

Statement on behalf of Picture srl

Examination of North Hertfordshire District Council Draft Local Plan 2011-2031

In respect of Matter 25 – Inclusion of access route into GA2 strategic allocation

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Submission document

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Extract from ED180 matters and issues:

For each of the new areas of land proposed through the main modifications:

- a) Is the inclusion of the new area of land for allocation necessary for soundness?
- b) Is the new area of land proposed deliverable? In particular, is it:
 - (i) confirmed by all of the landowners involved as being available for the use proposed?
 - (ii) supported by evidence to demonstrate that safe and appropriate access for vehicles and pedestrians can be provided?
 - (iii) deliverable, having regard to the provision of the necessary infrastructure and services, and any environmental or other constraints?
- c) Is the inclusion of the new area of land justified and appropriate in terms of the likely impacts of the development?

25.2 If/where the new area of land proposed for allocation is currently in the Green Belt:

- a) Do exceptional circumstances exist to warrant its allocation? If so, what are they?
- b) What is the nature and extent of the harm to the Green Belt of removing the new area of land from it?
- c) To what extent would the consequent impacts on the purposes of the Green Belt be ameliorated or reduced to the lowest reasonably practicable extent?

If/where relevant:

- d) If this new land were to be developed as proposed, would the adjacent Green Belt continue to serve at least one of the five purposes of Green Belts, or would the Green Belt function be undermined by its allocation?
 - e) Will the Green Belt boundary proposed need to be altered at the end of the plan period, or is it capable of enduring beyond then?
 - f) Are the proposed Green Belt boundaries consistent with the Plan's strategy for meeting identified requirements for sustainable development?
 - g) Has the Green Belt boundary around the new land been defined clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent? Does it avoid including land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open?
- Picture is the owner and promoter of strategic allocation GA2.
 - This statement is submitted in support of the Council's proposed MM382 to add land to the GA2 allocation to include an access route from Mendip Way.

a) Soundness

The inclusion of this 'access finger' is preferable, in order to make it even clearer how GA2 will take its main access from Mendip Way within the existing Great Ashby settlement. However, from the first masterplan submitted during consultation on the North Hertfordshire Local Plan in 2016, this corridor has always been shown as the access point and, in fact, it could be used for this purpose without allocation, as it was removed from the Green Belt by the Local Plan 1996 (see plan attached at Appendix 2), which

demonstrates that the 'access finger' is included within the original Great Ashby settlement boundary, which has now been built out).

The inclusion of this main access route in the GA2 housing allocation, as shown on the amended Policies Map at Appendix 1, is also for completeness to show the full extent of site GA2.

The inclusion of the access finger is also consistent with, and necessary to implement, SP18 d) dealing with the GA2 allocation, which dictates:

- Principal access from Mendip Way with:
 - i. provision for sustainable modes of transport having regard to the Stevenage Mobility Strategy
 - ii. comprehensive integration into the existing pedestrian and cycle, public transport and road networks

b) Deliverability

(i) Land ownership

This 'access finger' is not owned by Picture, but rather by:

- North Herts District Council – author of the Local Plan
- Croudace Homes – see letter attached at Appendix 3 offering access on commercial terms
- Homes England – see letter attached at Appendix 4 offering access on commercial terms
- Stevenage Borough Council – see letter attached at Appendix 5 offering access on commercial terms
- Weston Settlement Trust (controlled by Trustees of the extended family of the shareholders of Picture)

The parties have confirmed their willingness to negotiate access on commercial terms, with Homes England expressing interest in participating in the development of the site.

(ii) Safe and appropriate access

This new land proposed for inclusion serves as the main access point to strategic allocation GA2 providing a safe access to vehicles and pedestrians.

The attached statement at Appendix 6a from Wormald Burrows, civil engineering consultants appointed by Picture, reinforces the comprehensive highway and traffic study undertaken over the period 2016-17. This has tested junctions, identified where alterations might be needed, and is deemed by County Highways to offer appropriate access into the GA2 development.

It will be seen that the roundabout furthest removed from Mendip Way offers two arms of access into GA2, which enables a circular bus route to be introduced into the development and for emergency access to be available in the event of an accident on either the short stretch of road between the two roundabouts, or on one of the access roads into GA2. This twin access arrangement offers flexibility in the event of such an emergency.

There will be numerous pedestrian routes into the development from the existing Great Ashby development, in addition to a comprehensive cycleway from the main Mendip Way access.

During the previous hearing on the GA2 strategic allocation in February 2018, the Highway Authority confirmed its support for the subject allocation anticipating that the New Transport Plan for the Stevenage area is making appropriate allowances for the required improvements (on key junctions and other pinch points) to the existing road network.

The HCC team has signed off a Stage 1 Road Safety Audit report (attached at Appendix 7) in respect of the proposed Means of Access technical drawing submitted by Wormald Burrows on behalf of Picture.

(iii) Deliverability

This new 'access finger' extension to GA2 is not for housing development. However, the statement attached at Appendix 6b from Wormald Burrows confirms that the conclusions reached by the comprehensive reports which accompanied our 2016 submissions to the Local Plan remain accurate and valid. Such reports addressed all infrastructure matters and included a Flood Risk Assessment and more detailed Foul and Surface Water Drainage Assessment.

As part of its Regulation 19 representations, the promoter submitted extended Ecology and Heritage surveys and reports addressing potential issues and constraints on those matters.

c) Impacts of the Development

The inclusion of this access finger into the GA2 allocation does not in any way change the assessment of the likely impacts of the development of the entire GA2 allocation, which were extensively addressed in the Local Plan and supporting documentation as well as in the representations and statements submitted in the context of Regulation

19 representations (rep ID 4138) and ahead of the hearing session on Matter 10 held on 26 February 2018. In brief:

- The proposed development is confined to the very outer edges of strategic parcels of the Green Belt minimising impact on the wider character of the area.
- Topographical features, existing retained woodland and new planting buffers ensure optimal visual containment effectively mitigating and minimising its landscape impact.
- The site preliminary master plan, which has informed SP18, identifies green corridors to ensure connectivity between woodlands and into wider countryside ensuring optimal green infrastructure connections.
- An Ecological Scoping Survey completed by Picture identified a series of measures to allow the conservation of protected species, priority habitats and the site's biodiversity.
- Appropriate surface drainage strategies and flood risk prevention measures have been identified in the detailed technical reports by Wormald Burrows.
- The indirect impact of the proposed development on heritage assets in the vicinity have been assessed in detail by a specific Heritage Impact Assessment and is not considered to have any notable harm to their significance.

The Council has extensively made its case for the GA2 allocation also with regard to the existence of exceptional circumstances for releasing the land subject of the housing development from the Green Belt. These apply equally to this additional 'access' land, without which it is not possible to fully access the site. However, this 'access finger', as stated previously, is already excluded from the Green Belt under the Current District Plan where it forms part of the Great Ashby settlement (see plan at Appendix 1). The only reason it does not have houses built on it is the safety clearances imposed by National Grid and Power Gen in respect of the 400kVA and 132 kVA pylon lines.

25.2

Since the inclusion of this additional land into the housing allocation does not alter the proposed new Green Belt boundary presented in the submitted Local Plan or the extent of land that has already been proposed for release from the Green Belt, matters raised under 25.2 are not relevant.