden Suburb site and in the preparation of a joint policy and masterplan for the site, engaging relevant parties at appropriate stages, including the County Council in its capacity of Minerals and Waste,

Highways and Education Authority, parish councils and other stakeholders as necessary.

- 8.3 The MoU also establishes the process of managing the anticipated planning application for the site, which could include aligning the decision-making processes. Importantly, the MoU provides the basis for a consistent and comprehensive approach towards the Plan-making and longer term management of the site.

9. Neighbourhood Planning

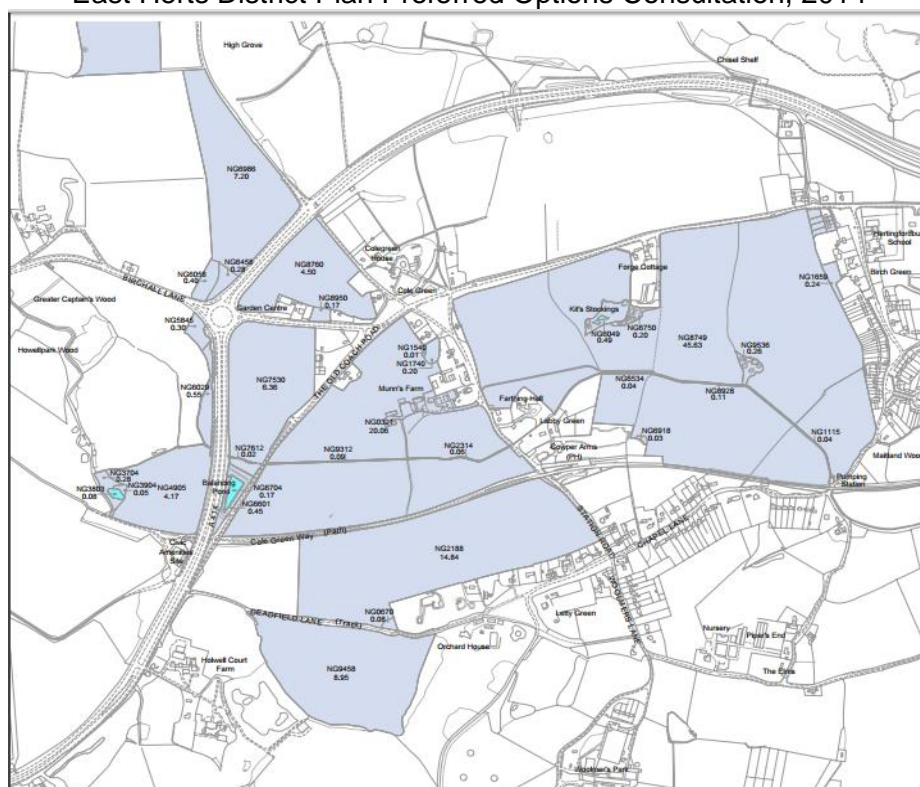
- 9.1 Hertingfordbury Parish Council has a designated Neighbourhood Area which covers the entire parish and intend to produce a Neighbourhood Plan. The element of Birchall Garden Suburb within East Herts lies within the parish. While there is currently no adopted or emerging Neighbourhood Plan at this stage, it is intended that the Neighbourhood Group are fully engaged with the preparation of the masterplan for the site.

10. Consideration of Alternative Sites

- 10.1 As part of the Plan-making process it is necessary to consider whether there are alternative options to the proposed development. Having identified that land to the East of Welwyn Garden City is suitable in principle for development, it is also necessary to consider whether there is an alternative location in which to accommodate a similar amount of development. The Strategic Land Availability Assessment is one means of looking at other locations and forms of development.
- 10.2 Gascoyne Cecil Estates submitted 127.21 hectares of land to the Call for Sites process in 2009, which comprised land to the north and south of Birchall Lane adjacent to the land presented by Tarmac as well as a large area of land around a number of villages to the south of the A414, which is collectively considered under site reference 26/004 in the Strategic Land Availability Assessment. The submission is made up of a number of large greenfield sites within the Green Belt linking Hertingfordbury, Birch Green and Letty Green below the Old Coach Road.
- 10.3 The assessment concluded that although the land around the villages was presented as being available, there are fundamental concerns with the approach presented – the considerable expansion of several villages. The submission suggests that the area could provide small-scale development in keeping with the character of the existing settlements. However, there are a number of features of historic and environmental importance in the locality and large parts of the area are identified as Areas of Archaeological Significance. Hertingfordbury, Birch Green and Letty Green are currently Category 3 Villages washed over by the Green Belt, where there is a presumption against development. The emerging District Plan identifies Hertingfordbury and Birch Green as Group 2 Villages, within which only infilling would be permitted. The development proposed by GCE takes the form of expansions outside the built up areas of the villages and as such would not constitute infill development, therefore the sites and therefore this option are not considered suitable.
- 10.4 Land to the East of Welwyn Garden City has been identified to meet the needs arising from both East Herts and Welwyn Hatfield, therefore development solely

within East Herts would not accommodate Welwyn Hatfield's needs. A dispersed pattern of development would also not provide the necessary infrastructure required to support the development, nor the critical mass required to justify the creation of new infrastructure such as schools, bus public transport services and healthcare facilities. There is no capacity at the primary school in Birch Green and no means to expand the school. The development would increase demand for secondary school provision, which would have to be accommodated in the two towns, where there are already capacity issues. While there are a number of community facilities and services spread amongst the settlements, they are not considered to be sufficient to support the proposed form of development. It is also unlikely that the Hertingfordbury Parish Neighbourhood Plan would support this option.

Figure 11.6: Gascoyne Cecil Estates land ownership as submitted to the East Herts District Plan Preferred Options Consultation, 2014



11. SA objectives

- 11.1 The Sustainability Appraisal is an integral part of Plan-making. This Settlement Appraisal forms part of the Sustainability Appraisal process as it considers the impacts arising from development and a consideration of alternative options. To assist the broader District-Wide Sustainability Appraisal, each of the urban extension options and the proposed development strategy for each East Herts town has been assessed against the Sustainability Appraisal Framework as updated by the Strategic Housing Market Area Spatial Options Distribution work. The appraisal of land to the East of Welwyn Garden City below describes how the site will meet the objectives as set out in the Sustainability Appraisal Framework. The wider likely cumulative impacts of development will be assessed in the Sustainability Appraisal supporting the District Plan.

Air Quality

- 11.2 The site is not near to an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) and is not considered likely to exacerbate air quality issues. The site will have incorporated Garden City principles which include tree-lined avenues. Buffer planting required to minimise and mitigate impacts on areas of woodland will increase biodiversity across the site mitigating air quality impacts arising from increased vehicle movements and buildings.

Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure

- 11.3 There are a number of wildlife sites within or near to the proposed development which comprise areas of ancient woodland, coppiced wood, species rich grassland and ponds home to protected species. The Cole Green Way is former railway line which runs east to west through the site, which over time has become an important wildlife corridor. Mitigation will therefore be required which will be achieved through the retention, expansion and positive management of woodland areas, landscape belts and enhanced green infrastructure corridors through the site as well as through well designed streets and urban blocks along Garden City principles.

Community and Wellbeing

- 11.4 The proposed housing mix and tenure and range of community facilities will support all age ranges, including the needs of an ageing population. The provision of bungalows and assisted living units will also provide for those with specialist physical needs. The neighbourhood centres will provide local shops and healthcare services as well as local sources of employment. Early Years, primary and secondary education will also be provided on-site. The use of Garden City principles, along with the provision of formal, informal and accessible natural green space, outdoor sports and play spaces as well as an allotment and community orchard provide valuable contributions to health and wellbeing objectives.

Economy and Employment

- 11.5 The site is located on the key east-west A414 corridor which is a major travel to work corridor through southern Hertfordshire providing links to major towns along key transport networks. The site not only provides employment opportunities through the creation of education, retail, community and healthcare facilities on site, but will also benefit from new modern employment space at The Holdings. The B195 is a key route in to the centre of Welwyn Garden City, providing good access to the many employment areas and the commercial centre of the town.

Historic Environment

- 11.6 The site lies within an Area of Archaeological Significance. As such, detailed assessments including archaeological field evaluations have been undertaken by Tarmac. There are many heritage assets within and in the vicinity of the site. However, degradation of their settings have occurred over time through various land uses and activities. The Heritage Impact Assessment concludes that where impacts may occur to the settings of heritage assets there are a variety of mitigation measures that can be incorporated in to the masterplanning of the development. These include buffer zones, reduced storey heights, layouts and design codes. These measures could assist in the modern interpretation of the landscapes which gave the heritage assets their original significance.

Housing

- 11.7 The proposal provides for a wide range of house types and mix, with an appropriate quantum and mix of affordable housing, bungalows, family sized homes, aspirational homes, a care home and assisted living properties. A site will also be provided for Gypsies and Travellers which could be delivered within the first five years of the Plan period.

Land

- 11.8 There will be a variety of densities across the site ensuring that the land is used efficiently but in a manner that respects the edge of settlement location within a landscaped setting. The land is currently in agricultural use as arable fields. The extraction of sand and gravel will be required to the north of Birchall Lane so a process of land remediation will need to be planned to create a development platform that respects the existing land form. Some of the material extracted will be used on-site to form buffer areas and for construction material.

Landscape

- 11.9 The landscape in this area is a key contributor to the significance of the setting of many heritage assets in the locality. The landscape has been shaped through the designs of Humphrey Repton and Capability Brown, linking large estates and manors together through parklands and rural landscapes. Much of this landscape has been degraded through land use changes and activities such as intensive agriculture and mineral extraction and land remediation. The Heritage Impact Assessment concludes that where impacts may occur to the landscaped settings of heritage assets there are a variety of mitigation measures that can be incorporated in to the masterplanning of the development. These include buffer zones, reduced storey heights, layouts and design codes. These measures could assist in the modern interpretation of the landscapes which gave the heritage assets their original significance.

Low Carbon Development

- 11.10 The site will incorporate footpaths and cycleways and facilitate a bus route through the site connecting to the existing town, thus facilitating the use of alternative modes of transport. The site will not support a decentralised heating system but will comprise buildings that incorporate sustainable building features exceeding building standards. On-site flood attenuation measures will be a fundamental element of the overall design of the site, incorporating natural drainage features and the creations of suds and swales.

Transport

- 11.11 The development site is well located to provide good connections to and extend the network of off-road cycle routes that connect Welwyn Garden City to Hertford (the Cole Green Way). Cycleways and footpaths will be incorporated into the design in a way which prioritises these routes over the use of private vehicle. Existing bus routes could be extended to run through the development connecting the development to the town centre and railway station within Welwyn Garden City and beyond to nearby Hertford. Transport modelling indicates that anticipated levels of vehicle movements generated by this development would not adversely affect the wider highway network, though the B195 Birchall Lane and junctions on the A414 will need enhancements.

Water

- 11.12 Methods to minimise water consumption through construction and occupation of the development will be utilised and appropriate connections to water supply and waste water networks are possible. The wider Rye Meads Waste Water Treatment Works has capacity with local improvements to connection points required.

12. Conclusion

- 12.1 The Council has undertaken careful consideration of the potential for development in this location, including the consideration of smaller parcels of land. It is considered that the Council's objectively assessed housing need will require the release of land from the Green Belt in order to plan for sustainable patterns of development. This site on the edge of a thriving town will enable new neighbourhoods to be planned that will provide key community services, be well connected to an existing urban area and will provide infrastructure and community facilities that will benefit new and existing residents such as new secondary school, healthcare and open spaces. This edge of town site will also enable connections from the existing urban area to the wider countryside through the improvement and creation of new green infrastructure routes and corridors.
- 12.2 The site will provide new homes in an established travel to work corridor and will provide new employment opportunities. The Council's requirement to provide for the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers can be delivered on this site within the first five years of the Plan. The incorporation of this accommodation within the masterplan will also serve to avoid conflicts between future occupants of the development.
- 12.3 As the site straddles the administrative boundary of Welwyn Hatfield and East Herts, this site provides an almost unique opportunity for two authorities to plan comprehensively to meet the needs of their residents through the creation of new community services and facilities. The masterplan approach and the production of a Supplementary Planning Document will provide opportunities for local engagement in the planning of new neighbourhoods. It will also provide assurances over the long-term delivery of development in line with the masterplan's original aims and objectives. It is therefore proposed that this site becomes an allocation within the East Herts District Plan and Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan for strategic development of 2,550 homes and supporting community infrastructure.