



Part 2

East Herts District Plan

Examination Hearing Statements

Matters and Issues: Part 2

Chapter 12: East of Stevenage

Matters and Issues, Part 2: Chapter 12 – East of Stevenage

Issues:

Question 1

How and why was the allocated site chosen ahead of other potential options particularly having regard to Green Belt boundaries, landscape character and demands on infrastructure?

1. The Development Strategy Topic Paper (**TPA/001**) and the Settlement Appraisal for Stevenage (**SSS/010**) sets out why the Council has chosen the site to east of Stevenage. In summary, the area was appraised through the Supporting Document (**SSS/001**) sieving process at a number of scales. Whilst initially discounted as an area of search (for a large urban extension of 5,000 homes), when the objectively assessed housing need increased and constraints to development in other locations were confirmed, the Council had to reconsider alternative locations for development. Having already undertaken a comprehensive assessment of sites, this site was known to be available and could contribute towards meeting the level of development required.
2. A number of representations made to the Preferred Options Consultation, in particular, from Stevenage Borough Council suggested that a smaller area of land to the east of Stevenage should be considered in order to support Stevenage's ambition for aspirational housing, among other considerations. In line with the Council's overarching ambition of achieving sustainable development that could deliver the necessary supporting infrastructure, land immediately adjacent to the existing settlement was therefore reconsidered. This approach was evaluated in the Sustainability Appraisal (**SUB/004**), which identified that the final strategy is considered to be the most sustainable when assessed against the reasonable alternatives.
3. In terms of Green Belt considerations, the site was assessed in the East Herts Green Belt Review as parcel 2 (**GRB/001**)¹. This parcel covered a very large area of land and as such, the Review suggested that a further round of assessment might establish whether there are areas within the parcels that perform differently according to the purposes of the Green Belt than the parcel as a whole. Stage 1 of the Stevenage Green Belt Review used similar parcels to the East Herts Green Belt Review (**GRB/002**)². However, the Stage 2 parcels were smaller in size and as such provided a more fine-grain comparison of different

¹ GRB/001 East Herts Green Belt Review, Table 3.3 and Appendix 3

² GRB/002 Stevenage Borough Council Review of the Green Belt around Stevenage, Part 1: Survey Against Green Belt Purposes – Figure 3.2, page 9

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locations (**GRB/003**)³. Similarly, the Stevenage Landscape Appraisal also considered smaller parcels than the East Herts Landscape Character Appraisal. Both studies confirmed that a smaller area of land immediately adjacent to the town would have minimal impact in terms of Green Belt and on the overall landscape, mainly due to structural planting that had occurred historically. This is explained in the Settlement Appraisal for Stevenage (**SSS/010**)⁴.

4. The more recently completed Green Belt Assessment prepared for the Statement of Common Ground for this site (**ED131**, Appendix 12) confirms the Council's view that the site is well contained and distinguishable from the rest of the area to the east of the town in terms of its contribution to Green Belt purposes, and that with careful masterplanning combined with appropriate woodland management and reinforcement of peripheral vegetation where required, the site's containment can be reinforced still further⁵. The Council considers that the allocation of this site is therefore consistent with the aim of creating sustainable communities and that there is no material harm to the overall integrity of the Green Belt.
5. In terms of landscape considerations, the site is within the Middle Beane Valley as defined in the Landscape Character SPD (**ED153**). One defining feature of the valley on a macro-scale is that it has an impression of remoteness, tranquillity and continuity. The ecological value of the Beane Valley is well known, and this is why the larger area of search was discounted at an early stage. However, the site chosen is distinct from the valley as it is well defined by structural planting and as such the site is not visible from within or across the Beane Valley. Other characteristics such as a sense of tranquillity and remoteness are not experienced within the site given its proximity to the urban edge of the town. A Landscape and Visual Assessment⁶ has been undertaken for the site which considers these matters in detail. The initial Concept Masterplan⁷ seeks to illustrate that the design of the site will be landscape-led, a key feature being the retention and reinforcement of existing planting bounding the fields. In order to ensure that the masterplan of the site protects and enhances existing hedgerows and trees around the site, it is proposed to add an additional parameter to Part III (j) of Policy EOS1 as agreed in the Memorandum of Understanding between East Herts Council and Stevenage Borough Council (**ED141**) (see proposed amended policy on page 5).

³ GRB/003 Stevenage Borough Council Review of the Green Belt around Stevenage, Part 2: Site Assessment and Capacity Testing – Section 2.3, Page 13

⁴ SSS/010 paragraphs 4.3 to 4.12

⁵ ED131 Statement of Common Ground Appendix 12: Assessment of Land According to the Purposes of Green Belt - Paragraph 5.1.4-5.1.5

⁶ ED131 Statement of Common Ground Appendix 8: Landscape and Visual Assessment

⁷ ED131 Statement of Common Ground Appendix 2: Concept Masterplan

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6. In terms of infrastructure, the site is relatively unconstrained in terms of the need to front-load infrastructure. As such it is considered able to contribute towards meeting the first five years of housing supply. This is an important consideration, as in addition to delivering 600 new homes, it is one of the few strategic sites with good access to the main road network considered able to also deliver a site for Travelling Showpeople, for whom there is an identified immediate need⁸ (**HOP/005**) and for which potential occupants are keen to engage in the delivery process. This weighed positively in the balance of considerations when appraising this site. The site will also deliver a range of dwelling types including a care home or sheltered housing complex as well as local shopping facilities. The site will also provide some larger family-sized homes, which is a key aspiration of Stevenage Borough Council.

Question 2

Is it deliverable, having regard to the provision of the necessary infrastructure and facilities?

1. Yes. A lot of preparation and investigation has already taken place to support the Plan-making process. There are a number of technical reports that support the Statement of Common Ground (**ED131**) which indicate that the necessary infrastructure is possible and viable.
2. The site is planned to be delivered in three tranches, enabling simultaneous delivery by three outlets, as well as an affordable housing provider. In addition, a fourth outlet may deliver the proposed specialist housing element of the scheme.
3. Where infrastructure requirements exist, they have been identified within the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (**IDM/001**). In particular there is a need to create new accesses on Gresley Way. These junctions are assessed as part of the Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) modelling work carried out by Aecom in 2015, which modelled the site based upon 750 homes so therefore presents a robust assessment. This work demonstrates that the only junction that requires improvement is Gresley Way/A602. This is also agreed in the Statement of Common Ground with HCC Transport (Appendix E to **SOC/001**). HCC has confirmed that the road network will be able to cater for the development and the access strategy for the site will be focussed upon active travel in accordance with the approach being adopted by Stevenage Borough Council and HCC, which seeks to encourage mobility by sustainable and inclusive modes with a shift from

⁸ HOP/005 East Herts Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Needs Assessment, 2016 – paragraph 1.19

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car driver to more space efficient, socially inclusive and less polluting forms of mobility (and not simply to supply extra road capacity for the benefit of car borne commuters in peak periods). The appendices provided with the Statement of Common Ground (**ED131**) indicate that there are no issues with the delivery of necessary supporting infrastructure.

4. In terms of education, the site will generate a pupil yield of just over one form of entry (FE), but will deliver a new 2FE primary school on site which will benefit both new and existing residents. The site is within walking distance of a former 'mothballed' secondary school, Barnwell School (East Campus), which will be reopened and expanded to accommodate 5FE. The County Council is also exploring options regarding the expansion of other secondary schools across the education planning area by 3.5FE. Furthermore, the delivery of an additional secondary school will be secured through the North Herts District Plan, also currently at Examination, which is the County Council's preference. This new school will change the dynamic of secondary school places. It is proposed to make a minor amendment to paragraph 12.2.3 to remove specific reference to Barnwell East School, as agreed in the MoU between East Herts and Hertfordshire County Council (**ED134**).
5. This site has considerable potential in terms of extending and connecting to existing cycleways and footpaths into the existing town and will assist the Stevenage Mobility Strategy through improvements to the cycle network along Gresley Way. There are larger retail and public facilities nearby and an opportunity to extend bus routes through the site. The Council has agreed through its MoU with Stevenage Borough Council (**ED141**) that specific reference to the Stevenage Mobility Strategy will be added. Therefore a Main Modification is proposed to Policy EOS1, Part III. (h) to this effect, supported by minor amendments to paragraph 12.2.5. In addition, it is proposed to add specific reference to the creation of a high quality cycle route along Gresley Way through a Main Modification to Part III (i), supported by minor amendments to paragraphs 12.2.4 (see proposed amended policy on page 5).
6. Explorations have been undertaken with regards to waste water requirements. All surface water run-off (i.e. up to and including the 1:100 year flood event plus climate change resilience uplifts (40%)) will be captured and drained within the site boundary. The drainage strategy will make provision for treatment drains such as swales, trapped gullies, permeable paving, attenuation and infiltration ponds in order to prevent pollutants from entering underlying aquifers or reaching the River Beane.
7. The Site Promoter and Council have already embarked on the masterplanning process which considers all aspects of design, including how to integrate the required infrastructure and facilities within the site, even giving consideration to

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the location and type of retail and community facilities to ensure they serve both the new development and existing homes in the vicinity, thus ensuring their long term viability. This process will continue in collaboration with Stevenage Borough Council and other key stakeholders with the aim of preparing a full detailed planning application for consideration upon adoption of the District Plan. To this effect, it is proposed to amend Part II of Policy EOS1 to make this relationship clear (see proposed amended policy below).

Policy EOS1 Land East of Stevenage

- II. Prior to the submission of any planning application/s a Masterplan setting out the quantum and distribution of land uses; access; sustainable high quality design and layout principles; necessary infrastructure; the relationship between the site and other nearby settlements; landscape and heritage assets; and other relevant matters, will be collaboratively prepared, involving site promoters, landowners, East Herts Council, **Stevenage Borough Council**, ~~town~~ and parish councils and key stakeholders. This document will further be informed by public participation in the process.
- III. (h) access arrangements and highways and wider strategic mitigation measures, including improvements to the A602/Gresley Way junction and other local roads as necessary, **taking account of the Stevenage Mobility Strategy**.
- III. (i) sustainable transport measures which encourage walking and cycling through the site, including:
 - the provision of cycleways and footways that provide links into Stevenage including existing cycle networks, **including the provision of a high quality cycle route along Gresley Way between Six Hills Way and Fairlands Way, including links to Six Hills Way**;
- III. (j) responds to the existing landform to define individual character areas, incorporating existing landscaping within the new streets, paths and spaces; enhances the outer boundary of the site; **retains and enhances where required the existing hedgerows within and around the site, punctuating where access into the site is required**; and creates a net gain to biodiversity through additional planting;