

## **Chapter 13 East of Welwyn Garden City**

### **13.1 Introduction**

- 13.1.1 Welwyn Garden City which immediately adjoins East Herts to the east of the district is the Country's second Garden City and therefore has a long history as an innovative and distinctive town. The town's location within the A1(M) corridor means it is highly accessible and as such is home to regionally important employment areas and national headquarters of large businesses. The town and the borough is a key workplace and retail destination for East Herts residents. This results in strong economic and housing market links between Welwyn Hatfield and East Herts.
- 13.1.2 Land to the East of Welwyn Garden City was assessed through the Plan-making process and was identified as a Broad Location for Development. This meant that the principle of development in this location was reserved subject to further detailed assessments which would be considered through the production of a Development Plan Document.
- 13.1.3 Since the Preferred Options consultation, East Herts and Welwyn Hatfield Council Officers have undertaken technical assessments to assess the feasibility and suitability of development in this location. This is documented in the Settlement Appraisal.
- 13.1.4 Consequently, land to the East of Welwyn Garden City at Birchall Garden Suburb is allocated for development in both the East Herts District Plan, and the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan to accommodate 2,550 new homes over the Plan period. 1,350 homes will be in East Herts and 1,200 homes will be in Welwyn Hatfield Borough.
- 13.1.5 As the development straddles the boundary between the two authorities the site will be planned in a comprehensive and co-ordinated manner. East Herts Council, Welwyn Hatfield Council and Hertfordshire County Council (in its capacity as minerals and waste planning, education and highways authority) will work together with landowners and other key stakeholders to produce a masterplan for Birchall Garden Suburb, which can be adopted as a Supplementary

Planning Document to provide a clear basis upon which future planning applications will be considered. The masterplan will set out the detailed phasing of delivery across the site, but development will commence within the first five years of the Plan period.

## **13.2 Development East of Welwyn Garden City**

13.2.1 The main components of the development strategy for land to the East of Welwyn Garden City at Birchall Garden Suburb subject to masterplanning are expected to focus on the following:

13.2.2 **Housing and Community Facilities:** 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. 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.

13.2.3 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). 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.

13.2.4 **Education:** 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.

13.2.5 **Character and Design:** Welwyn Garden City is well known for its Garden City design principles and this will provide a strong

framework for the development, which will be secured through the use of design codes and a collaboratively prepared masterplan. This will ensure the highest quality design and layout and a comprehensive and unified approach to the whole development, albeit reflecting different character areas across the site. Connections will be enhanced between the development site to the environmental assets such as Panshanger Park and the River Lea and Mimram corridors.

- 13.2.6 **Heritage:** 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.
- 13.2.7 **Open Spaces:** 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.
- 13.2.8 **Green Belt:** The site is largely screened from the wider landscape by the surrounding areas of woodland, which along with the surrounding roads help to define the structure of the area. Panshanger Lane to the east of the site provides a clear Green Belt boundary, beyond which is an area of high quality landscape around the Mimram Valley and the Grade II Registered Panshanger Park. To the south-east, the A414 makes a clear Green Belt boundary and will be screened by the creation of new landscape features.

- 13.2.9 **Transport:** 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. The development will make improvements to National Cycle Route 61 (a disused railway line known as the Cole Green Way), and will create new cycle networks providing connections within and around the site for leisure and commuter cycling trips to and from the development.
- 13.2.10 Existing bus routes will 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. The site is well located for access in to Welwyn Garden City off the A414 and B195. Mitigation will be required on the A414 junctions and improvements will be necessary to the B195, Birchall Lane.
- 13.2.11 **Employment:** 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. The area is well located for easy access to Hatfield Business Park and the employment opportunities within Welwyn Garden City and Hertford. There will also be employment opportunities within the two neighbourhood centres provided as part of the development and within the schools.
- 13.2.12 **Waste Water Infrastructure:** Waste water will drain to Rye Meads Waste Water Treatment Works, and new waste water services will be created as part of the development to ensure that the efficiency of the network is maintained and there are no adverse effects on surrounding watercourses.

13.2.13 **Minerals:** It is important to prevent the unnecessary sterilisation of mineral resources (which is a requirement of national policy and the Hertfordshire Minerals Local Plan). As there are underlying mineral deposits which will need to be extracted prior to the commencement of development, and if possible should be used locally in the construction phase. Detailed phasing and the approach to land remediation and subsequent development will be set out in the masterplan.

#### **Policy EWEL1 Land East of Welwyn Garden City**

I. Land at Birchall Garden Suburb is allocated for development in both the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan (SDS2) and the East Herts District Plan (EWEL1), to accommodate approximately 2,550 new homes over the plan period, of which 1,200 will be in Welwyn Hatfield Borough and 1,350 in East Herts District.

II. East Herts District Council and Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council will continue to work together to ensure that the new suburb is delivered in a comprehensive manner across the local authority boundaries. Mechanisms will need to be established to ensure the effective delivery of infrastructure required to support the development.

III. A joint masterplan setting out the quantum and distribution of land uses, access, sustainable design and layout principles will be prepared by Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council and East Herts District Council, working with the landowner and other key stakeholders. The Masterplan, which will be informed by the Strategy Diagram shown in Figure 13.1 below, will form the basis of a Supplementary Planning Document which will provide further guidance on site specific matters. Any application for development should be preceded by, and consistent with, the Masterplan.

IV. The site will be planned comprehensively to create a new sustainable community incorporating Garden City principles.

V. The developer must demonstrate the extent of the mineral that may be present and the likelihood of prior extraction in an environmentally acceptable way has been fully considered. As a minimum, an assessment of the depth and quality of mineral, together with an appraisal of the consequential viability

for prior extraction without prejudicing the delivery of housing within the plan period should be provided.

VI. In accordance with the relevant Local/District Plan policies the site will provide:

- a) A wide mix of housing types, sizes and tenures, including affordable housing; housing for older people; and serviced plots of land to contribute towards meeting evidenced demand for self-build and custom housebuilding;
- b) A Gypsy and Traveller site of an area sufficient to accommodate a total of 15 pitches (4 pitches for East Herts' and 11 pitches for Welwyn Hatfield's needs) to contribute towards the needs of both authorities;
- c) A neighbourhood centre in the East Herts part of the development and a small neighbourhood centre in the Welwyn Hatfield part of the development, each in an accessible location to meet the day-to-day retail needs of new residents;
- d) An employment area in a visible and accessible location in accordance with an up-to-date assessment of need; this area would incorporate the Holdings in Welwyn Hatfield, together with land off Birchall Lane (currently allocated as a Waste Site (ref. AS008) in the Hertfordshire Waste Site Allocations Document) subject to there being no adverse impact on neighbouring residential amenity;
- e) Community facilities, including healthcare (in the East Herts part of the development) and leisure facilities;
- f) Education facilities, including one 2 form entry primary school with Early Years Provision in Welwyn Hatfield and an all-through school in East Herts comprising a 2 form entry primary school with Early Years Provision and a secondary school of up to 8 forms of entry. Schools should provide for the dual use of facilities for community purposes;
- g) Sustainable transport measures including the improvement of pedestrian links, cycle paths, passenger transport and community transport initiatives;

h) Suitable access arrangements and any necessary wider strategic and local highway mitigation measures, including addressing impacts on the A414 in Hertford, the B195 and the A1(M);

i) Formal and informal open spaces for leisure and recreation, including play areas, sports fields, allotments and community orchards. Spaces will contribute to wider ecological networks including a strategic green infrastructure corridor from St Albans through to Hertford. As such, spaces should:

- \*be accessible to both new and existing communities;

- \*provide north-south and east-west connections, providing upgraded routes for walkers and cyclists, including the Lea Valley Path and Cole Green Way;

- \*provide safe routes for wildlife, protecting and enhancing wildlife assets;

- \*balance the needs of recreation and nature, providing animal infrastructure and undisturbed areas.

j) Protection and enhancement of heritage assets and their settings, both on-site and in the wider area through appropriate mitigation measures;

k) Landscaping and planting;

l) Necessary utilities, including integrated communications infrastructure to facilitate home-working; and

m) Sustainable drainage and provision for flood mitigation.

VI. In order to ensure that the site is planned and delivered comprehensively, any application for development on part of the site will be assessed against its contribution to the masterplan, and will not prejudice the implementation of the site as a whole.

13.2.14 Figure 13.1 is an illustrative strategy diagram which will be used as a basis for masterplanning and will also help inform decisions on planning applications.



**Figure 13.1 Strategy Diagram - Land East of Welwyn Garden City**

