

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL  
CABINET PLANNING AND PARKING PANEL – 17 OCTOBER 2024  
REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (PLANNING)

NORTH WEST HATFIELD MASTERPLAN SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT

**1 Executive Summary**

- 1.1 North West Hatfield is a large strategic site to the north-west of Hatfield and south west of Welwyn Garden City. Policy SP 22 of the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan states that a masterplan for the site will form the basis of a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and that any application for development should be preceded by and consistent with the masterplan.
- 1.2 A Development Framework SPD, containing a masterplan for North West Hatfield has been prepared by the landowner, in collaboration with officers from Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council and Hertfordshire County Council to ensure the site is planned comprehensively to create a new sustainable community. The document has been prepared in line with the Council's Approach to Masterplanning Guidance note which was endorsed by the Council in March 2024.
- 1.3 SPDs are non-statutory documents that build upon policies in Adopted Local Plans to give more detailed guidance on how policies or proposals will be implemented. Prior to adoption SPD's must be subject to a minimum of 4 weeks public consultation<sup>1</sup>. Representations made during this period must be considered by the council and summarised in a report identifying the main issues raised and how these have been addressed in the SPD.

**2 Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1 That Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel (CPPP) recommend to Cabinet that the North West Hatfield Masterplan, as detailed in Appendix A, be taken forward for public consultation for a period of six weeks.

**3 Explanation**

- 3.1 The Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan (2016), sets out the Council's strategy for delivering growth in the Borough over the Plan period up to 2036. This includes the development of new neighbourhoods masterplanned to create new sustainable locations incorporating the principles of high-quality design.
- 3.2 The Plan sets out that a comprehensive approach will be taken to large sites. Masterplans will provide a spatial framework that will be agreed by the Council prior to the determination of any relevant planning application. They will set out the vision

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<sup>1</sup> The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012, Regulation 12

and objective for the development; establish the quantum and distribution of land uses; identify sustainable transport linkages and a movement hierarchy; and establish the core design concepts for the site, building on the principles set out in the Local Plan.

- 3.3 Masterplanning is not a one-size-fits-all approach, the process is based upon a collaborative approach to identifying and resolving issues, creating a vision for what the site aspires to achieve, testing design options and seeking views upon preferred solutions. The output of this process is a Masterplanning Framework or Masterplan which is presented to members for consideration.
- 3.4 North West Hatfield is a large strategic site to the North West of Hatfield located south of Coopers Green Lane and immediately west of the A1M, and wraps around the north, east and west of Hatfield Garden Village. Most of the site was removed from the Green Belt by the adoption of the Local Plan in 2023, however, the northeastern corner remains designated as Green Belt land providing a 'green gap' between the new development and Welwyn Garden City.
- 3.5 Policy SP22 of the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan (2016), allocates land at North West Hatfield to accommodate approximately 1,750 homes over the plan period. The policy contains a requirement for the production of a strategic masterplan document to form the basis of a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to provide further guidance on site specific matters including (but not limited to) the quantum and distribution of land uses, sustainable design and layout principles, sustainable access and transport measures, treatment of ecological and heritage assets including key views, provision of community facilities, green infrastructure and landscaping, SuDs, locations of Gypsy and Traveller sites, and phasing and delivery of infrastructure. Any application for development should be preceded by and consistent with the masterplan.
- 3.6 A Supplementary Planning Document including a masterplan for North West Hatfield has been prepared and is included as Appendix A. The document has been produced by Consultants Carter Jonas on behalf of the Landowner Gascoyne Estates. Officers from WHBC and HCC have reviewed the document at various stages of production and provided feedback.
- 3.7 A project liaison Group was established, this comprised Local Councillors and a representative from Hatfield Town Council who, along with Council officers, attended a series of meetings to discuss development of the Masterplan and content of the SPD. Attendees were presented with information on various topics such as transport and accessibility, land use and design, and drainage and given the opportunity to provide critical feedback.
- 3.8 In November 2023 the Draft Masterplan proposal was presented and tested at the Hertfordshire Design Review Panel, an independent and impartial process for evaluating the design quality and sustainability of development proposals in Hertfordshire. Following a site visit the panel of multidisciplinary experts reviewed the draft masterplan and gave constructive criticism, the feedback from which was considered by the consultant team and responded to in the document and shared with the Liaison Group.
- 3.9 The Draft Development Framework SPD is now at the final stages of production and is presented here for consideration (see appendix A). Following an introduction

to the policy and planning history of the site, the document provides a contextual analysis of the current site, identifying issues such as heritage, ecology, landscape, hydrology and topography, land use, minerals and air quality and acoustics. This is followed by an explanation of the vision and objectives for development, and an explanation of the lengthy engagement process that has led to this vision, including the land owners response to the observations of the November 2023 Hertfordshire Design Review Panel. The Development Framework/Masterplan contained in part 5 of the document presents a land use strategy for the site including locations for housing, employment and education, blue green infrastructure, street hierarchy and active travel routes as well as key place making principles such as density and key views. Character areas, a sustainability strategy, and implementation and delivery in the form of a phasing plan are also included.

### **Statutory Requirements for Supplementary Planning Documents**

- 3.10 Supplementary planning documents (SPDs) do not form part of the statutory development plan and as such cannot introduce new planning policies into the development plan. SPD's should build upon and provide more detailed advice or guidance on policies in an adopted local plan. In this case the main policy is Policy SP22. Once adopted SPD's are a material consideration in the decision making process and as such draft SPD must be subject to consultation.

#### Public Consultation

- 3.11 The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 require that prior to adoption of a Supplementary Planning Document, a Local Planning Authority (LPA) must make the document available for inspection for a minimum of four weeks for the purpose of seeking representations. In accordance with regulation 35 a document is taken to be made available by a LPA when it is available for inspection at their principal office and at such other places within their area as the LPA consider appropriate, during normal office hours, and published on the LPAs website (regulation 35).
- 3.12 Following consultation and prior to adoption of an SPD, the LPA must prepare a statement setting out: the persons the LPA consulted when preparing the SPD; a summary of the main issues raised by those persons; and how those issues have been addressed in the SPD. Copies of this statement and the SPD itself must be made available in accordance with Regulation 35.
- 3.13 It is proposed that the Draft North-West Hatfield SPD undergo public consultation for a period of six weeks commencing on 8<sup>th</sup> November 2024 and finishing on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2024. The consultation will take place online using the Council's consultation portal and hard copies of the document and response forms will be deposited at suitable locations as per the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) and as required by regulation 35.
- 3.14 The consultation seeks to gain public opinion on contents of the SPD and Masterplan proposals. The results of consultation will be presented to Council prior to any decision on adoption being made.

## Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 3.15 The Environmental Assessment of Plans & Programmes Regulations 2004 (the SEA Regulations) require that an assessment is carried out of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment. This includes those plans and programmes prepared and/or adopted by any authority at a local level, including supplementary planning documents. A plan or project may also require a Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA), as set out in the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) if it is considered likely to have significant effects on a habitats site.
- 3.16 An initial SEA / HRA screening report has been produced by WHBC for the North West Hatfield Development Framework SPD. Based on the available evidence and taking account of the relationship of the proposed SPD to the adopted Local Plan it is considered that the SPD would not give rise to activities that would result in significant environmental effects of a type or scale different to those already considered in the SA (SEA) or HRA of the Local Plan.
- 3.17 Officers are therefore of the opinion that the SPD does not require environmental assessment under the provisions of the above regulations. The screening report was sent to the relevant statutory consultees (Historic England, Natural England and the Environment Agency). Responses were received from Historic England who concurred with the Council's opinion that SEA was not required, and from Natural England who did not wish to comment.

### **Next Steps**

- 3.18 Following the close of public consultation on 20<sup>th</sup> December, the SPD will be amended as required and together with a summary of the representations received be reported to CPPP ahead of progressing to Cabinet and a meeting of Council. Council will then decide if the SPD should be adopted.

### **Implications**

#### **4 Legal Implication(s)**

- 4.1 There are no direct legal implications associated with this report. Consultation on the draft North West Hatfield SPD will be carried out in accordance with the provisions of the Town and County Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. Once adopted the SPD will become a material consideration in determining applications for development of the North West Hatfield site.

#### **5 Financial Implication(s)**

- 5.1 There are no financial implications arising directly in relation to this report. If adopted by the Council the SPD will be a material consideration in determining planning applications for development at North West Hatfield and as such will provide greater certainty for developers and decision makers. The purpose of such an approach is to reduce the risk of poor quality applications coming forward, being refused and then going to a costly planning appeal.

## **6 Risk Management Implications**

- 6.1 Production of a Masterplan SPD for North West Hatfield is compliant with local plan policies SP9 and SP22. The strategic masterplan SPD provides a framework to guide future sustainable development of the site and should help to shape development proposals by setting standards for layout, design quality and phasing of development in the interests of the community. The masterplan will provide a useful tool for officers when negotiating with developers and determining applications for development and should therefore reduce the risk of uncoordinated poor-quality development coming forward.

## **7 Security and Terrorism Implication(s)**

- 7.1 There are no security and terrorism implications arising directly in relation to this report.

## **8 Procurement Implication(s)**

- 8.1 There are no procurement implications arising directly in relation to this report. The Masterplan SPD has been produced by the landowner and their consultant team with input from Council Officers.

## **9 Climate Change Implication(s)**

- 9.1 The masterplan proposes development on what is currently a greenfield site and as such has several climate change implications. Construction of this scale will use high levels of raw materials and energy, whilst operation of the development will obviously lead to greater energy consumption. Development of agricultural land will inevitably lead to more hard surfacing which can have implications for surface water runoff and drainage. The masterplan includes a drainage strategy plan, but further details of mitigation measures will be necessary at the planning application stage.
- 9.2 The masterplan identifies sustainability principles and promotes sustainable design and forms of development both in terms of construction and function of neighbourhoods. Having a masterplan in place should help to secure more sustainable forms of development by setting a framework for more detailed design and providing a tool for officers when reviewing applications and negotiating with developers.
- 9.3 Council officers have undertaken an initial SEA Screening of the Draft SPD, the outcome of this process concluded that full SEA/ HRA screening is not required. This screening had been sent to appropriate statutory bodies, the result of which will be reported to Council in due course.

## **10 Human Resources Implication(s)**

- 10.1 There are no Human Resources implications arising directly in relation to this report. The draft SPD consultation process will be managed by Council Planning Officers as part of their existing workload. The presence of a masterplan SPD for development management purposes will assist planning officers in decision making.

## **11 Health and Wellbeing Implication(s)**

- 11.1 Health and wellbeing has been considered in the masterplan design process. The masterplan aims to facilitate active travel by providing attractive environments for walking and cycling and ensuring provision of public transport. The form of development and layout of streets has been designed to provide pleasant environments to encourage community engagement.

## **12 Communication and Engagement Implication(s)**

- 12.1 The allocation of the site for development has been consulted upon and the subject of examination by the Inspector of Welwyn Hatfield Draft Local Plan over several years. The Landowner has also undertaken a range of engagement exercises over several years. The masterplan builds on the policy requirements of the Adopted Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan (2106) and has been the subject to engagement with the Liaison Group.
- 12.2 Formal consultation on the Draft Masterplan SPD will be the responsibility of the Council. Council officers will manage this process as part of their usual workload.

## **13 Link to Corporate Priorities**

- 13.1 The subject of this report is linked to the Council's Corporate Plan, in particular Priority 1: Attractive and accessible green spaces – providing a variety of green spaces for all communities to enjoy, Priority 3: Quality homes through managed growth – delivering affordable homes to meet local need, high quality housing thriving neighbourhoods and sustainable communities, and Priority 4: A sense of community where people feel safe - Design and maintain attractive neighbourhoods which our communities can enjoy and take pride in.

## **14 Equality and Diversity**

- 14.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) was not completed because the draft SPD does not introduce any new policies to what is already contained in the adopted local plan. Additionally, this report does not propose changes to existing service-related policies or the development of new service-related policies.

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**Background papers:** None

### **Appendices**

Appendix A: North West Hatfield Masterplan SPD

Appendix B: SEA / HRA screening report