

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET PLANNING AND PARKING PANEL – 17 AUGUST 2023
REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR - PLANNING

RESPONSE TO ST ALBANS DISTRICT AND CITY COUNCIL – NEW LOCAL PLAN
CONSULTATION

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 St Albans District and City Council (SADC) are in the process of producing their new Local Plan. Once adopted, the new Local Plan will guide the future spatial development over a 15-year period from 2024 to 2041. It will replace the policies contained within its existing District Local Plan (adopted in 1994).
- 1.2 The Draft Local Plan 2023¹ consultation runs between 12th July and 25th September 2023.
- 1.3 A local housing need figure of 888 dwellings per annum has been calculated, based on the Government's Standard Method. The Spatial Strategy seeks to deliver at least 15,096 net additional new homes up to 2041 with a large proportion of the district's future development needs provided by 12 broad locations each with 250 or more homes and 90 large, medium or small sites that each could provide between five and 249 dwellings.
- 1.4 There are no proposed development sites adjacent to the boundary with Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council or any that would significantly impact Welwyn Hatfield. The nearest site proposed for allocation is Glinwell (Nursery), Hatfield Road, St Albans, which is identified as a Broad Location for growth.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 That the Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel agree the consultation response provided in Appendix A.

3 Explanation

- 3.1 St Albans City and District Council (SADC) have been preparing a new Local Plan for a several years. Most recently SADC withdraw the 2018 version of their draft Local Plan covering the period 2020-2036 in November 2020, following concerns raised by the Planning Inspector regarding failure to comply with the Duty to Cooperate and a number of other significant issues, namely that the draft Plan has not been prepared in accordance with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement; that it failed to meet objectively housing assessed needs; and that key pieces of supporting evidence were either absent or inadequately prepared. Following this, the Council commenced preparation of a new Local Plan 2024-2041 in January 2021.

¹ Otherwise referred to in this report as SADC Local Plan (2023)

- 3.1 The Draft SADC LP has been published for public consultation. Preparation of this version of the SADC LP began in January 2021 and has been through the following stages:
- a) Call for Sites – January to March 2021
 - b) Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report consultation – January to March 2021
 - c) Regulation 18 draft Local Plan – 2023 (Current Stage)
- 3.2 The draft plan for consultation identifies a preferred level of growth and sets out a preferred spatial strategy and related policies for accommodating this growth. A Sustainability Appraisal and Habits Regulation Assessment are published alongside the draft Local Plan. The next stage of the Local Plan following this consultation is the publication of the proposed submission plan (Regulation 19) and then submission of Examination.

Housing Need

- 3.3 The current standard method for calculating the minimum annual local housing need set out in Planning Practice Guidance results in the need for the delivery of 888 dwellings per year. The draft Local Plan reflects this and sets the Local Plan target for delivery of new homes at 888 (minimum) new homes a year. This equates to a total minimum target of 15,096 homes up to 2041.
- 3.4 The Plan states that: *“There may, however, be significant changes in the Government’s evidence/approach between this consultation draft Plan and its next iteration as a proposed final draft Plan in 2024, potentially including:*
- *New household projections based on the 2021 census are due to be published by the Government in early 2024 – the Government currently requires the use of 2014-based household projections. This Council considers the Government’s approach to be an illegitimate use of out-of-date data, and many other councils and stakeholders agree.*
 - *The Government has said it will ‘review its approach’ to the Standard Method for calculating local housing need in 2024.*
 - *The Government may make further changes to the NPPF and/or the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) which affect housing requirements and delivery.*

Spatial Strategy

- 3.5 *Strategic Policy SP1: A Spatial Strategy for St Albans District* sets out the approach of identifying and prioritising development sites on Previously Developed Land/ Brownfield land first before identifying sites in the green belt. 81% of SADC is designated green belt land, and there is insufficient land available to meet the OAHN without releasing land from the green belt.
- 3.6 The spatial strategy reflects the Settlement Hierarchy as set out in Table 1.3 of the Plan. The spatial strategy gives priority to the development of larger urban centres which can provide a greater range of services and facilities, supports the re-use of land within the urban areas, and can reduce the need to travel. This results in most site allocations being within and adjacent to the larger and most sustainable urban

centres that are Tier 1 - St Albans and Hemel Hempstead; Tier 2 – Harpenden, and Tier 3 - London Colney.

- 3.7 Broad Locations for development (Policy LG1) are identified as large urban extensions of 250 or more homes or strategic-scale employment. The most significant Broad Locations are the four comprising Hemel Garden Communities, which are planned to the east and north of Hemel Hempstead on Green Belt land, and will provide a large contribution to meeting the district's growth requirements.
- 3.8 Other Broad Locations are North St Albans, East St Albans, West of London Colney, North East Harpenden, North West Harpenden, West Redbourn (north and south), Glinwell Nursery, St Albans, and Harper Lane near Radlett.
- 3.9 The other categories of development are Large Sites (100-249 homes), Medium Sites (10-99 homes) and Small Sites (5-9 homes). These sites are concentrated mostly within urban areas and around the higher-tier settlements as defined in the Settlement Hierarchy, outlined in Strategic Policy SP1: A Spatial Strategy for St Albans District of the draft Local Plan.
- 3.10 The site with the strongest locational relationship to Welwyn Hatfield is **Glinwell**. It is identified as a Broad Location for growth, with a site area of 20.85ha, potentially providing a mixed-used development of 436 dwellings, a possible primary school, green infrastructure, transport infrastructure, and other community infrastructure. The site is currently in use as a nursery with glasshouses growing vegetables, together with a farm shop and associated car parking. As such the site is identified as Previously Developed Land (PDL).
- 3.11 Key development objectives/issues identified for this site include: The provision of an 80+ unit C2 Nursing care scheme, which is included in the total number of dwellings. An assessment of education needs will be undertaken to consider if there is a requirement for a primary school, including Early Years provision, to serve the new community. Suitable access and cycle access/improvements to the A1057 Hatfield Road or mixed pedestrian and cycle use will be required and suitable access and improvements to the Alban Way walking and cycle route will need to be provided. A contribution to the Ellenbrook Fields Country Park will be required.

Consultation response

- 3.12 Appendix A contains the council's response to the SADC Local Plan consultation. The key issues are the potential impact on the purposes of the Green Belt and the need for development to be supported by commensurate infrastructure.
- 3.13 The Welwyn Hatfield Green Belt Review notes that the gap between St Albans and Hatfield is narrow to the west of Hatfield. The smaller settlements of Smallford and Sleapshyde lie between the first-tier settlements towards the eastern urban edge of St Albans, further limiting the perception of separation. This gap is therefore considered to be fragile.
- 3.14 As the site is just under 1km away at the nearest point to the boundary with Welwyn Hatfield, there are concerns development of this site may reduce the already "fragile gap" that exists between St Albans and Welwyn Hatfield at this location. However, the site is extensively built-up, with glasshouses and buildings on the site, which reduces the contribution it makes to the sense of openness of the wider countryside. Consequently, in addition to the site-specific considerations already identified, WHBC suggest that there should be appropriate landscaping and edge

treatment of the site to reduce the visual impact of the development on the green belt.

- 3.15 Infrastructure: A traffic impact assessment will be needed to ensure that the necessary infrastructure is in place to cope with additional traffic on the A1057 and surrounding roads resulting from the proposed development. Site specific considerations including proposed improvements to the A1057 and to the Alban Way are welcome as are contributions to the Ellenbrook Fields Country Park.

Next Steps

- 3.16 Following conclusion of the consultation SADC will consider the comments received and use them to help inform its decision making on the next stage of the plan preparation process. The SADC Local Development Scheme (LDS) identifies the following timetable for the next stages:
- a) Regulation 19 (pre-submission consultation), July-September 2024
 - b) Submission, December 2024
 - c) Examination, December 2024 – November 2025
 - d) Adoption, December 2025

Implications

4 Legal Implication(s)

- 4.1 There are no direct legal implications associated with this report. However, it should be noted that the Duty to Cooperate is a legal requirement, which is considered in the examination of Local Plans. Public bodies have a duty under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, as amended by the Localism Act 2011, to cooperate on the preparation of planning documents so far as they relate to a strategic matters (the Duty to Cooperate). Strategic matters are defined as those that would have a significant impact on at least two planning areas.
- 4.2 Local planning authorities that are unwilling to cooperate and unable to provide robust evidence to support a strategy that does not plan for the unmet requirements of another local planning authority may fail the test of compliance with the Duty to Cooperate or their plan may be found unsound.
- 4.3 A Duty to Cooperate Compliance Statement will accompany the next version of the SADC Draft Local Plan, and will be updated before it is submitted to the Secretary of State alongside the Local Plan and other supporting documents.

5 Financial Implication(s)

- 5.1 There are no financial implications arising directly in relation to this report.

6 Risk Management Implications

- 6.1 There are no risk management implications arising directly in relation to this report. Responding to neighbouring Authorities consultations ensures that potential areas of concern, which could have both direct and indirect implications for Welwyn Hatfield are identified and can be dealt with as appropriate.

7 Security & Terrorism Implication(s)

There are no security and terrorism implications as a result of this report.

8 Procurement Implication(s)

8.1 There are no procurement implications arising as a result of this report.

9 Climate Change Implication(s)

9.1 No climate change implications have been identified resulting from this report. Although clearly proposals for more development will have an impact on climate change and will need to be assessed as part of the sustainability appraisal process accompanying the preparation of the SADC Local Plan.

10 Policy Implication(s)

10.1 There are no direct policy implications arising for Welwyn Hatfield as a result of this report.

11 Link to Corporate Priorities

11.1 The subject of this report is linked to the Council's Business Plan 2023-24 and, in particular, Priority 3 Our Housing - to plan for current and future needs, and Priority 4 Our Economy – sustainable growth. Responding to other authorities' consultations helps this Council to meet these priorities effectively.

12 Equality and Diversity

12.1 There are no equality and diversity implications arising as a result of this report.

13 Health and Wellbeing

13.1 There are no health and wellbeing implications arising as a result of this report. The SADC Plan relates to its administrative area and contains policies on health and wellbeing within the district.

14 Human Resources

14.1 There are no Human Resources implications arising as a result of this report.

15 Communications and Engagement

15.1 There are no communications and engagement implications arising as a result of this report.

Appendices:

- Appendix A: WHBC consultation response to St Albans Draft Local Plan Reg 18

Background Papers

St Albans Draft Local Plan Regulation 18 consultation document.