



**WELWYN
HATFIELD**

**Colin Haigh
Head of Planning**

Reply to: address as below
Date: 27 July 2020

Melvyn Middleton
Planning Inspectorate
c/o Programme Officer
louise@poservices.co.uk

Dear Sir

Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan

I write in response to your letter dated 2 July 2020 concerning our Local Plan timetable.

On the last occasion I wrote to you on 10 February 2020, I set out a timetable for public consultation on new sites in early 2020, the reporting of results to councillors in late May and hearing sessions on new sites in June. In this regard I can confirm that the new sites document was issued for public consultation in mid February and that hearing sessions on Birchall Garden Suburb and Symondshyde took place in early March.

You will aware however that the Government announced a major lockdown of the country on 23 March due to the coronavirus pandemic. This has had multiple consequences for the Council and the Local Plan. For the first weeks of lockdown the Council focused on its delivery of core services and emergency services for vulnerable residents. All committee meetings were suspended until legislation for virtual meetings was introduced and suitable IT and governance arrangements were identified. We also decided to extend the new sites consultation deadline until 1 May 2020 to ensure that everyone had time to comment.

I can confirm that the Council received 771 representations to the consultation exercise and that these have all been published on our [consultation portal](#).

I must advise however that no committee meetings have yet taken place to debate the results of the consultation or to consider new sites. This is because of the coronavirus situation and the difficulties of hosting virtual meetings to debate complex matters.

It is also related to the content of your letter dated 13 February 2020 in immediate response to my letter, which states that:

"I have decided to hold hearing sessions into all of the outstanding Regulation 19 sites... Following these hearings I will prepare an interim report for the Council that clearly identifies those submitted sites (if there are any) that I consider not to meet the tests of soundness... I will also invite the Council to take appropriate action to resolve any outstanding matters of soundness. This is likely to include the submission of additional housing sites for development."

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It is also related to the content of your letter dated 19 March 2020 following the hearing sessions in March, which states that:

"I have ... decided that the most appropriate way forward now is to conclude the examination of the Regulation 19 plan ... and to write an interim report on my findings, in which I will be inviting the Council to take the necessary steps to make the Local Plan sound. That is why we have had hearing sessions this week and will be having further hearings ... to consider everything in the Regulation 19 plan that has not yet been examined."

In order to assist the production of your interim report the Council has prioritised the preparation of hearing statements for the stage 8 hearing sessions and the production of the additional evidence you requested on Birchall Garden Suburb and Symondshyde, all of which have now been submitted to the examination.

The Council is now working on the understanding that hearing sessions will take place on all outstanding submitted sites in July and August and that you will write an interim report thereafter. This will then be presented to elected members, alongside the results of the public consultation, the implications for the Objective Assessment of Housing Need (OAN) of the publication of new 2018-based household projections, any new site analysis work and updated sustainability appraisal work. This information will give members everything they need to understand which submitted sites are sound, which are unsound and how many more sites might be needed in order to achieve a sound plan. Any additional sites that members select will then be submitted to you for examination.

As a result it would be very helpful to know when you intend to publish your interim report, so that we can as quickly as possible schedule the necessary committee meetings.

I also write in response to your letter dated 13 July 2020 querying whether the Council considers that the publication of the 2018-based household projections represent a meaningful change in the housing situation. I can confirm that we have commissioned Turley and Edge consultants to update our OAN evidence to take account of these projections and make any judgements they feel able to about the possible impact of Brexit and the coronavirus pandemic on population growth and housing need. As requested this work will be carried out for both the submitted plan period and the 2016-2036 plan period. There will therefore be a requirement for modelling. It will also consider the issue of concealed households. We intend that this work will be completed by 28 August and will be submitted to the examination. It will be reported to first available meeting of Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel on 10th September.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Colin Haigh', written in a cursive style.

Colin Haigh
Head of Planning