

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET PLANNING AND PARKING PANEL – 18 FEBRUARY 2025
REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (PLANNING)

NORTH WEST HATFIELD MASTERPLAN SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT
ADOPTION

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.
- 1.4 The Draft SPD was consulted on for a period of six weeks between 08 November and 20 December 2024. Following consideration of the responses, some changes have been made to the consultation draft, and the revised version is attached at Appendix A.

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 adopted.
- 2.2 Delegate authority to the Assistant Director (Planning), in consultation with Executive Member for planning, for any necessary further minor editorial changes to the SPD if necessary.

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 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.
- 3.10 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

- 3.11 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.
- 3.12 A draft of the SPD was consulted upon between 08 November and 20 December 2024. In line with requirements of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 and the Council Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) the draft document was made available for inspection. The consultation utilised the council's consultation portal and paper copies deposited at suitable locations as per the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) and as required by regulation 35.
- 3.13 A consultation report is attached at Appendix B. In summary the themes from the consultation were:

Theme	Summary response
Objection to development of the site, including development land in the Green Belt	The site was removed from the Green Belt and is allocated for development in the adopted Local Plan. Development of strategic sites are critical to delivery of the Local Plan strategy.
Traffic and highway concerns including the road networks ability to support the level of development identified and conflict between road users during mineral extraction and construction.	Transport assessment work informed the allocation of the site in the Local Plan. This work was the subject of engagement with the County Council as Highway Authority and examined by the Local Plan Inspector. Active travel sits at the heart of the strategy, and the impact of the development will be mitigated through several potential measures to be agreed as planning applications come forward.

	<p>The traffic generation and impact of the proposed development will be tested as part of the preparation of a Transport Assessment to support a future planning application. This will be the subject to further consultation. A construction management plan will be necessary as part of a future planning application setting out how construction traffic will be managed.</p>
<p>Accessibility and movement including the importance of ensuring connectivity to existing infrastructure including safe walking and cycling routes and adequate bus service provision</p>	<p>The SPD includes a transport and movement strategy which promotes new active travel and bus routes. Proposals include provision of new local services and facilities, located in accessible parts of the site.</p>
<p>Concerns regarding impact upon the ecology of the site</p>	<p>The SPD identifies the need to retain veteran trees and for hedgerows to be incorporated into the new development. The site will be required to deliver a biodiversity net gain.</p>
<p>Provision of recreational facilities and community sports provision including concerns around provision of dual use facilities at the secondary school</p>	<p>The landowner and Council officers have been in discussions with Sport England regarding the matter and provision of community facilities is now proposed on the eastern edge of the site.</p>
<p>Impact upon the character of the Garden Village</p>	<p>The SPD seeks to limit the impact on the existing community, the SPD proposes a series of green buffers that will function as a degree of separation. Detailed design work will be carried out and will be the subject to further consultation with the community Suitable architectural styles will be determined at the planning application stage as part of a design code.</p>
<p>Community engagement with regards to emerging development proposals, including uncertainty with regards to phasing and delivery of the site</p>	<p>An SPD is a planning document to guide future development and as such goes into detail that can be considered complex. It is apparent concise information on the proposals for the site is required. The landowner Gascoyne Estates has committed to providing further high-level information on a website regarding the nature, timescales and phasing of development.</p>

- 3.14 Other issues included climate change and standards for sustainable buildings, provision of a range of affordable homes, flood risk and noise pollution, particularly in the construction phase.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 3.15 In line with the requirements of The Environmental Assessment of Plans & Programmes Regulations 2004 (the SEA Regulations) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) an SEA/HRA screening assessment was undertaken to determine whether an SEA/HRA was required for the North West Hatfield Development Framework SPD. The appropriate consultation bodies (Historic England, Natural England and the Environment Agency) were consulted on the SEA/HRA Screening Report. 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

- 3.16 On adoption the SPD it will become a material consideration in determining planning applications for development of the North West Hatfield Strategic site. The masterplan will set the framework for more detailed planning of the site including development of design codes.

Implications

4 Legal Implication(s)

- 4.1 The statutory basis for Supplementary Planning Documents and their preparation is set out by a range of acts and associated regulations, including the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) and the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended). The need to determine whether an SPD requires a Strategic Environmental Assessment is required under The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 and the need to determine whether an SPD requires a Habitats Regulation Assessment is required under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. The requirements of these Acts and Regulations have been adhered to during the production of the North West Hatfield Development Framework SPD. 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 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 latter of which requires a masterplan to be produced and agreed by the Council prior to any application for development.

- 6.2 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 as detailed above.

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 of 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 and a six week public consultation which ran between 08 November and 20 December 2024. The results of the consultation have been considered (as identified above and in Appendix B) and the SPD document amended accordingly.

13 Link to Corporate Priorities

- 13.1 The subject of this report is linked to a number of the Council's Corporate Priorities, in particular 'Homes to be Proud of' as it will help to deliver new high quality homes, including social and affordable homes. It will also contribute to 'Enabling an economy that delivers for everyone' by providing new employment space and neighbourhood centres within the development, and to 'Together, create opportunities for our communities' promoting health and wellbeing with the provision of new school and recreational facilities.

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.

Matthew Wilson
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Background papers: None

Appendices

Appendix A: North West Hatfield SPD

Appendix B: North West Hatfield SPD Consultation Statement

Appendix C: North West Hatfield SPD Adoption Statement