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## **Petition for Council 16 November 2022 – Position Statement**

### **Petition Wording:**

*We the undersigned petition the Council to to protect the unique and outstanding landscape of the area north of Bengeo, known locally as Bengeo Field, for the whole community of Bengeo and Hertford. We ask that the East Herts District Council reject any further residential development, which would also place further stress on the local infrastructure with regards to highways, wastewater drainage, local health services, and schools.*

*We believe Bengeo Field needs to be protected from further development to prevent the destruction of a beautiful landscape that is much loved and utilised by the community. This area provides a much valued amenity thanks to the highly popular Byway 1. The pathway through Bengeo Field, which passes by the Lonely Oak, is extremely popular and surveys provide evidence that increasing numbers of people use it for a variety of activities. The unique views it offers to walkers across Rib Valley makes it imperative that we preserve this locally important landscape, which was described as having exceptional value by the Landscape Officer of Hertfordshire County Council. The landscape was also found to be of outstanding value by the Planning Inspector at the Planning Inquiry which rejected minerals extraction: "These landscapes are especially important as a foil to urban settlements [...] I consider that the appeal site is a landscape resource and visual amenity of considerable importance because of its proximity to the urban area." It seems contrary to that finding to allow residential development to destroy the same landscape.*

### **Council Position:**

East Herts District Plan Policy HERT4 allocates an area to the North of Hertford for residential development, part of which is currently under construction and nearing completion, and the remainder of which is expected to be the subject of a planning application in due course.

In terms of any impact on local infrastructure, prior to adoption of the District Plan the Council worked in conjunction with Hertfordshire County Council and other key stakeholders to ensure that any additional demand on resources arising from development could be accommodated.

The Inspector to the Examination in Public considered infrastructure issues and subsequently stated in her report that "the IDP [Infrastructure Delivery Plan] clearly identifies the necessary social and community infrastructure (including health and education) to support development sought by the Plan" and, in respect of Hertford sites specifically, including HERT4, that "The sites are better located than the reasonable alternatives in terms of protecting the historic character of the town, access to facilities and deliverability and are sustainable, long term options for housing".

As a strategic site allocation, which forms part of the Council's overall approach to meeting its evidenced housing needs by 2033, the HERT4 site was removed from the Green Belt in its entirety on adoption of the District Plan in 2018. The principle of development in this location has therefore already been established, subject to the detailed criteria in Policy HERT4 being met. Any future planning application would be assessed against the contents of this policy and all other relevant policies in the Plan.

Beyond the boundary of the HERT4 site allocation area, over 90% of Bengo Field would remain after the development of the HERT4 site<sup>1</sup>. This area of Bengo Field continues to lie within the Green Belt and is protected by District Plan Policy GBR1. It is further protected by Policy LGS1 of the Bengo Neighbourhood Plan, which forms part of the Development Plan and designates the area as a Local Green Space. Any future proposals in that location which failed comply with the District Plan, Neighbourhood Plan, or national guidance would therefore be considered contrary to policy.

In terms of Byway 1, Policy HERT4 makes provision for the protection of Public Rights of Way and seeks further opportunities to enhance on-site infrastructure in this regard.

The 'Lonely Oak' referred to on Byway 1 lies some 350 metres from the site allocation and would therefore be unaffected by any future development proposals. The other 'Lone Oak' lying within the HERT4 site allocation would likewise remain as a key feature within any proposed landscaping scheme.

The Masterplanning Framework for Land West of Wadesmill Road, Bengo, for Phase 2 of the HERT4 site allocation is due to be considered by Executive on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November. This is a collaboratively prepared document, which responds to Policies HERT4 and DES1 'Masterplanning' that require site promoters to engage with the Council as pre-requisite to the submission of any planning application. The Masterplanning Framework has been collaboratively prepared on a 'without prejudice' basis in respect of HERT4 policy criteria relating to previous mineral extraction on neighbouring land. It should not, therefore, be seen as in any way predetermining the outcome of any future planning application submitted to the Council.

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<sup>1</sup> *The total area of Bengo Field is 139.79 acres or 56.57 hectares; HERT4 Phase 2 totals 12.95 acres or 5.24 hectares; therefore, HERT4 Phase 2 equates to 9.26% of Bengo Field.*