

**RAPLEYS**

Prepared for  
North Hertfordshire District Council/Bellcross Homes

# STATEMENT OF COMMON GROUND

## LAND AT HIGHOVER FARM HITCHIN

Our Ref: CB/503/55/1

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) has been prepared by Rapleys on behalf of Bellcross Homes (the site owner) at the request of North Hertfordshire District Council (the Council) in relation to the Emerging Local Plan 2011-2031.
- 1.2 Land at Highover Farm, Hitchin, herein referred to as “the site”, has been identified by the Council within the 2016 Pre-Submission Local Plan (Regulation 19 Publication) as strategic housing allocation for the provision of approximately 700 new homes. It is understood that the Council considers the site to be suitable and available for development within the first 10 years of the Plan period.
- 1.3 This SoCG has been prepared to assist the forthcoming Examination in Public (EiP) with the details of the site, a review of relevant surveys and reports that have been undertaken, phasing, build-out rates and details of infrastructure provision. Various documents are produced for reference.
- 1.4 This statement supplements the previous agreement between North Hertfordshire District Council and Bellcross Homes that was submitted to the examination in November 2017 (ED30) (the first statement).
- 1.5 The first statement set out areas of agreement insofar as they related to broad issues of delivery and infrastructure provision in order to inform the consideration of strategic matters through the examination. The first statement set out the broad parameters of the development proposed for this site.
- 1.6 This supplementary agreement provides additional information on site-specific issues and constraints. The two statements should be read alongside one another. In the event of any conflict between the two statements, this latter statement should take precedent.
- 1.7 The contents of this statement are without prejudice to the submission and determination of any future planning application(s) on this land.
- 1.8 The Council’s own assessments and evidence have been supplemented by ongoing discussion between the parties and the provision of additional information by Bellcross Homes as set out in this statement.
- 1.9 This SoCG sets out those matters which have been agreed between the site promotor and the Council.
- 1.10 The details of the site are set out in the following chapters:
- **Section 2:** Provides details of the site, planning history and relevant background
  - **Section 3:** Outlines the proposals for the site including quantum of development, housing, types and mix and any expected infrastructure required to accommodate the proposals.
  - **Section 4:** Provides details of the searches, discussions and pre-application enquires that have been undertaken by the site promotor, including results and responses obtained.
  - **Section 5:** Outlines any expected mitigation that may be required and an indication of its delivery.
  - **Section 6:** Contains details on the deliverability of the scheme, including phasing.
  - **Section 7:** Outlines any expected mitigation that may be required and an indication of its delivery.
  - **Section 8:** Details of outstanding matters to be resolved.
  - **Section 9:** Conclusions.

## 2 THE SITE AND RELEVANT BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The 37 hectare site is located to the north-east of the existing settlement of Hitchin within the Green Belt. A site location plan is attached at **Appendix 1**.
- 2.2 The site is currently in agricultural use, defined by arable land, grassland and hedgerows. It is gently sloping, with the highest points to the centre and south-east of the site.
- 2.3 Surrounding the site is residential, and to a lesser extent on the other side of the railway line, employment development to the south and west. The northern boundary is marked by the First Capital Connect line between Hitchin and Cambridge, with agricultural land beyond. The site's eastern boundary is bound by Stotfold Road which links Hitchin with Letchworth Garden City.
- 2.4 Figure 1 below demonstrates the relationship of the site to the surrounding area through an aerial photograph.



Figure 1. Annotated Google Aerial Screenshot of the Site (Google, 2017)

- 2.5 There are no relevant historic planning applications in terms of the site's allocation.
- 2.6 On behalf of the site owner, Rapleys LLP submitted representations to the emerging Local Plan as follows:
  - March 2012/2013 -SHLAA 'Call for Sites' consultations
  - January 2014 -SHLAA Update 'Call for Sites' consultation
  - January 2015- Draft Local Plan consultation

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- November 2016 - Pre- submission consultation

2.7 These representations provided detailed information that demonstrated the availability, suitability and viability of the site for development, which are examined in more detail below. The site owner's latest representations to the Pre-submission consultation are attached at **Appendix 2**.

2.8 In November 2017, a Statement of Common Ground signed by the site owner and Council was submitted to the Inspector in respect of Matter 6 (Deliverability) for the EiP. A copy is attached at **Appendix 3**.

### 3 THE PROPOSALS

- 3.1 The site owner has demonstrated through various submissions to the emerging Local Plan and pre-application enquiries (see Section 4 below) that the site is capable of accommodating approximately 700 new homes which the emerging Local Plan proposes which account for approximately 5% of the District's objectively assessed housing need between 2011 and 2031.
- 3.2 The site owner contends that the provision of self-build development should be a consideration rather than a requirement, which is further discussed in Section 8 of the SoCG.
- 3.3 Figure 2 below demonstrates an indicative masterplan on a net developable area of 22.45 hectares, with 9.67 hectares of public open space and 2 hectares of sport pitches (including within proposed primary school grounds). A copy of this plan (to scale) is included in Appendix 4 and was provided to the Council and Design Review Panel on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2017.

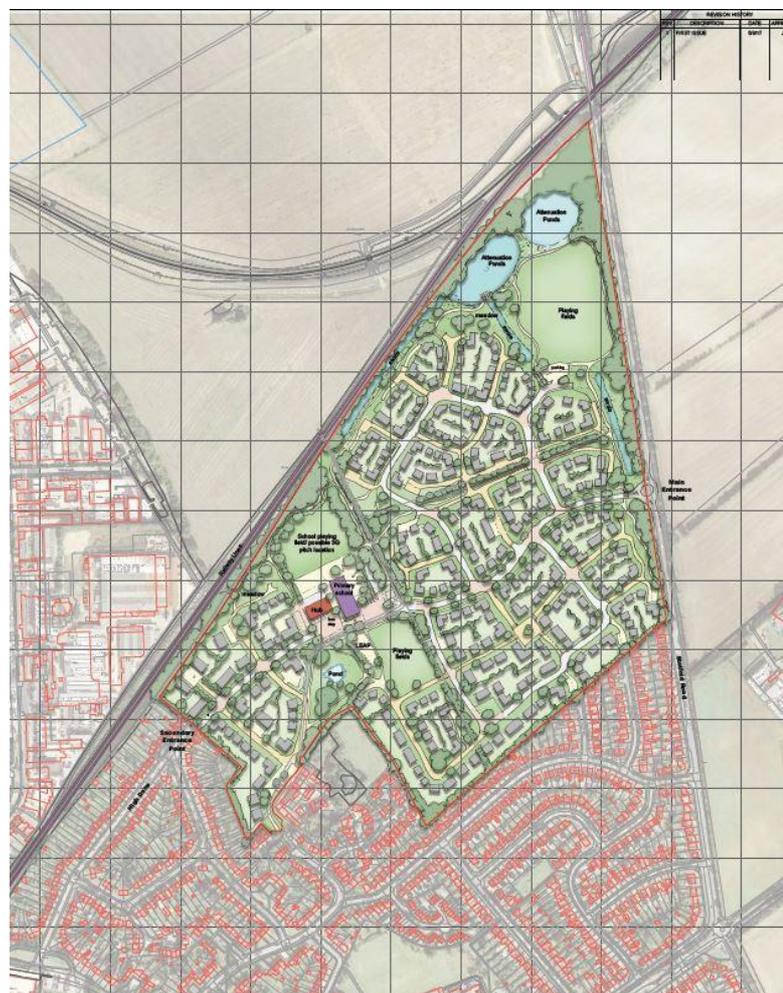


Figure 2. Illustrative Masterplan (Dwg Ref: PL1685-VW-001, nts)

- 3.4 A series of indicative plans are also enclosed within this SoCG which detail the potential uses of the various parts of the site:
- An indicative density/ land use plan (Appendix 5)
  - A concept movement and access plan (Appendix 6)

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- 3.5 It is envisaged that the development, as shown above, would comprise circa 700 homes in total. With regards to housing type and mix, the site owner aspires to meeting both affordable housing and tenure requirements of the emerging Local Plan, and at this time it is not envisaged that viability will become an issue (to be confirmed through viability assessment).
- 3.6 The Council's dwelling estimate of 700 homes set out in the emerging Local Plan is based upon the findings of the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA). This assumed a site-wide gross density of approximately 20 dwellings per hectare (dpha) making allowances for the constraints and site-specific observations identified in that document.
- 3.7 Informed by the site's existing characteristics and surroundings, the site owner considers that this can be accommodated by providing a range of densities of between 25 dpha and 40 dpha arranged appropriately across the site with higher densities around the new community hub, and the lowest densities at the edges of the development area. Building heights range from 1 up to 2.5 storeys, albeit building heights are generally limited to 2 storeys again around the edges of the development and along the frontage with Stotfold Road.
- 3.8 In terms of landscaping, and informed by advice from the applicant's landscape consultant, the site owner proposes, inter alia, the following:
- Retaining existing hedgerows, trees and ponds where possible and provision of landscape screening and buffer zones at key locations to create a rural edge and gradual transition to the countryside;
  - A sustainable drainage system that utilises green spaces;
  - A public open space strategy including school playing fields, community sports pitches and neighbourhood play areas;
  - A hierarchy of open space types to add interest, aid legibility and establish character;
  - Creation of green streets to create strong visual and physical green links between the site and adjacent surroundings.
- 3.9 The masterplan was also informed by advice from the consultancy team, whose findings will be set out in detail in the following reports that will support the planning application:
- Air Quality Assessment
  - Agricultural Land Classification Survey
  - Archaeological and Cultural Heritage Assessment
  - Ecological Assessment
  - Flood Risk Assessment
  - Ground Conditions Baseline Survey
  - Landscape Visual Impact Assessment
  - Noise Impact Assessment
  - Transport Assessment
  - Utilities Report
- 3.10 The detailed layout of the development will continue to be developed in consultation with relevant stakeholders and informed by the findings of the Environmental Impact Assessment, further pre-application advice and / or community engagement as applicable. A final masterplan reflecting the outcomes of these processes will be presented and secured as part of a future planning application.

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## 4 WORK RELATIVE TO THE PLANNING APPLICATION TO DATE

- 4.1 Various enquiries and searches have been undertaken to date in respect of the residential development of the site.
- 4.2 Initially, in February 2016, a pre-application meeting was held with the Council where Officers confirmed support for the site's allocation to meet the District's housing need and advised that a formal pre-application and EIA Scoping Package be submitted. A copy of the meeting minutes is attached at **Appendix 8**.
- 4.3 In August 2016, a follow-up meeting was held with the Council where the scope of pre-application consultation was agreed as well as a collaborative approach to promoting the site in the Local Plan process. A copy of the meeting minutes is attached at **Appendix 9**.
- 4.4 In March 2017, a scoping request (17/00680/1SCP) was made to the Council in support of a planning application for approximately 700 new homes. A copy of the Scoping Opinion Letter dated 10<sup>th</sup> May 2017, which confirms the proposals constitute EIA development, is attached at **Appendix 7**.
- 4.5 In May 2017, a pre-application meeting and site visit was held with Officers where it was agreed that the proposal would contribute to the local authority's five year housing supply. Officers re-confirmed the local authority's support for the principle of development and it was agreed that the proposal would need to be supported by technical evidence and undergo public consultation. A copy of the meeting minutes is attached at **Appendix 10**.
- 4.6 In June 2017, two public exhibitions were held with residents and local businesses (see invite leaflet attached **Appendix 11**), where infrastructure was the key matter raised.
- 4.7 In September 2017, formal written feedback (attached at **Appendix 12**) was received from the Council which confirmed:
- In advance of the current Development Plan being replaced, very special circumstances would need to be demonstrated.
  - There would be a presumption in favour of supporting the proposal, notwithstanding the site's Green Belt status, given emerging Local Plan's advanced stage and the Site's inclusion as a strategic housing site.
- 4.8 Most recently, in October 2017, a Design Review Panel (DRP) Meeting took place to agree design parameters as far as possible in advance of a formal planning application submission, where the following observations and recommendations were made by the DRP:
- The site is a logical extension to Hitchin and the design intention to deliver a landscaped scheme that integrates into the wider landscape setting is supported.
  - The site presents an exciting opportunity to deliver a new 21<sup>st</sup> century neighbourhood to meet house need and deliver exemplar development in terms of design and sustainability.
  - Further contextual analysis and appraisals informed by technical assessment is needed to support the final masterplan strategy.
- 4.9 The education team at HCC have also been consulted by the Council with their feedback attached at **Appendix 13**. Furthermore, Rapleys on behalf of the site owner has engaged in initial discussions with the education team where Officers provided their support for an on-site primary school with further details on financial contributions for inter alia, off-site secondary education at The Priory School, Hitchin to be discussed and negotiated as part of a future planning application.

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4.10 The site owner would be willing to enter into a Section 106 Agreement (as part of a forthcoming planning application) to include obligations towards education provision and other matters that are directly associated with the proposals.

4.11 A full suite of technical reports will be prepared to support the proposed residential development, including the following:

- Planning Statement;
- Design and Access Statement;
- An Environmental Statement, comprising:
  - Historic Environment Desk Based Assessment
  - Landscape Visual Impact Appraisal
  - Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy
  - Ground Conditions
  - Noise and Vibration Assessment
  - Air Quality Assessment
  - Ecological Report
  - Utilities Report
  - Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) Survey
  - Arboricultural Survey and Assessment
  - Transport Assessment and Travel Plan

4.12

#### **WORK CARRIED OUT TO DATE RELATIVE TO PROPOSED ALLOCATION AND EIA**

4.13 As previously confirmed, a scoping request was made by Rapleys in respect of the Land at Highover Farm (between Stotfold Road and Highover Way), North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) subsequently responded in a letter dated 27th April 2017 with a Formal EIA scoping opinion. Further comments were also included in the pre-application consultation response issued by NHDC dated 08 May 2017 (ref. PN/998/17).

4.14 The comments from this correspondence along with any discussion and further agreement with the relevant authorities has been detailed by each discipline in turn below, alongside additional relevant information derived from the Council's own site investigations and evidence. The work carried out to date has also been indicated along with any outcomes.

#### **Archaeology and heritage**

4.15 A Historic Environment Desk Based Assessment (November 2017) and Geophysics Survey have been carried out by the site owner to assess the likely nature of archaeological deposits and features, which may be impacted upon by the site owner's proposals.

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- 4.16 It is likely that trial trenching will be required to take place in negotiation with HCC, however it is considered that this will not preclude the site from being able to accommodate and deliver strategic residential-led development.
- 4.17 In addition, it is acknowledged that the farm buildings at Highover Farm (outside the application boundary) are currently under consideration by Historic England to including them on their statutory list. Notwithstanding this, the current arrangement proposed in the southern area delivers an appropriate amount of ‘breathing space’ around the farm buildings and a coherent interface with new the new development, albeit, evidently this matter will need to be kept under review.
- 4.18 Other heritage assets which might be affected by the development are identified in Policy SP17 of the emerging Local Plan and the Scoping Report. These assets and their significance will be considered in further detail as the detailed development proposals for the site are progressed. The measures identified below in relation to landscape and Green Belt may assist in screening the proposed new development from these heritage assets and / or maintaining their setting.

#### **Flood risk and drainage**

- 4.19 **Water Resources and FRA** - An FRA has now been initially drafted in accordance with the agreed scope and is currently being reviewed subject to the results and review of the intrusive investigations and the final masterplan arrangement. It will be provided to the local authority with the planning application.
- 4.20 **Surface Water** - The Formal EIA scoping opinion from NHDC included comments from Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) acting as Lead Local Flood Authority. This included the requirement for a drainage assessment as well as a Flood Risk Assessment. Their comments highlighted the need to give preference to infiltration before discharging surface water to a water course.
- 4.21 The proposed drainage strategy is to solely utilise infiltration since there are no watercourses or rivers adjacent to the Site. Following further discussions between the site owner and HCC, it was confirmed that if the Site is to utilise infiltration then there would be the requirement for infiltration testing to support an outline planning application. This is to ensure a feasible discharge mechanism for the Site, as this cannot be conditioned as part of the planning consent.
- 4.22 Due to the proximity to the rail line, Network Rail have also been consulted in respect to the proposed development. The main issue raised is the need to ensure that no soakaway, or surface water retention ponds can be within 20m of the boundary with Network Rail land. However, this has been taken into consideration within the drainage strategy.
- 4.23 At present the intrusive ground investigation has been completed and the drainage assessment is currently being reviewed by the site owner, although the drainage strategy has not yet been issued to HCC for review, but will be with the planning application. However, initial results indicate that a drainage strategy based on infiltration is achievable.
- 4.24 **Foul Water** - Anglian Water have confirmed through the plan-making process that there is capacity within the environmental consent for Hitchin Water Recycling Centre to accommodate planned growth and that the emerging Local Plan provides a sound basis for the delivery of wastewater infrastructure.
- 4.25 It is possible to drain part of the Site by gravity to the local Anglian Water (AW) sewer network, however, the remainder of the Site would need to be connected to a new foul water pumping station and then water pumped to the AW network. At present a foul

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drainage strategy has been developed for the proposed scheme and this will be submitted with the planning application.

- 4.26 The Anglian Water Pre-Planning Assessment Report indicates that the foul drainage from the proposed development is in the catchment of Hitchin Water Recycling Centre, which currently has capacity to treat the flows from the proposed development site.

### **Ground Conditions**

- 4.27 A Phase 1 Environmental Risk Assessment has since been undertaken and completed by the site owner and would be submitted in support of an application for the proposed development.
- 4.28 The desk study indicates that historically the Site was agricultural land and has remained largely undeveloped to date. No significant area of potentially infilled land is recorded onsite. The study considers that the potential for environmental risk and liabilities is considered to be Low to Very Low, although there is a potential Moderate/Low risk posed by made ground in relation to the adjacent former railway line and former onsite structures.

### **Noise and Vibration**

- 4.29 The scope of the baseline noise survey and the assessment methodology has been discussed and agreed with the Environmental Health Department of North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC). Further comments with respect to noise were also included in the pre-application consultation response issued by NHDC, ref. PN/998/17 dated 08 May 2017.
- 4.30 The baseline noise and vibration survey has been completed and WSP have carried out initial analysis of the measurement results and a noise and vibration statement will be included as part of the planning application.

### **Air Quality Assessment**

- 4.31 The Formal EIA scoping opinion from NHDC confirmed that there would be a need for an Air Quality Assessment including a Construction Phase Dust Assessment.
- 4.32 However, the scoping opinion also indicated that;
- “irrespective of the outcome of the air quality modelling there will be an expectation of measures to be proposed that will mitigate the impact of the development on Air Quality in North Hertfordshire.”*
- 4.33 On the basis of the coverage of air quality monitoring in the area in the vicinity of the Site, it was agreed with North Herts EHO (David Carr) that additional monitoring would not be needed and that local authority monitoring data would be used to conduct verification of the modelling.
- 4.34 It has further been agreed with North Herts EHO that a cumulative impact of road vehicle exhaust emissions from other committed development are considered within any traffic datasets issued.’
- 4.35 Following further comments on scope, the requirement for dispersal modelling has been requested by NHDC. Therefore as part of the Air Quality assessment dispersal modelling will be undertaken and submitted with the planning application.

### **Ecological Report**

- 4.36 There are two local wildlife sites adjacent to the site to the north of the railway line covering the railway bank and road verges respectively. However, no fundamental

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ecological constraint to development has been identified on the immediately adjoining northern area of the site through the preparation of the plan. The need for Phase 1 and species surveys were identified during the Plan's preparation.

- 4.37 In June 2014 Mouchel undertook a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA). This PEA included a site walkover survey and desk study which identified potential ecological constraints to the proposed development.
- 4.38 Following the stage one (PEA) survey, discussions and scoping with the NHDC EHO were undertaken to ensure appropriate Ecology Stage 2 surveys were undertaken by the site owner to inform and support the planning application:
- 4.39 A summary of the findings of the stage 2 surveys are detailed below.
- Breeding birds - The Site supports a locally / district important bird assemblage. Consideration to this will be given within the masterplan.
  - Barn owls - No signs of barn owl were recorded within the Site.
  - Great crested newts - Presence / absence surveys have been undertaken within three ponds adjacent to the Site. No great crested newts were recorded.
  - Common reptiles - A low population of common reptiles were recorded on Site.
  - Invertebrates - Surveys concluded that Site is of low value for invertebrates.
  - Bats - No roosts were recorded within the Site or within the adjacent farm buildings.
- 4.40 Biodiversity enhancements have been considered and included in order to inform and develop the masterplan for the Site - these enhancements include;
- Retention of existing trees and hedgerows
  - New native tree planting
  - New native hedgerow planting
  - Wildflower meadow planting
  - Bird boxes and bat boxes
  - Mitigation specific to farmland birds
  - Pond creation, enhancement, and SuDS design within the Site
  - Other wildlife habitat improvements

### **Utilities Report**

- 4.41 Various utility enquiries and searches have been undertaken to date by the site owner. The appraisal process consisted of a desk study, data research and consultation with utility companies and regulatory bodies such as the HSE and has fully investigated Foul Drainage, Water Supply, Electricity Supply, Gas Supply and Telecommunications.
- 4.42 This work has indicated that sufficient capacity is available for the proposed development for all utility services, with some modest offsite reinforcements required for gas supply. As such there would be no constraint to development in relation to Utilities.
- 4.43 The HSE on-line search tool was also used to check for Hazardous Plant in the vicinity of the Site. The response report stated that the Site does not lie within the consultation distance (CD) of a major hazard or a major accident hazard pipeline.

### **Agricultural Land Classification Survey**

- 4.44 An 'Agricultural Land Assessment' has been undertaken by the site owner, and results highlight that the land is classified as a mix of 2 and subgrade 3a.
- 4.45 Where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, Paragraph 112 of the NPPF says local planning authorities should seek to use poorer quality land in preference to that of a higher quality. The Council's Housing and Green Belt

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background paper (HOU1, p.21) demonstrates that limiting new housing development on the basis of agricultural land quality would significantly impact the District's ability to meet its housing needs.

### Transport Assessment and Travel Plan

- 4.46 The emerging Local Plan identifies that principal access to the site should be taken from Stotfold Road with appropriate integration provided in to the local highway network. A number of existing roads run to the edge of the allocated land including Highover Way and High Dane.
- 4.47 There has been ongoing engagement between the landowner, the District Council and Hertfordshire County Council as highway authority who have raised no objection in principle to the proposed access points or the allocation more generally.
- 4.48 Formal scoping has been undertaken by the site owner with Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) as highway authority and with Highways England in relation to the impact on the strategic network, as a result of the development proposals.
- 4.49 The Formal EIA scoping opinion from North Hertfordshire District Council requested a number of extra junctions to consider as part of the Transport Assessment. In addition, NHDC also required an assessment of the cycle and pedestrian access to the Site and the wider area to be included in any assessment in line with the aims of the Council's Transport Strategy. As part of the Transport Assessment the requirements of NHDC will be included.
- 4.50 HCC and their consultants, AECOM, operate the Welwyn/Hatfield, Stevenage/Hitchin and Baldock/Letchworth Highway Model (WHaSH-BL) to test development proposals. The development proposals at the site were already included as an assumption within the WHaSH-BL model when this was used to test and inform the draft NHDC Local Plan. However, the detail of the proposed development and the access arrangements were required by HCC to be tested in further detail within the model. This would also provide the required flows for Junction modelling, which is to be included as part of the Transport Assessment.
- 4.51 Modelled peak hour outputs from the base year and four future year model scenarios have been produced to enable assessment of the proposals. The five scenarios for which outputs have been provided by AECOM include;
1. Base Year 2013 (as this is the validated base year of the model);
  2. Do-Minimum in a 2021 forecast modelling year;
  3. Do Minimum plus full Highover Farm development in a 2021 forecast modelling year;
  4. Do Minimum for forecast year 2031;
  5. Do Minimum plus full Highover Farm development for forecast year 2031.
- 4.52 The full list of junctions for which junction modelling is to be undertaken is detailed below (which includes the additional junctions requested by NHDC);
- Cambridge Road / Woolgrove Road / Willian Road
  - Stotfold Road / A505 / Queenswood Drive
  - Woolgrove Road / Cadwell Lane / Grove Road / Wilbury Way
  - Woolgrove Road/High Dane
  - Woolgrove Road/Highover Way
  - Stotfold Road/Grovelands Avenue
  - Wilbury Hills Road/Icknield Way

- Arlesey Road/Wilbury Hills Road/Stotfold Road

4.53 In addition, following discussions with Highways England, junction modelling of A1 (M) Junction 9 will also be included within the Transport Assessment.

4.54 Local Traffic Surveys have also been undertaken and completed within a neutral traffic month to obtain 2017 baseline information and validation data for the junction models.

4.55 At present the junction modelling still needs to be completed. However, as part of AECOM's review of the WHaSH Model they have provided a summary of the strategic modelling tests for the benefit of HCC, which is detailed below (although this is subject to further junction modelling):

*"In summary, the model tests have demonstrated the following:*

*The highway network in and around Highover Farm will be affected by some capacity issues in and around the North East of Hitchin by 2031 irrespective of whether the Highover Farm development is commenced or not.*

*The development will not have a significant detrimental impact on the local highway network. The majority of the junctions assessed operate within their capacity restraints and with no notable delay increase as a consequence of the development.*

*The new junction which would be required along Stotfold Road as part of the new development is not expected to experience any issues of over-capacity.*

*The junctions where capacity problems were identified are identical in both scenarios, both with and without the new development at Highover Farm. These are the Woolgrove Road / Grove Road and Cambridge Road / Woolgrove Road signalised junctions, and the Stotfold Road / Bedford Road roundabout.*

*Improvements will be needed at the signalised junctions where over-capacity is already an issue, particularly the Cambridge Road / Woolgrove Road signals. However, since any improvements would attract more traffic from the new development a contribution towards these improvements from the developer may be considered justifiable.*

*Possible mitigation measures may be required at a number of existing junctions in the network although no assessment has been made by AECOM as part of this undertaking."*

4.56 Detailed measures will be subject to further discussion as the scheme is developed (see paragraphs 5.4 and 5.6 below)

### **Landscape and Green Belt**

4.57 The Council's evidence shows that the site falls within the Arlesey - Great Wymondley (CG16a, pp.103-108d) landscape character area. This is a large parcel that stretches across the entire district and is considered to be of low to moderate sensitivity and low landscape value. Notwithstanding this point the emerging Local Plan recognises that the undeveloped gap between Hitchin and Letchworth Garden City is relatively narrow in this location. This is the key factor behind the assessment of this site in the Council's Green Belt Review as making a significant contribution to Green Belt purposes.

The landscape and Green Belt gap between the two settlements will be appropriately treated in the final scheme, as required by Policy SP17 of the emerging Local Plan and informed by the Landscape Visual Impact Appraisal to be completed as part of the Environmental Statement. This is most likely to be achieved through the provision of green infrastructure features at the northern end of the site and along the eastern boundary as shown in the indicative masterplan.

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## 5 MITIGATION

- 5.1 The emerging proposals for the site have been drafted taking into account a range of planning matters, including but not limited to transport, landscape, heritage, ecology and education. In some instances, it is recognised that mitigation will be required. Open space will be provided on site and therefore no off-site mitigation in this respect is required.
- 5.2 The site will reserve sufficient land to accommodate a 2FE primary school and appropriate financial contributions will be made towards its delivery. The modification below to Policy SP17(e) is proposed and agreed to clarify this point in response to the Statement submitted by HCC to the Matter 10 hearings along with a minor consequential amendment to paragraph 4.205 replacing the word “secure” with “deliver”:
- ~~On-site~~ **Approximately 2 hectares of land reserved for provision of a new primary school**
- 5.3 Where appropriate, further financial contributions will be made to offset the impact of development on the local area, and these will be secured through a Section 106 Agreement. Such contributions might include some of the following:
- Education (including secondary school, library and youth facilities)
  - Transport (including traffic calming and junction improvements)
- 5.4 Typically, contributions for large scale development as this are paid at phased stages of development dependant upon phasing of the scheme. There are currently no extenuating circumstances identified to indicate that comparable approach could not be taken for this development.
- 5.5 It has been agreed with the HCC that a new bus route will help support easy access to local public transport for future occupiers of the proposed development. This could be provided prior to the completion of the development (exact timing to be subject to agreement with the HCC) to encourage the early adoption of sustainable travel patterns. It is also acknowledged that works and/or contributions towards the impact of development on the local and wider road network may also be necessary.
- 5.6 Ecological mitigation may also be required and allowance for this has been built into the masterplan.
- 5.7 Any further mitigation that may be required as part of the proposals can be discussed and agreed with the Council, potentially prior to a planning application being submitted.

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## 6 DELIVERABILITY

- 6.1 It is envisaged at this stage that 100 dwellings per year will be delivered over a total completion period of 7 to 8 years. On the basis that planning permission is granted without the need to appeal, and subject to clearance of all necessary pre-commencement conditions, it is estimated that development could commence within 12 months from the date of planning permission.
- 6.2 The site owner is in discussions with potential development partners to bring forward the site via a joint venture as soon as possible.
- 6.3 The site owner has an aspiration to deliver residential-led development on the site and is currently exploring a number of joint-venture opportunities that have come forward. Within this context, the site owner wishes to establish the principle of development on the site by proposing to submit an outline planning application and in order to regularise the above under a future outline permission, the site owner would accept appropriately worded conditions in respect of the following:
- Phasing delivery plan
  - Detailed landscape strategy (including inter alia, green/blue infrastructure, planting implementation scheme and boundary treatments)
  - Detailed urban design strategy (including inter alia, design codes, materials schedule, parking and servicing plans)
  - Energy strategy
- 6.4 The site owner is committed to working with the key stakeholders to ensure the delivery of residential development is consistent with the future Local Plan, where relevant.

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## 7 NEXT STEPS

- 7.1 The site owner intends to submit an outline application with all matters reserved aside from access for residential development which will be informed by ongoing discussions with the Council and other statutory bodies.
- 7.2 Rapleys LLP will continue working with the Council and secure development of the site in parallel with and subject to the development plan process. The collaborative preparation of the final masterplan will establish the principles of development for the site and underpin any subsequent application, as per required by draft Policy SP17 (Site HT1 - Highover Farm, Hitchin).
- 7.3 The site owner is willing to continue working in partnership with the Council to ensure that the site can come forward in the early stages of the Local Plan and contribute significantly to housing supply in this locality as soon as possible.
- 7.4 It is the view of the site owner that the submission of an outline application would not be premature to the emerging Local Plan. The proposed scale of development represents a 5% proportion of overall allocated housing provision and the Council anticipates the site contributing to the five-year land supply on adoption of the Plan. This can only happen if an early planning application is submitted. On this basis, it is the site owner's intention to submit a planning application in early 2018, in parallel with the EiP process.

---

## 8 OUTSTANDING MATTERS TO BE RESOLVED

- 8.1 The current wording of the site's allocation draft policy - SP17 (Site HT1 - Highover Farm) remains unresolved whereby the site owner contends that the provision of "*At least 7 serviced plots for self-build development*" should be a consideration and not a requirement.
- 8.2 There are no further outstanding matters between the parties in relation to the proposed Local Plan allocation. Any further issues relating to, for example, detailed design, layout and access are for future discussion and consideration as part of any further pre-application negotiation and / or subsequent planning application(s). In response to the Council's pre-application feedback and DRP recommendations, and as part of the ongoing masterplanning exercise, the site owners has instructed the necessary consultants who have undertaken site research and surveys to ensure that the development would be suitable, sensitive and delivered to a high quality.

---

## 9 CONCLUSION AND DECLARATION

### CONCLUSION

- 9.1 It has been proposed by the Council that the site will be allocated as strategic housing site in the emerging Local Plan for approximately 700 new homes.
- 9.2 The site is available now suitable for development and is deliverable. The site owner contends to be in a position to commence development on the site imminently upon the grant of planning permission. The site can therefore make an important, early contribution to housing delivery in the District over the plan period on a site where there is no flood risk, and where there are no infrastructure or service restrictions that may otherwise delay commencement. On this basis, the benefits to the community and District as a whole are substantial, particularly in terms of the site's proposed allocation delivering 5% of the total proposed housing provision in order to meet objectively assessed housing need.
- 9.3 The emerging proposals incorporate 9.67 hectares of public open space delivered through a green /blue infrastructure strategy that provides visual and physical enhancements to the site and its future occupiers but also access to recreational, amenity and community facility opportunities and footpath connections for existing residents in Hitchin to improve and enhance health and wellbeing and access to nature.
- 9.4 The site is in a sustainable, accessible location with good access to local services and facilities including education, employment, shops and recreational services that could meet the everyday needs of future occupiers. The extended provision of public transport into the site and the potential to walk and cycle from the site to meet these everyday needs would provide opportunities for future occupiers to opt for carbon neutral opportunities to travel, reflecting the aims of the NPPF to reduce reliance on the private car as reflected in the Council's Transport Strategy. This would offer further environmental, social and economic benefits.
- 9.5 Formal pre-application engagement has been undertaken with the Council, statutory bodies and utilities/ service providers. Beyond the matter of the requirement to provide self-built plots, there are not currently considered to be any significant issues identified that would act as an impediment to development taking place on this site.

**DECLARATION**

*This document forms an agreed SoCG to assist the future Examination of North Hertfordshire’s Local Plan. This SoCG is between Bellcross Homes, as the site’s owner, and North Hertfordshire’s District Council, as the local planning authority. This SoCG relates to the promotion of Land at Highover Farm, Hitchin for residential-led development for approximately 700 new homes.*

*This SoCG reflects those matters which have been agreed and is without prejudice to matters which are currently not agreed, notwithstanding any further future agreement which may be reached between the site owner and North Hertfordshire District Council. This SoCG does not preclude any additional representations which Bellcross Homes or their professional advisors may wish to make to the Local Plan Examination, either orally or in writing, in respect of matters relating to this site.*



Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Cllr David Levett

Position: \_\_\_\_\_Portfolio Holder for Planning & Enterprise\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_17 April 2018\_\_\_\_\_

On behalf of North Hertfordshire District Council



Signature: J A Lowes (Apr 18, 2018)

Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

On behalf of Bellcross Homes

**STATEMENT OF COMMON  
GROUND PREPARED FOR  
NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT  
COUNCIL/BELLCROSS HOMES**

**LAND AT HIGHOVER FARM  
HITCHIN**

**SUPPORTING APPENDICES**

April 2018

Our Ref: CB/503/55/1

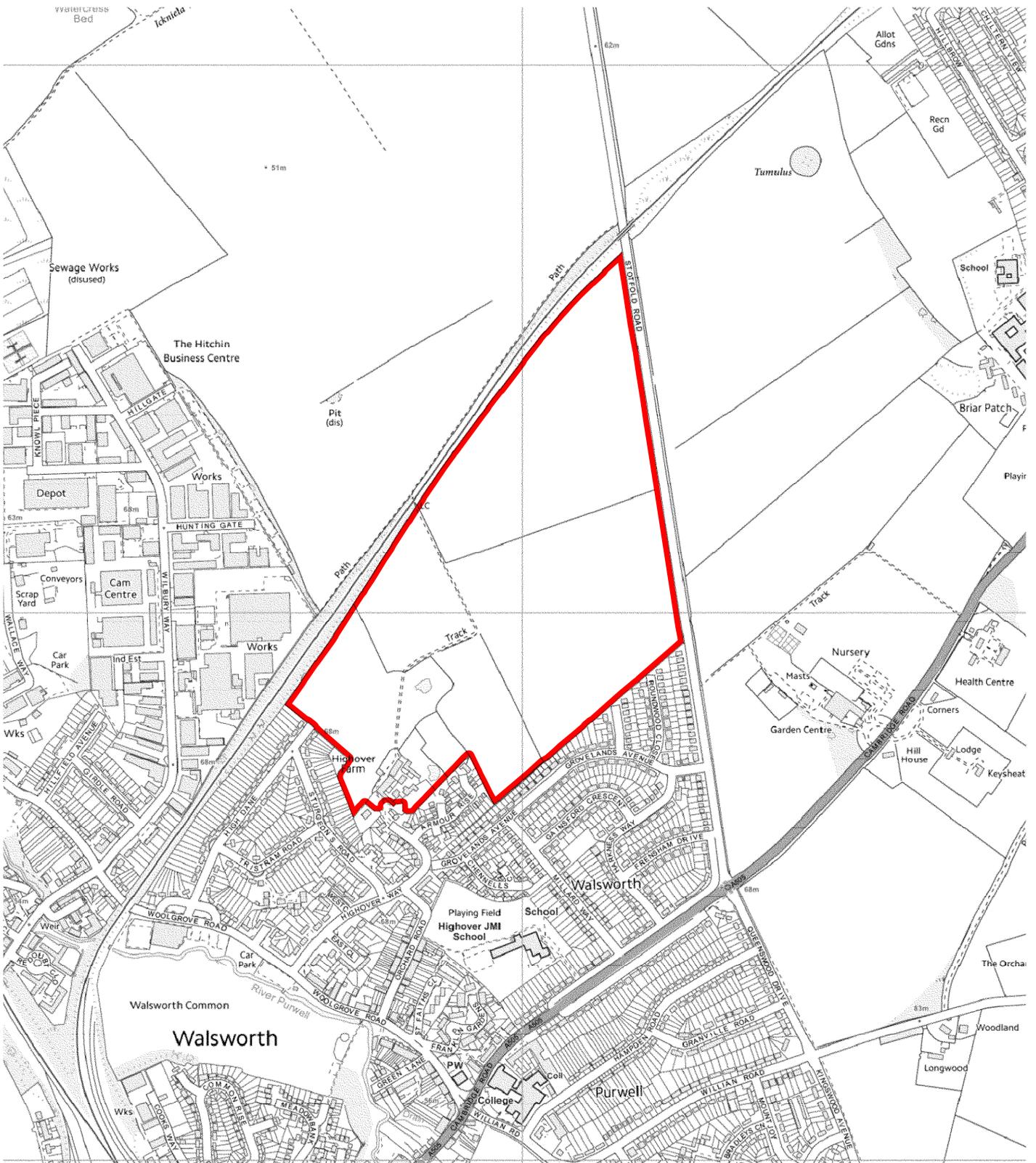
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## Appendices

Appendix 1	Site Location Plan
Appendix 2	Pre-Submission Local Plan Representations, 29 November 2016
Appendix 3	EiP Matter 6 (Deliverability) Statement of Common Ground between NHDC and Bellcross Homes, 15 November 2017
Appendix 4	Indicative Masterplan
Appendix 5	Indicative Density and Land Use Plan
Appendix 6	Draft Concept Movement Plan
Appendix 7	Scoping Request and NHDC Opinion Letter, May - March 2017
Appendix 8	Meeting Note, dated 11 February 2016
Appendix 9	Meeting Note, dated 2 August 2016
Appendix 10	Meeting Note, dated 3 May 2017
Appendix 11	Public Exhibition Consultation Leaflet
Appendix 12	NHDC Formal Pre-Application Feedback, 26 September 2017
Appendix 13	HCC Education Team Feedback, dated 22 September 2017

Appendix 1

# SITE LOCATION PLAN



**SITE LOCATION PLAN**

Highover Farm  
 Highover Way  
 HITCHIN SG4 0RQ



Scale @ A4 : 1:10,000

Plan No. : 503/55/1\_SLP01

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Appendix 2

**PRE-SUBMISSION LOCAL PLAN  
REPRESENTATIONS, 29  
NOVEMBER 2016**

CB/503/55/1

29 November 2016

Planning Policy  
North Hertfordshire District Council  
PO Box 480  
M33 ODE

Submitted via email: [local.plans@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:local.plans@north-herts.gov.uk)

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Re: DRAFT LOCAL PLAN - PROPOSED SUBMISSION CONSULTATION -  
OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2016 - REPRESENTATIONS ON BEHALF OF BELLCROSS HOMES**

We act on behalf of Bellcross Company Limited, trading as Bellcross Homes ('Bellcross'), and write in respect of the above consultation. Bellcross has an excellent track record of delivering residential development across the Home Counties and in the District (the previously developed parts of Highover Farm). As you are aware, Bellcross is the freehold owner of the site at Highover Farm (Site Ref: HT1) in Hitchin. The site extends to approximately 37 hectares, and is identified in the consultation draft for being suitable for approximately 700 homes - a site location plan is enclosed.

The site is currently in agricultural use, and is very well connected to the existing built-up area of Hitchin, being bounded on two sides by existing residential development. The other two boundaries are marked by a railway line and Stotfold Road. Accordingly, the site has the potential to contribute significantly to the District's housing supply, whilst ensuring that any revised Green Belt boundaries are robust. As such, our client wishes to ensure that the emerging planning policy framework for this site and wider area is positively prepared in order to facilitate this.

These representations build on discussions and correspondence that has taken place over a number of years, and most recently a number of meetings with policy and development management officers over the last 12 months. Through this, our client has sought to work closely with the local authority in order to assist in meeting the objectively assessed housing need of the District.

Specifically, the following representations have been submitted to date to the local authority in relation to our client's site, promoting it for residential development:

- March 2012/2013 - SHLAA 'Call for Sites' consultations
- January 2014 - SHLAA Update 'Call for Sites' consultation
- January 2015 - Draft Local Plan consultation

In addition, in advance of the submission of a planning application, my client has submitted a request for a screening opinion relative to residential development on the site. The resulting opinion confirmed that development would require an EIA, and defined the relevant issues that need to be reviewed.

Our client's consultancy team has carried out some of the relevant survey work in order to respond to this, and work is ongoing. We are pleased to confirm that, at this stage, no issues have arisen that would suggest that the site should not be developed. On the contrary, initial

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findings indicate that all environmental issues arising can be more than adequately addressed a sustainable manner, further underlining the site's suitability for housing.

To summarise, our client remains fully committed to pursuing residential development on the site. In this context we have reviewed the Draft Local Plan Proposed Submission consultation document, and request that the following representations are considered by the Council in the ongoing preparation of this document.

## **Representations**

### **Policy SP2: Settlement Hierarchy**

Our client supports the principles of the settlement hierarchy, namely that the majority of the District's development will be located within or adjoining towns such as Hitchin, with allowance for additional development elsewhere in the District.

### **Policy SP5: Countryside and Green Belt**

Our client supports the principle of reviewing the boundaries of the Green Belt, in the interests of meeting the District's need for housing. Further, the managed release of land outside settlement boundaries, and within the Green Belt, is supported in this context.

### **Policy SP6: Sustainable Transport**

Our client supports the principle of sustainable transport, however, in Criterion D, the implementation of sustainable infrastructure on Strategic Housing Sites should be carefully considered and relate directly to addressing any impacts generated by development on local transport infrastructure. Further, any measures should take into account the viability and deliverability of new development.

### **Policy SP7: Infrastructure Requirements and Developer Contributions**

The principles set out in Criterion A of this policy are supported by our client. However, Criterion B is overly prescriptive, and potentially onerous, and should be deleted. Finally, Criterion F is ambiguously worded. It should be amended to confirm that the local authority will take viability issues into consideration when development contributions and obligations are being discussed relative to specific sites under development.

### **Policy SP8: Housing**

The general thrust of this policy is supported by our client. However, in terms of Criterion F, it should be recognised that, where assessing an appropriate level of affordable housing on individual development sites, viability should be taken into account to ensure that sites are achievable and deliverable.

### **Policy SP17: Site HT1 – Highover Farm, Hitchin**

The identification of this site for housing is wholeheartedly supported by my client, including the reference to approximately 700 homes. However, in the interests of ensuring that the site maximises its potential relative to meeting the District's housing need, it should be recognised that a higher quantum of development might be suitable on the site, subject to further survey and design work.

More specifically, the following commentary is offered:

- The reference to self-build development in Criterion D should be a consideration rather than a requirement;
- The reference to a new primary school in Criterion E should be qualified to confirm that one should only be provided if necessary, in the context of future discussions and analysis relative to need and existing school capacity within the local area.

#### **Policy T1: Assessment of Transport Matters**

The broad thrust of this policy is supported, however, Criterion D should also refer to major development's viability as well as practicability.

#### **Policy HS2: Affordable Housing**

In Criterion A, reference should be made to viability as well as housing targets. All policies relating to affordable housing should be clear that site specific circumstances will be taken into consideration, and that the type and proportion of affordable housing sought by the local authority on individual developments should not be greater than what the wider development can support in viability terms. More specifically, Criterion C is too specific, and does not take individual site circumstances into account and should be deleted.

#### **Policy HS5: Accessible and Adaptable Housing**

The motives behind this policy are supported by my client, but the policy should be amended to be clear that site- specific circumstances, viability and existing and future housing stock and needs, will be taken into consideration when applying the policy.

#### **Policy D1: Sustainable Design**

As with the previous policy, the motives behind this policy are supported. However, again this policy should be clear that site - specific circumstances and viability will be taken into consideration during its application.

#### **Policy NE5: New and Improved Public Open Space and Biodiversity**

For the same reasons as set out in the previous two policies, this policy should be clear that site- specific circumstances and viability will be taken into consideration during its application.

### **SUMMARY**

To summarise, my client is generally supportive of the policies set out in the Draft Proposed Submission Local Plan, particularly Policy SP17 relating to my client's landholding at Highover Farm. However, some detailed amendments are suggested to the policies in order to ensure that development is achievable and deliverable, and in particular ensures that our client's site can be brought forward in the short term to contribute to the District's required housing stock.

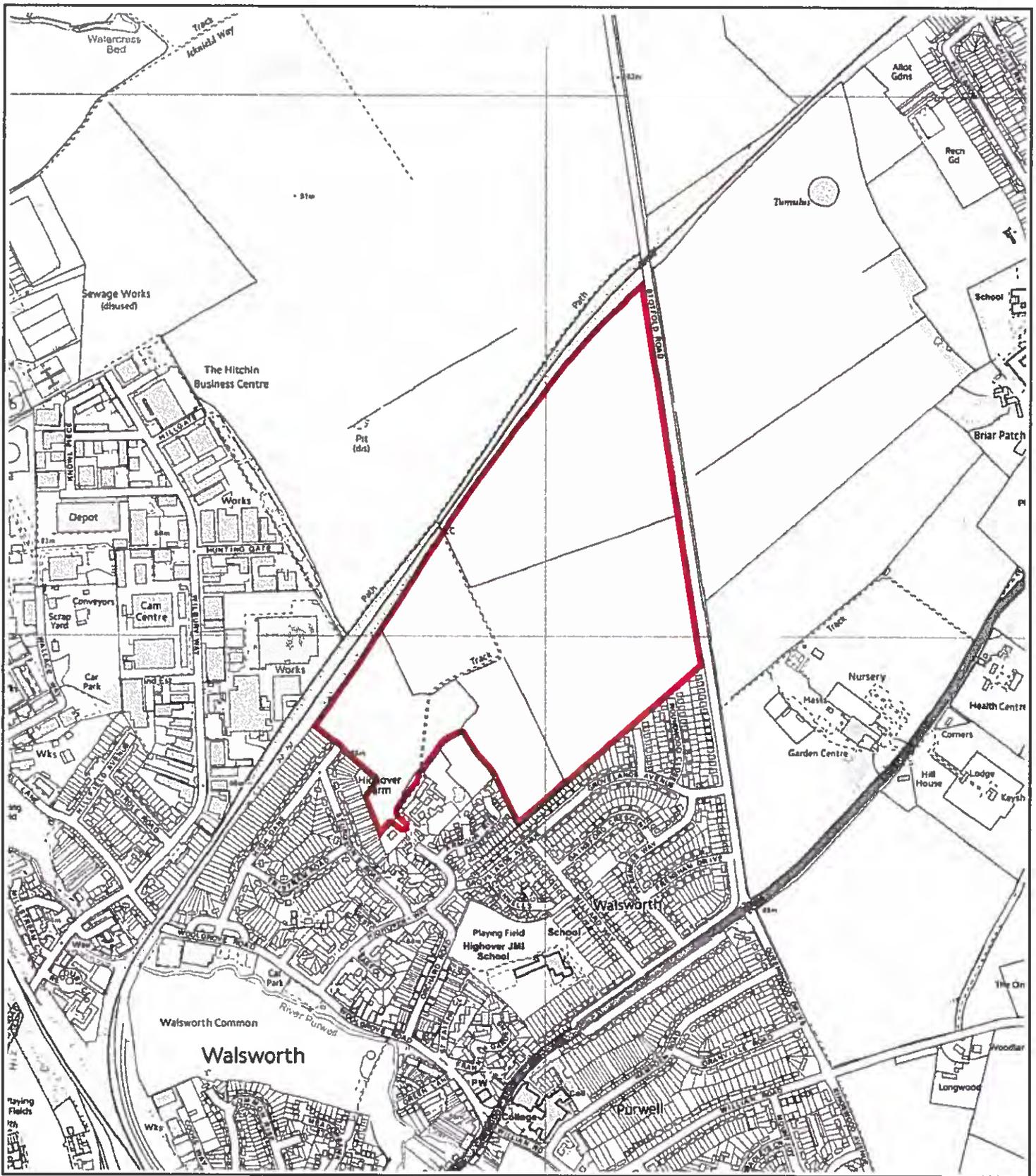
We would be happy to discuss the comments in this letter in further detail, if it would assist. In the meantime, we look forward to receiving written confirmation that these representations have been received, and duly made, as part of this consultation exercise.

Please send all correspondence marked for the attention of Jason Lowes at our London office, who can be contacted on 07899 963 524 or [jason.lowes@rapleys.com](mailto:jason.lowes@rapleys.com).

Yours faithfully,

  
Rapeys LLP (Nov 29, 2016)

Rapeys LLP  
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**SITE LOCATION PLAN**

Highover Farm,  
Highover Way,  
HITCHIN. SG4 0RQ.



Scale @ A4 : 1:10,000

Plan No. :

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Appendix 3

**EIP MATTER 6  
(DELIVERABILITY)  
STATEMENT OF COMMON  
GROUND BETWEEN NHDC  
AND BELLCROSS HOMES, 15  
NOVEMBER 2017**

# **North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 Examination in Public**

## **STATEMENT OF COMMON GROUND**

As agreed between North Hertfordshire District Council  
And Bellcross Homes  
Concerning Strategic Allocation HT1 – Highover Farm,  
Hitchin

**November 2017**

1. This is an agreed statement of common ground in relation to the identification of HT1 – Highover Farm Hitchin as a proposed strategic allocation within the North Hertfordshire Local Plan at Policy SP17. The purpose of this statement is to provide the Inspector with a summary of the areas of agreement for the matters to be examined during the Stage One hearing sessions scheduled for November and December 2017. It is anticipated that a further statement will be prepared to address the more detailed issues in relation to Matter 10, scheduled to be examined during February 2018.
2. This statement of Common Ground (SOCG) has been prepared by North Hertfordshire District Council and is submitted jointly with Rapleys on behalf of Bellcross Homes. Bellcross Homes own the site. This SOCG is the result of collaboration between the landowner and the Council. Both are committed to the implementation of the Highover Farm proposed strategic allocation. This statement is made without prejudice to the submission and determination of any planning application made for the allocation.

### **Policy SP17: HT1 – Highover Farm, Hitchin**

3. All parties agree that the land identified within the proposed strategic allocation at HT1 on the proposals map is 'suitable, available and achievable' for development, meeting the criterion of effectiveness set out in paragraph 182 of the National Planning Policy Framework. The site is able to deliver housing development in accordance with the aims of the Local Plan.
4. Highover Farm, along with all other proposed strategic allocations, has been the subject of a full planning assessment and Sustainability Appraisal process. This is set out in the Local Plan evidence base, and is summarised in the Housing and Green Belt Background Paper (HOU1) as updated by the Partial Update on Housing Monitoring and 5 Year Supply (ED3).
5. All parties consider that the allocation of Strategic Allocation HT1 Highover Farm for housing is an appropriate land use. The capacity of the site is approximately 700 dwellings, a neighbourhood retail centre and a primary school. All parties are committed to working together to bring forward an appropriate scheme.
6. The extent of the land in the control of the applicant is detailed at Appendix 1: Site Location Plan.

### **Masterplan**

7. Bellcross Homes will provide a comprehensive masterplan to demonstrate the delivery of approximately 700 dwellings, neighbourhood retail centre and primary school across the strategic allocation in accordance with Policy SP17.

## **Timetable**

8. All parties are in agreement with the indicative trajectory for housing delivery set out in ED3.
9. A planning application is expected to be submitted to North Hertfordshire District Council in early 2018. The indicative trajectory set out in ED3 assumes that the strategic allocation will start delivery dwellings in 2020.
10. As with any of the sites proposed to be removed from the Green Belt through the Local Plan, the trajectory will depend on the date of the adoption of the Plan. Based on the adoption of the Local Plan in 2018 it is anticipated that completions will commence in 2020 at 50 dwellings per annum. It is then anticipated that completions will increase to 100 dwellings per annum by 2021 and thereafter average 100 dwellings per annum until the site has been completed.
11. Retail facilities would be provided (serviced) within approximately 18 months of commencement of housebuilding with the primary school to be provided approximately two years later or as agreed by the education authority at the planning application stage.

## **Infrastructure**

12. The provision of community and education facilities, where required, will be constructed as an integral part of the residential development. It is agreed that the key social infrastructure of neighbourhood level retail facilities providing approximately 500m<sup>2</sup> of A class floorspace and a primary school will be provided.

## **Utilities**

13. Utility company plans show that the site is adjacent to strategic infrastructure and that all services (water, gas, electricity and telecommunications) are available. Utility capacity assessments show that any upgrades that are required to service the site can be achieved through reinforcement works commensurate with a scheme of this scale. It is not anticipated that utility provision will place a constraint upon delivery of the site.

## **Key Objectives and Principles**

14. The objective is to deliver a sustainable, comprehensive urban extension to Hitchin which links with and complements the existing settlement pattern and provides for housing, social and recreational needs.

15. All parties support the provision of high quality and well thought out design within the strategic allocation to produce attractive places to live that strengthens the connection to the countryside through a network of green corridors and parks. Green infrastructure will be integral to the design of the scheme with the retention of the existing pond on site providing a focal point for green open space and connecting to green corridors which will permeate the development and link to the open countryside.
16. All parties are committed to providing an urban extension which provides strong connections to existing communities making use of existing connections via Highover Way and High Dane roads while respecting that principal access to the site will be achieved from Stotfold Road subject to suitable integration with the local highway network.

### **Affordable Housing**

17. All parties are supportive of the provision of affordable housing as part of the development in accordance with Policy HS2: Affordable Housing.

### **Issues for Further Discussion**

18. Bellway Homes contend that the provision of plots for self-build development should a consideration rather than a requirement of Policy SP17.
19. Bellway Homes would like to further discuss the phasing of the range of neighbourhood-level facilities and the phasing/delivery strategy for the development at the planning application stage.

### **Conclusion**

20. The proposed Local Plan strategic allocation at HT1 Highover Farm constitutes an appropriate and deliverable urban extension to Hitchin which supports the vision and objectives of the plan. It would extend Hitchin to the north east and provide a significant contribution towards the housing needs of North Hertfordshire.

**Declaration**

The content of this document is agreed for the purposes of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan Examination.

Signed on behalf of Bellway Homes:

**Rapleys LLP**

.....  
Position:

Date: 15.11.2017

And

Signed on behalf of North Hertfordshire District Council

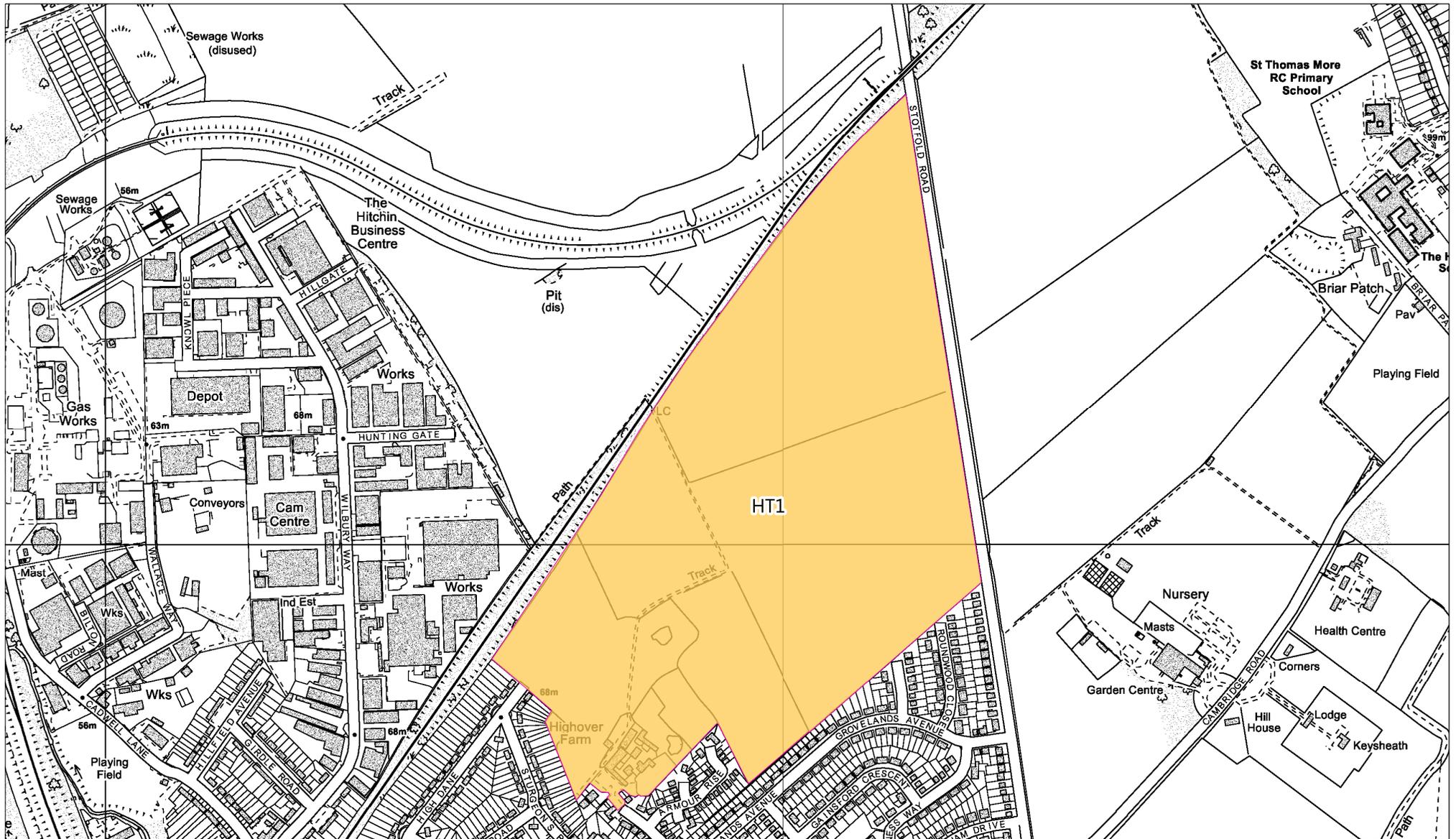
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D. H. H.', written in a cursive style.

.....  
Position: Executive Member for Planning and Enterprise

Date: 15.11.2017



Appendix 1 – Extent of Strategic Allocation HT1



Scale: 1:8000  
Date: 14:11:17



Appendix 4

# INDICATIVE MASTERPLAN



Appendix 5

# INDICATIVE DENSITY AND LAND USE PLAN



**Site boundary**

**DENSITY AND LAND USE**

- Residential 25dph
- Residential 30dph
- Residential 35dph
- Residential 40dph
- School (1.400 ha)
- Local Centre (0.109 ha)

**HEIGHT**

- 2-2.5 storeys
- 1 storey

(Remainder = 2 storeys)

REV	DESCRIPTION	DATE	APPROVED
REVISION HISTORY			

Issue	Date	Status	Drawn	Apprvd.

Client Bellcross Homes

Project Highover Farm Hitchin

Drg Title Density, Height and Land Use

Created on 14.09.17 Created by EH Approved by JW/AR

Scale 1:2000 @ A1 Size COMMENT

Drg No. PL1685-VW-004-01

**Planit Intelligent Environments LLP**  
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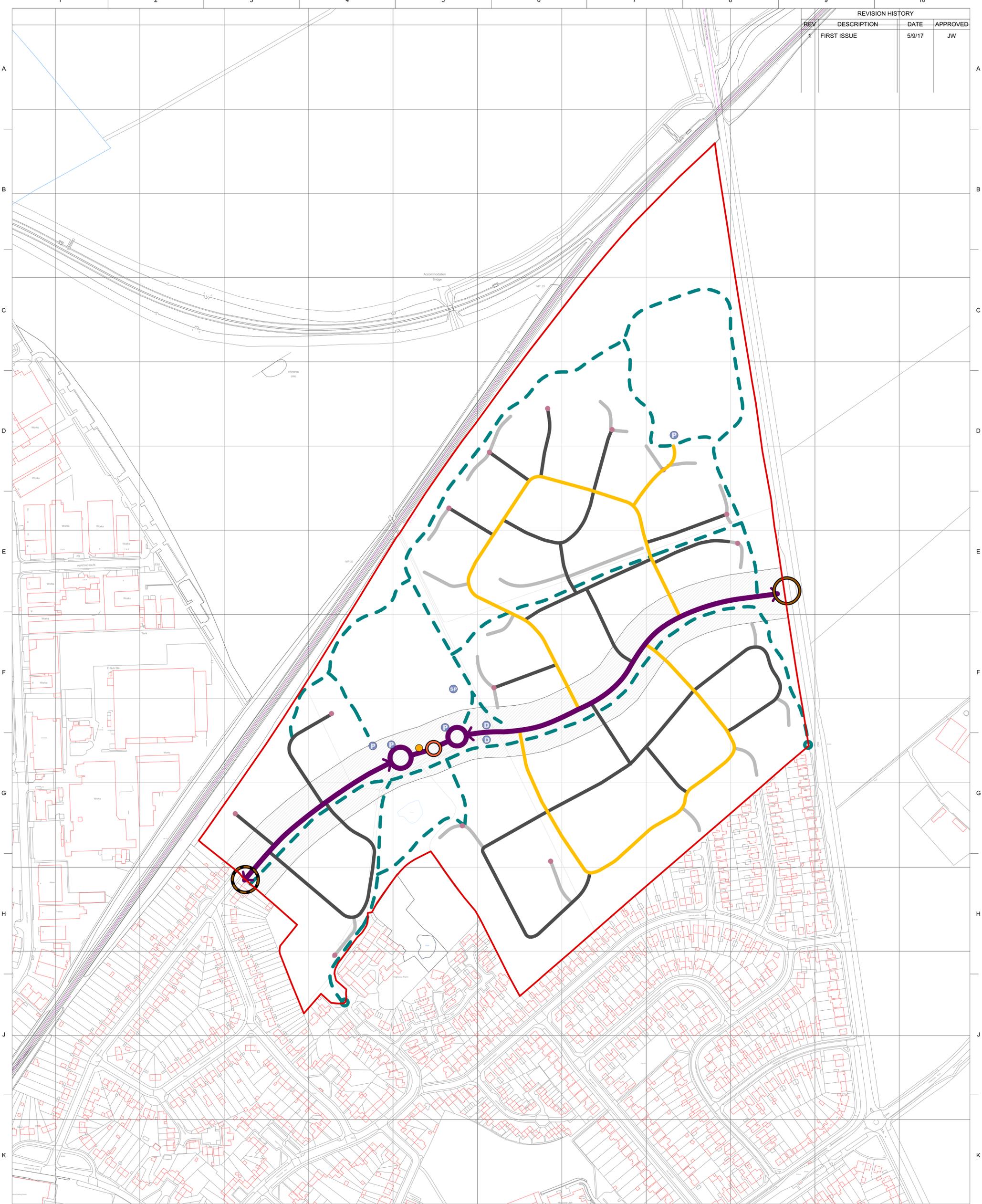
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- This drawing must be read with the relevant specification clauses and detail drawings.
- Order of construction and setting out to be agreed on site.

Appendix 6

# DRAFT CONCEPT MOVEMENT PLAN

REVISION HISTORY			
REV	DESCRIPTION	DATE	APPROVED
1	FIRST ISSUE	5/9/17	JW



KEY	
	Site boundary
	Primary road (7m carriageway, 2x 2m footway)
	Secondary road (5.5m carriageway, 2x 2m footway)
	Tertiary lane (min 7.5m, potential shared surface)
	Private driveway (shared surface)
	Pedestrian / cycle route
	Central square/ bus turning area/ parking
	Turning head for service/ emergency vehicles
	Main vehicle access
	Emergency / secondary access
	Restricted access bollards
	Bus stop
	Pedestrian access point
	Parking
	School Parking
	School on street drop off
	Limit of Deviation

Issue	Date	Status	Drawn	Apprvd.

Client	Bellcross Homes
Project	Highover Farm Hitchin
Proj Title	Parameters: Movement
Created on	14.09.17
Created by	EH
Approved by	JW/AR
Scale	1:2000 @ A1
Size	COMMENT
Status	COMMENT
Org No.	PL1685-VW-002

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- Order of construction and setting out to be agreed on site.

Appendix 7

**SCOPING REQUEST AND NHDC  
OPINION LETTER, MAY-  
MARCH 2017**

**NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

*Correspondence address:*

North Hertfordshire District Council, PO BOX 10613, Nottingham, NG6 6DH  
Telephone: (01462) 474000  
Text Phone: (01462) 474800.  
DX 745063, Sale 8



10 May 2017

Ms S Smith  
Rapleys  
Clifton Heights  
Triangle West  
Bristol  
BS8 1EJ

Our Ref : 17/00680/1SCP  
Contact : Tom Rea  
Direct Line: 01462 474565  
Email : tom.rea@north-herts.gov.uk

Dear Ms Smith

**Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment ) Regulations 2011  
– Formal EIA Scoping Opinion of North Hertfordshire District Council as Local  
Planning Authority**

**Development proposal: Residential development including associated  
infrastructure works**

**Site: Land at Highover Farm between Stotfold Road and Highover Way, Hitchin,  
Hertfordshire**

I refer to your submission of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) scoping report in relation to the proposed development at Highover Farm, Hitchin received by the Local Planning Authority on 17th March 2017.

This scoping opinion will provide a brief description of the site and the proposed development followed by a summary of the Council's 'Scoping Opinion' incorporating representations and the opinion of officers.

**The Site**

The application site is shown on the Site Location Plan attached at Appendix 1 (drawing no. - 503/55/1\_SLP01) to the EIA Scoping Report submitted by Rapleys (dated 17th March 2017).

The site is approximately 37 hectares in size and is located and abuts the north eastern edge of the existing settlement of Hitchin. The eastern boundary of the site abuts Stotfold Road and the western boundary the Cambridge to London railway line. The southern boundary of the site adjoins the residential area of Walsworth forming part of the Hitchin urban area. The site contains several buildings forming Highover Farm. The site currently comprises an agricultural field with access from Highover Way.

### The Proposal

The proposed development is for residential development of approximately 700 dwellings (Class C3), up to 500 sqm of retail or other neighbourhood uses (Classes A1, A3, A4 and A5), a primary school (Class D1), open space, strategic landscaping and other green infrastructure, associated vehicular and pedestrian access, access and drainage infrastructure.

### Consultation Responses

A wide range of consultation responses have been received and copies have been forwarded to you. Further responses received by the LPA after this formal scoping opinion letter has been issued will be forwarded to you in due course. Should you require any further information on these representations please contact the case officer, Tom Rea.

### The Council's Scoping Opinion

The Local Planning Authority has considered the information submitted with the scoping request, specifically the suggested topic areas/chapters to be included in the Environmental Statement (ES). For clarity these are set out in the submitted request on page 18 of the Scoping Report as follows:

- ∅β7Introduction
- ∅β7Methodology
- ∅β7Background Development
- ∅β7Alternatives
- ∅β7Development Description
- ∅β7Planning Context
- ∅β7Economy, Population and Society
- ∅β7Water Resources
- ∅β7Transportation
- ∅β7Ecology and Conservation
- ∅β7Landscape, Visual Impact and Built Environment
- ∅β7Noise
- ∅β7Land Use and Agriculture
- ∅β7Archaeology
- ∅β7Overview of Effects

The Local Planning Authority is in broad agreement with the proposed content. However additional chapters/topic areas are required as follows:

➤ Ground conditions and contamination

➤ Air Quality

With reference to chapter 15 (Overview of Effects) the General Scope should read 'Summary of the Cumulative and Residual Effects'

The LPA would highlight the following matters:

#### Alternatives

The EIA Regulations require that the ES includes an outline of the alternatives to the proposed development site and indicate the reasons for progressing the alternative chosen taking into account the environmental effects. In this case the Scoping report states that it is not relevant to assess alternative locations given the allocation of the site in the Proposed Submission Local Plan.

I consider that there may need to be a robust defence of this position in the introduction of the ES. For example you may wish to provide comment on how the Highover site has formed part of a wider and thorough search for sites and subsequent consultation process undertaken by the Council as part of the emerging local plan following a strict regulatory approach. This process would also have included a sustainability assessment process and evaluations of the traffic, community infrastructure and environmental impacts. Consultation has been undertaken with key stakeholders and statutory consultees in informing the land allocation process. The Council has also fulfilled its Duty-to-Co-operate' via the 2011 Localism Act co-operating on strategic planning issues that cross administrative boundaries which is relevant to Highover given the proximity of the site to neighbouring Central Bedfordshire.

#### Air Quality

According to the NHDC Air Quality Planning Guidance document <http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/environmental-health/pollution/air-quality/air-quality-and-planning> the proposed development is of a size that represents a Major Scale development.

As such it is possible to confirm that there will be a requirement for an Air Quality Assessment (as identified in para. 5.79 of the Scoping Report) in order to determine the impact of the development on the relevant receptors. It will also provide a means of determining the scope of air pollution mitigation measures that would be required if the proposal were considered to be suitable.

Para. 5.80 of the Scoping Report states that construction phase dust issues will be mitigated and controlled and so it is expected that a Construction Phase Dust Assessment will be prepared. Given the size of the proposed development it would also be expected

that a construction phase transport management plan will be prepared with the aim of minimising, if not avoiding, the impact of HDV and LDV exhaust emissions on the Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) in Hitchin at Payne's Park/Park Way and at Stevenage Road.

Integral to the assessment and subsequent protection of local air quality is the provision of a transport assessment and travel plan so the commitment to both made in para. 5.26 is welcomed.

Finally, the prediction made in para. 5.81 of the Scoping Report is inappropriate, for a development of this scale, without an Air Quality Assessment. Therefore, there should be an Air Quality Assessment included within the EIA and also a Chapter within the Environmental Statement.

Irrespective of the outcome of the air quality modelling there will be an expectation of measures to be proposed that will mitigate the impact of the development on air quality in North Hertfordshire.

#### Ground conditions and contamination

The proposed development site is located on an area of land that according to the records available to the Environmental Protection Team would not be expected to be associated with land contamination. As such there are no concerns that need to be raised at this stage and the commitment to submit a Phase 1 Environmental Risk Assessment Report is appropriate taking into account the vulnerability to land contamination of the proposed end use.

The EP Team has a web-page that aims to provide advice to developers, which includes a copy of a Planning Advice Note on "Development on Potentially Contaminated Land and/or for a Sensitive Land Use" in use across Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire. This can be found on [www.north-herts.gov.uk](http://www.north-herts.gov.uk) by searching for contaminated land.

#### Archaeology and Cultural Heritage

The LPA and Hertfordshire County Council Archaeology are in general agreement with the approach that has been set out with regard to archaeology. It is noted however that the County Council Historic Environment Advisor requires the scoping radius to be extended to include Wilbury Hill in consultation with the Historic Environment Record Officer.

It is noted that there are locally listed buildings which form the group of farm buildings at Highover Farm – these are within the site location plan area and it is recommended that they form part of the assessment. It is advised that consultation is undertaken with Historic England over the proximity of the site to the Schedule Monuments and due weight

given to the potential environmental effects.

### Ecology and Nature Conservation

I would draw your attention to the e-mail received from Martin Hicks at Hertfordshire Ecology who requests that the ES makes specific reference is made to the protected species affected by this development. In general however the Council's ecological advisors consider the Scoping Report represents a reasonable and acceptable approach to preparing the ES with respect to Ecology.

### Landscape

The approach to LVIA is considered appropriate i.e. that it will be based on the guidelines produced by the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment 2013.

The various location receptors for assessment are noted however there may be further locations required – these will be provided once the full comments of the Council's Landscape Officer are received. Views should be assessed from the Icknield Way Byway Open to All Traffic (Ickleford 018).

Paragraph 5.65 is incorrect in terms of nearest public rights of way to the site. Public Footpath Hitchin 089 runs along the northern edge of the Cambridge to London railway line from Stotfold Road to Wilbury Way – forming the north western boundary of the site.

The landscaping along the Stotfold Road boundary is a key feature of the Stotfold Road Highway boundary and area locally – the impact on this landscape feature needs to be factored into the assessment

### Noise and Vibration

It is understood that the Council's Environmental Health officer has reached agreement with Mouchels on the proposed noise assessment methodology. It is noted from the scoping report that road and rail noise is considered to be the dominant local noise sources. It is suggested that the assessment also considers noise impacts from the nearby Hitchin Industrial estate as there are some open land uses there which generate intermittent noise at various times such as the scrap metal works and waste recycling centre on Wilbury Way.

### Economy, Population and Society (Socio-Economic)

The LPA notes that the recognised receptor is to be Walsworth and adjoining wards. It may be necessary to consider the impact on neighbouring wards in the adjoining Central Bedfordshire area in particular the settlements at Fairfield Park and Arlesey given the

close relationship that the development may have with regard to services for residents in these areas.

With regard to impacts on other infrastructure, the LPA recommends that consideration is given to health impacts, in particular GP capacity and whether the site should accommodate a surgery and dental practice.

The LPA considers the approach to socio-economic impacts to be appropriate in other respects.

#### Soils and Agricultural Land

The LPA accepts that it is unlikely that the site will contain any significant contamination. The site contains a significant amount of agricultural land – an assessment of the grade of land and how this loss will impact on overall provision locally would be appropriate.

#### Traffic and Transport

The approach to the Transportation section of the ES is noted. It is suggested that the following additional roads are included in the receptors :

- Wilbury Hills Road/Ickniel Way junction (serving the nearby Fernhill Secondary school)
- Woolgrove Road/Wilbury Way/Cadwell Lane junction (serving the Hitchin industrial estate)
- Arlesey Road/ Wilbury Hills Road/ Stotfold Road

An assessment of the cycle and pedestrian access to the site and the wider area will be a key part of the Methodology when looking at sustainable transport alternatives. Potential connections into existing networks (off road) should also be scoped into the assessment.

Any comments received from the highway Authority will be forwarded as and when received.

#### Water Resources (Hydrology and Hydrogeology)

The LPA considers the approach proposed to be appropriate.

#### Utilities/Infrastructure

It is noted that it is not intended to scope in this topic area into the ES but that a separate assessment report (presumably to be submitted with a future planning application). The LPA would draw attention to the potential for gas pipeline routes to be located within the

vicinity of the site given that such infrastructure runs across Walsworth Common .

### Residual and Cumulative Impacts

The Council agrees that it is appropriate to consider any significant residual and/or cumulative impacts as they are identified in other chapters of the Environmental Statement.

With regard to specific sites that should be included in consideration of cumulative impacts we have put together a list based on information from North Hertfordshire District Council and Central Bedfordshire District Council. The specific sites are as follows:

#### **North Hertfordshire**

Land north of Letchworth Garden City (Strategic site allocation in the Council's Proposed Submission Local Plan (PSLP) – see Policy SP15: Site LG1

Land north of Baldock (Strategic site allocation in the PSLP – see Policy SP14: Site BA1

Land off Bedford Road, Ickleford – PSLP allocation site IC3

Land at Lower Stondon – PSLP allocation LS1

#### **Central Bedfordshire District Council**

Land at Chase Farm, Arlesey – planning application ref: CB/17/01158/OUT

It is anticipated that these proposed developments may be most likely to have cumulative and combination effects, particularly with regard to the highway network within the area.

### Scoping Plan

As a result of comments above the scoping plan may need to be widened to accommodate all of the receptors mentioned.

### Conclusion

The Council has not received full consultation responses from all relevant technical consultees. On this basis we cannot be certain that further issues in relation to the content of the ES will not arise following formal consultation on the future planning application and associated ES. The Council reserves the right to request additional information on any

matter within the ES under Regulation 22 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2011.

Yours sincerely

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

Simon Ellis  
Development & Conservation Manager

**RAPLEYS**

Scoping Report for  
Bellcross Homes

# ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT SCOPING REPORT LAND AT HIGHOVER FARM, NORTH EAST HITCHIN

17 March 2017

Our Ref: SRS/JC/503/55/1



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## 1 INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF

- 1.1 Rapleys LLP has been instructed by Bellcross Homes to undertake an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Scoping Study for the proposed redevelopment of land at Highover Farm on the north eastern side of Hitchin, shown at **Figure 1**.
- 1.2 A masterplan is currently being developed to accommodate a major residential led mixed use proposal. Whilst the precise application red line boundary is still to be agreed, **Figure 2** shows the general scoping area for the site.
- 1.3 The intention is to submit a outline planning application in July 2017 to co-inside with the submission of the Local Plan to the Secretary of State.

### OBJECTIVE

- 1.4 To date, a Screening Request was sent to NHDC on 10 August 2016 with a formal Screening Opinion being issued by the NHDC on 2 September 2016. The Screening Opinion confirmed that proposed development is likely to have significant effects on the environment to the extent that detailed analysis would be necessary to properly assess any effect and therefore an EIA is required.
- 1.5 Specifically the key environmental concerns raised by NHDC include:
- Large scale urbanising impact of the development on a previously undeveloped site;
  - Potential significant impact on the highway network;
  - Potential impact on a nearby Scheduled Monument (a bronze age burial site comprising two barrows (English Heritage listing no. 1017406), and
  - Potential loss of Grade 2 agricultural land.
- 1.6 The objective of this report is to present the findings of a Scoping Study to NHDC for consideration. It is intended that NHDC can subsequently adopt this as the formal Scoping Opinion, confirming the content of the EIA to accompany the planning application for the site.

### LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

- 1.7 The requirement for an EIA is derived from EU Directive No. 2011/92/EU (as amended by 2014/52/EU). This Directive is transposed into UK law through the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2011. These Regulations require that prior to the grant of planning permission the likely significant effects of a project on the environment should be assessed.
- 1.8 The outcome of this process will be the production of an Environmental Statement (ES) submitted with the planning application. The ES shall consist of the Scoping Study, the EIA, a set of Technical Appendices and a Non-Technical Summary (NTS).
- 1.9 A Scoping Study presents the information required by the Regulations to the LPA in a structured way. The required information is:
- A plan sufficient to identify the land;
  - A brief description of the nature and purpose of the development and its possible effects on the environment, and

- Such other information or representation the person making the submission may wish to provide.

1.10 However, good practice guidance recommends that a comprehensive Scoping Report is submitted, providing the LPA with information in a structured way.

1.11 This report includes the information required by the Regulations, but also expands in further detail.

### SCOPING METHODOLOGY

1.12 This report considers all of the environmental topics contained in Schedule 4 of the Regulations, including:

- Population;
- Flora and Fauna;
- Soils;
- Water;
- Air;
- Climatic factors;
- Material Assets;
- Architectural and Archaeological heritage, and
- Landscape.

1.13 The potential effects of the proposal on these topics will be considered during the construction and operational phases of the development (as appropriate). The Regulations require an assessment only of the likely 'significant effects' on the environment, and therefore a judgement of significance must be applied. Those environmental topics or specific elements of topics which are not considered to have significant environmental effects are proposed to be excluded, i.e., they are scoped out.

1.14 In this Scoping Report, the environmental effects are considered on a topic-by-topic basis, and the baseline conditions, the likely receptors (particularly the most sensitive), and any potential environmental effects that would arise from the development, are set out. If potential effects are identified, the assessment sets out the methodology that will be adopted in reviewing those effects.

### STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

1.15 This Report describes the existing site, the proposed development, the consultation undertaken, and most critically, summarises the likely significant effects. The Report concludes with a draft structure of the ES.

### EIA TECHNICAL TEAM

1.16 This Report was prepared by Rapleys LLP with technical input provided by the following consultant team (table overleaf):

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TOPIC AREA	RESPONSIBILITY
Economy, Population and Society	Rapleys LLP
Water Resources (including Floodrisk and Drainage)	Mouchel
Ground Conditions	Mouchel
Transportation and Travel Plan	Mouchel
Ecology and Conservation	Mouchel
Landscape, Townscape and Visual Amenity	Steve Jowers Associates Ltd
Noise	Mouchel
Air Quality	Mouchel
Agriculture and Soils	Mouchel
Utilities/Infrastructure	Mouchel
Archaeology and Cultural Heritage	Archaeologica

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## 2 EXISTING SITE CONDITIONS

### SITE LOCATION

- 2.1 The site location plan is provided at **Figure 1**.
- 2.2 The site extends to approximately 40 ha and is located to the north east of Hitchin.
- 2.3 The site is relatively flat and comprises agricultural land. It is irregular in shape, and is bound by a housing estate to the east and south, Stotfold Road to the north and north east and a railway line to the north and west. In the vicinity of the site to the south and west are predominantly residential uses, albeit to the west of the site beyond the railway line is the Hitchin Business Centre.
- 2.4 Hitchin is one of the main settlements within the NHDC administrative area with a population in 2011 of around 33,350. Letchworth and Stevenage are in close proximity to the town.
- 2.5 There are a wide range of facilities in Hitchin. In close proximity to the site are Highover Junior School (with nursery), Walsworth Common and the Hitchin Business Centre. Hitchin town centre is circa 2km from the site with a range of market town services. Hitchin railway station (which provides regular services to London Kings Cross in circa 30 mins) is approximately 1km to the south of the site.

### PLANNING HISTORY

- 2.6 No recent planning applications have been found which would be relevant to this proposal.

### PLANNING POLICY

- 2.7 The adopted Development Plan for the site for the purposes of the principal Act is the adopted North Hertfordshire District Local Plan No. 2 with alterations (April 1996), saved Policies from September 2007. The proposals map of the Plan notates the site as within the Green Belt and partially within a Landscape and Open Space Pattern designation.
- 2.8 The emerging Development Plan, known as the 'Draft Local Plan 2011-2031' is progressing in its formation. In December 2014 NHDC consulted on the Local Plan Preferred Options consultation paper. The draft Proposals Map allocates 24.2ha of the site for housing under emerging Policy HT1 with an estimated dwelling capacity of 484 dwellings.
- 2.9 In January 2015, Rapleys, on behalf of Bellcross Homes, submitted written representations to the Preferred Options Consultation to include land to the north of the emerging draft allocation. This would result in a total allocation of 36.95 ha of housing land which would deliver approximately 800 homes (assuming 30 dwellings per hectare).
- 2.10 Further written representations were made to the Proposed Submission Consultation in November 2016 which builds on the previous Local Plan representations and ongoing discussions with the Council. The recent representations wholeheartedly supports the ongoing allocation of the site (Site HT1- Highover Farm, Hitchin) under Policy SP17, including the reference to approximately 700 homes. The representations also re-emphasise the site has potential to deliver a higher quantum of development subject to further survey and design work.
- 2.11 The Council are continuing to review the consultation responses received from the Proposed Submission consultation and propose upload copies of representations on to the Council's website in due course. Officers remaining under instruction to report upon the consultation and proposed next steps by March 2017. It is therefore likely that adoption of the Local Plan remains anticipated for Spring/Summer 2018.

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### 3 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

#### DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT

3.1 The proposed development scheme is still emerging at this stage. However, some key principles have been established which are guiding the development. These are:

- Up to 700 dwellings, comprising a mix of properties sizes at a medium density;
- Local Centre provision, including school;
- Provision of open space and landscaping/green infrastructure, and
- In points of access will be required from Stotfold Road.

#### ALTERNATIVES

3.2 Under Schedule 4 Part 1 of the Regulations, an ES must provide ‘an assessment of alternatives considered, and indication of the main reasons for the choices made, taking into account environmental effects’, studied by the applicant.

3.3 The consideration of alternatives can be viewed in a number of ways, but in relation to the site, this is considered in terms of alternative designs/layouts/access strategies and the ‘no development’ scenario. It is not relevant to assess alternative locations for the proposed scale of development in this instance given the fact that the Site has been allocated for housing development within the Proposed Submission Local Plan.

#### CUMULATIVE IMPACT

3.4 The EIA process requires the consideration of cumulative impacts where appropriate.

3.5 In this instance, the applicant controls an area of land which forms part of a proposed housing development allocation. The ES therefore considers the impacts/effects of the development of the client’s land holding in the first instance, as agreed in consultation with NHDC. This is particularly pertinent to the transport assessment.

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## **4 CONSULTATION**

- 4.1 In accordance with the Regulations, consultation and discussions have been held with NHDC since 2014 which will continue through until submission of the Outline application.
- 4.2 As part of this on-going scoping process, a number of key consultees and Officers at NHDC have been contacted to assist in providing baseline information for the site and surrounding area and to inform the methodology to be adopted in the assessment of potential environmental effects.
- 4.3 Furthermore, it is intended that the development proposal will be widely consulted prior to a formal planning application being submitted to NHDC. Both the local community and key statutory consultees (such as the Environment Agency) will be engaged at an early stage.

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## 5 POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

5.1 This chapter of the report reviews the potential environmental topics on a sequential basis and follows an identical format in terms of presenting the information:

- Baseline conditions setting out those conditions with reference to any assessments already undertaken and any likely receptors;
- Potential environmental effects, and
- Assessment methodology to be adopted.

5.2 It should also be noted that in each case, the ES will identify and consider appropriate mitigation measures, resulting residual impacts and cumulative impacts (the latter are to be identified in agreement with NHDC).

### ECONOMY, POPULATION AND SOCIETY

5.3 The economy, population and society chapter of the ES will address the potential socio-economic impacts likely to be generated as the result of the development of the site.

#### Baseline Conditions

5.4 A preliminary desk-based study has been carried out to examine the existing socio-economic situation for the ward in which the site is located. Baseline information on the current situation in this ward and the existing economic situation has been obtained from the Office for National Statistics, in the form of the 2011 Census (Office of National Statistics [ONS], 2011), being the most up to date information.

#### Receptors

5.5 The potential receptors likely to be directly affected by the proposal comprise the local and wider economies, both in financial and social terms, defined by way of ward boundaries.

5.6 The site lies within Hitchin Walsworth ward, therefore focus will be on this ward in particular. In addition, it may also be necessary to consider the impact on the adjoining wards. These are considered to be the zone of influence in relation to the site and Hitchin as a whole.

#### Potential Environmental Effects

5.7 Potential environmental effects are considered likely to include:

- Impact on social community services and facilities arising from demand arising from additional population, including education and healthcare,
- Changes to the mix and balance of housing in the area, and
- Impact on the local economy including the likely effect on local businesses and local economy and effects on employment/unemployment during construction and operation of the development.

#### Assessment Methodology

5.8 A desk based assessment will be undertaken to analyse the potential socio-economic effects. The key socio-economic topics to be reviewed and potential impacts assessed will include:

- Population and demographics;
- Economy and employment;

- Wealth and deprivation;
- Housing;
- Education;
- Community facilities including open space, and
- Health services.

5.9 The assessment will adopt a series of standard and recognised techniques as appropriate.

### WATER RESOURCES

5.10 The water resources chapter of the ES will assess the potential impacts of the proposed development upon the hydrogeology and hydrology within the site and surrounding area.

#### Baseline Conditions

5.11 The nearest watercourse is the River Purwell which is approximately 400 m to the south of the site.

5.12 The Environment Agency's (EA) flood zones map shows that the entirety of the Site lies within Flood Zone 1 and has very low probability of flooding ,less than 0.1% (1 in 1000-year) from rivers or the sea, although there is a small area of high surface water flood risk in the northern corner of the site.

5.13 At present the site is wholly greenfield and the development will introduce areas of hardstanding, with consequential changes to the existing site drainage regime.

5.14 The extent and capacity of the on and off site drainage provision (foul and surface water) is currently unknown.

5.15 The Site is not within a groundwater Source Protection Zone (SPZ) as indicated on the EA maps. The nearest source protection zone is immediately on the western side of Stotfold Road. The Total Catchment (SPZ 3) of the public water abstractions is Letchworth Garden City.

5.16 The geological map (BGS 1:50,000 Sheet 221 Hitchin) indicates the presence of Quaternary deposits - Dry Valley Deposits (chalky silt, clay sand and gravel) in the very northern corner of the site; and Anglian Glacial Till (chalky sandy and stony clay) in the very southwestern part. Most of the site area is not covered by superficial deposits and the bedrock is Middle Chalk (white chalk with flints and marl seams) and Melbourne Rock (hard nodular chalk) of the Upper Cretaceous.

5.17 The chalk is designated Principle Aquifer i.e. layers of rock that have high intergranular and/or fracture permeability, which can usually provide a high level of water storage and may support water supply and/or river base flow on a strategic scale.

5.18 The superficial deposits in the southwestern and northern parts of the Site are designated Secondary Undifferentiated Aquifers i.e. drift deposits with wide range of water permabilities and storage.

#### Receptors

5.19 The following receptors will be considered in the assessment:

- The principal (chalk) and secondary (glacial till and dry valley deposits);
- The River Purwell;

- Local drainage network (foul and surface water), and
- Future occupiers of the proposed development and adjacent landowners.

#### Potential Environmental Effects

5.20 Potential effects to be addressed by the EIA include:

- Potential risk of pollution to water resources (surface and ground water) during the construction and following completion of the development;
- Potential flooding from groundwater and overland flow;
- Potential changes to the drainage regime as a result of changes to proportion of hard and soft landscaping and the use of SUDS, and
- Effects of the site's new population on foul water drainage capacity.

#### Assessment Methodology

5.21 A Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) will be undertaken in accordance with National advice and in accordance with NHDC's Strategic FRA. This will consider how the Development would manage surface water runoff and discuss the proposed use of sustainable drainage systems. The FRA will be supported by a Drainage Management Plan (DMP) which will set out the principles of how surface water run-off and foul drainage will be managed within the development. The FRA and DMP will seek to demonstrate that the proposals will not have a negative effect upon on and off-site flooding due to the combined effects of increased surface water run-off and climate change.

5.22 The FRA will be fully scoped and agreed with the EA. The ES will summarise the FRA and DMP, and will also consider the proposed construction impacts on ground and surface water quality and groundwater flow. The potential of groundwater flooding will also be considered by reviewing historical data.

5.23 The Drainage Strategy will address the implication of flooding and drainage in respect of open space and access which will feed into the Masterplan to determine the location of utilities.

#### GROUND CONDITIONS

5.24 A desk based assessment will be required to establish the baseline ground conditions of the site. However given the historic use of the site for agriculture it is anticipated that no significant contamination exists.

5.25 It is considered that a baseline survey will be sufficient to enable this topic to be scoped out of the ES.

#### TRANSPORTATION

5.26 The Transportation chapter of the ES will address the potential transportation impacts likely to result from the redevelopment of the site, and will be informed by the Transport Assessment (TA) and Travel Plan (TP), submitted in support of the application.

#### Baseline Conditions

5.27 The land at Highover Farm, Hitchin, which is currently a Greenfield site, is located to the north of the existing residential development that comprises High Dane, Sturgeon's Way, Highover Way, Armour Rise, Grovelands Avenue, Collison Close and Roundwood Close. To the north of the site is the railway line with farmland beyond and to the east of the site is Stotfold Road with farmland beyond.

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- 5.28 The Strategic Road Network (SRN) in the vicinity of the Site is the A1(M) which is located to the east of the Site. Access onto the A1(M) from the proposed Site is via the A1(M) junctions 8 and 9 to the southeast and east respectively of the development site.
- 5.29 The local highway network that supports the SRN comprises of A and B classified roads, unclassified roads, and residential roads and streets. Cambridge Road (A505) is approximately 700m to the south of the Site. The A505 which forms the main east-west route through Hitchin provides links between Luton to the southwest of the proposed site and Letchworth Garden City and junction 9 of the A1(M) to the northeast of the proposed site. Directly to the east of the Site is Stotfold Road, this provides a route north to Stotfold and beyond.
- 5.30 There are footways on all the residential roads to the immediate south of the Site. Street lighting is provided along most of these lightly trafficked residential roads which enhances pedestrian safety during the hours of darkness.
- 5.31 The existing residential roads in the local area are generally lightly trafficked and suitable for cycling. The footways on these residential roads are also generally adequate in width and also provide access to local schools, shops and community facilities.
- 5.32 There are dropped kerbs and tactile paving provided on Stotfold Road, to the north of its junction with Grovelands Avenue, which provides access to the bus stops at this location. The A505 at its junction with Willian Road and Woolgrove Road is signal controlled with pedestrian crossing facilities on each of the approach arms. On the A505, close to the station, there is a Zebra Crossing and on the B656 by the station there is signal controlled pedestrian crossing both of which will assist pedestrians crossing the roads at these locations.
- 5.33 There are a number of bus services that operate in the vicinity of the proposed development Site. Bus routes 80 and 81/81A operate services between Stevenage/Westmill and Westmill/Purwell respectively. Both of these services are provided from the bus stop on Highover Way. This bus stop is located approximately 300m from the site.
- 5.34 Service 89 operates between Hitchin, Pirton, Shillington and Meppershall. This service is provided from the Orchard Road bus stop on Woolgrove Road, approximately 450m from the Site.
- 5.35 Bus services 97 and 98 operate between Hitchin/Stotfold and Hitchin/Baldock respectively. These services are provided from the bus stops on Cambridge Road circa 550m to the south of the Site. In addition, bus service 386 is also provided from these bus stops and this service operates between Bishop's Stortford, Hitchin and Stevenage.
- 5.36 The nearest railway station to the proposed development site is Hitchin station, approximately 1.4km from the Site. From the development site, the station is accessible by cycling, bus or car. The walking time from the Site to Hitchin railway station is approximately 17 minutes.
- 5.37 First Capital Connect provides services from Hitchin station between London stations (London Kings Cross and Moorgate) and Cambridge and Peterborough.

#### Receptors

- 5.38 In order to establish the sensitive receptors surrounding the Site, a desktop study was undertaken, examining local area mapping, in addition to site visits during the peak periods. The assessment will consider the impact of the proposed development on roads in the vicinity of the following receptors:
- Stotfold Road

- Cambridge Road
- Highover Way
- Grovelands Avenue
- Woolgrove Road
- Willian Road

### Potential Environmental Effects

5.39 Potential impacts are essentially those relating to increases in traffic, both during the construction and operational phases of the development on the existing surrounding highway network and associated impacts on existing and residents of the proposed development.

### Assessment Methodology

5.40 A review of the relevant planning policies will be undertaken.

5.41 A review of the existing and proposed pedestrian and cycle access to the site will be undertaken, as well as a review of the public transport to determine accessibility to the site.

5.42 Personal Injury Accident data records will be obtained and analysed.

5.43 Traffic surveys have been collected for key locations in the local highway network. This survey data will be used to create, calibrate and validate junction modelling at various key locations to be agreed with Hertfordshire County Council (HCC).

5.44 Use of the 'Stevenage and Hitchin UTP Model' (SHUM) will be discussed with HCC and Highways England and either outputs from the SHUM traffic model will then be used or a separate distribution/growth model will be created (which would include agreed planned and committed development). Data from these models would then be used to assess the impact of the full development in the future years at the identified junctions. It is anticipated that the following years will be assessed:

- 2017 Base (year of planning application);
- The opening year, assuming full build out and occupation, and
- Either a date ten years after the date of registration of the planning application (2027) or a date that ties in better with the SHUM model/NHDC Local Plan period.

5.45 The latest version of 'Junctions 8' and 'LinSig v3' junction modelling software will be used to assess the capacity and the impact on the identified junctions, with and without the development proposals.

5.46 The identified junctions will be assessed for a typical weekday AM Peak Hour and PM Peak Hour. These hours will either be determined from the SHUM model or from the surveyed traffic data, collected from the local highway network.

5.47 The residual impacts will be considered post any proposed mitigation measures that are appropriate for the scale of the proposed development.

- 
- 5.48 The mitigation measures that are considered appropriate to the proposed development will be detailed within the Travel Plan which will accompany the planning submission. In addition, should any transport related contributions and highway works be required these will be detailed in the Transport Assessment.

#### ECOLOGY AND CONSERVATION

- 5.49 The ecology and conservation chapter of the ES will assess the effects of the proposals on ecology.

#### Baseline Conditions

- 5.50 A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report (June 2014) has been prepared to identify any ecological constraints on the site which will need to be considered as part of the planning application.

- 5.51 This appraisal confirms that there are no designated areas either on or directly adjacent to the site. The nearest designated site is Keysheath Meadow LWS located approximately 0.5 km from the site.

- 5.52 Within the 'study area' (an area extending to 2km from the Site boundary), however, the following statutory and non-statutory designated sites and species were identified:

- Statutory Designated Sites - two Local Nature Reserves (LNR);
- Oughtonhead Common, and
- Purwell Meadows.

- 5.53 Non-statutory Designated Sites - 20 non-statutory designated sites, consisting of 19 Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) and one nature reserve run and managed by the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust (HMWT).

- 5.54 Statutory Protected Species - The local biological records office confirmed that 4 statutory protected species records existed for the study area. However, these records were either more than 10 years old, or there was unsuitable habitat for the species within the proposed development site, and they were therefore scoped out of the study.

- 5.55 Non Statutory Protected Species -The local biological records office confirmed that 34 non-statutory protected species records existed for the study area. 31 of these species were more than 10 years old and were therefore scoped out. The remaining 3 species of birds that are designated under the Birds Directive (little egret *Egretta garzetta*) or the Bern Convention (little egret, great spotted woodpecker *Dendrocopos major* and the grey wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*).

- 5.56 The appraisal identified a number of potential habitats on the site, including grassland, dense scrub, hedgerows, scattered trees, arable, farm buildings, and a pond. These habitats could potentially support the following protected species:

- Birds;
- Barn owls;
- Great crested newts;
- Common reptiles;
- Bats;
- Invertebrates, and

- 
- Other mammals.
- 5.57 Of the above, further survey work has been undertaken to establish whether the following species are present;
- Breeding birds;
  - Barn owls;
  - Great crested newts;
  - Common reptiles, and
  - Bats.

#### Receptors

- 5.58 In light of the above, and in broad terms, the following aforementioned receptors will be considered through the Ecology Assessment:
- Statutory and non statutory designated sites, and
  - Existing statutory and non statutory species habitats.

#### Potential Environmental Effects

- 5.59 Potential impacts would relate to loss of habitats and the potential disturbance to protected species. There is also the potential positive impact of habitat enhancement and creation.

#### Assessment Methodology

- 5.60 The assessment of impacts on ecology will be undertaken in accordance with Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management's (CIEEM) guidelines on Ecological Impact Assessment and an ES chapter prepared. Consultation with appropriate bodies will be undertaken.
- 5.61 Detailed survey results will be contained within a Technical Appendix with potential for mitigation on site, where necessary.

#### LANDSCAPE, VISUAL AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT

- 5.62 This chapter of the ES will consider the impact of the development on the landscape and visual amenity of the area, identifying existing key views from the edge of Hitchin and the surrounding landscape and settlements.
- 5.63 The landscape and visual assessment will be prepared based upon 'The Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, third edition (GLVIA3)', published by the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment in 2013.
- 5.64 This guidance does not provide a prescriptive approach to assessment but identifies principle and good practice. The methodology for this assessment will be based on this approach. The detailed appraisal will enable the potential landscape and visual effects to be determined, and a landscape design and mitigation strategy to be put forward as part of the outline planning application.

#### Baseline Conditions

- 5.65 In terms of landscape, the key issue is the open location. The site adjoins the existing Walsworth Estate and is visible to residents of properties the adjoining street. There are no public rights of way across the site. The nearest public right of way is The Icknield Way Path

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which runs East to West about 750 metres to the north and has open views of the site to the south.

5.66 A Visual Assessment will be undertaken to identify potential receptors to visual change.

5.67 There are no built environment concerns given that the Walsworth Estate is not a designated Conservation Area. However, it is understood that the site is part located in the landscape character area LCA 216 (Arlesey - Great Wymondley) in the North Herefordshire and Stevenage Landscape Character Assessment.

5.68 An arboricultural survey and assessment will be undertaken to confirm the health and visual quality of the trees on site.

#### Receptors

5.69 The following receptors will be considered through the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment:

- Stotfold Road to the east of the site;
- Further north on Stotfold Road, on the other side of the railway, where the road rises to Wilbury Hill;
- The Letchworth Greenway which at its nearest point is approximately 400m to the east of Stotfold Road at a higher elevation;
- A505 Cambridge Road, and
- High Dane, Collison Close and Roundwood Close.

#### Potential Environmental Effects

5.70 The potential impacts of the development upon landscape may include the following:

- Temporary visual intrusion during the construction works;
- Long term changes to landscape quality and context, and
- Long term changes to the quality and context of local views to, from and through the site for a number of different visual receptors during the daytime.

#### Assessment Methodology

5.71 The landscape, visual and built heritage assessment will include the following elements:

- Agreement of potential views to be assessed with NHDC;
- Definition of the Zone of Visual Influence;
- Assessment of the existing landscape character and visual quality of the site and surrounding area through desk-based analysis and field study;
- Evaluation of key landscape features and classification of their sensitivity to change;
- Evaluation of the design quality, and
- The development of mitigation measures, where appropriate.

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## NOISE

5.72 This chapter of the ES will address the potential impacts on noise likely to be generated as the result of the redevelopment of the site, and the suitability of the site for the proposed uses.

### Baseline Conditions

5.73 The land at Highover Farm, Hitchin, which is currently a Greenfield site, is located to the north of the existing residential development that comprises High Dane, Sturgeon's Way, Highover Way, Armour Rise, Grovelands Avenue, Collison Close and Roundwood Close. To the north of the site is the railway line with farmland beyond and to the east of the site is Stotfold Road with farmland beyond.

### Receptors

5.74 The following sensitive receptors will be considered as part of the Noise Assessment:

- Existing nearby residents during the construction and operational phases of the development, and
- New residents during construction and operational phases of the development.

### Potential Environmental Effects

5.75 The potential environmental effects for noise would include increased noise and vibration impacts on existing nearby residents and new residents during the construction and operational phases of the development.

### Assessment Methodology

5.76 The noise and vibration assessment will consider the suitability of the prevailing local noise and vibration environment for the proposed developments and assess the potential impacts on the prevailing conditions at existing local noise and vibration sensitive receptors, such as existing local dwellings. The scope of the assessment will be agreed through consultation with North Hertfordshire Environmental Health Officer. The assessment will consider the potential impacts during both the construction and operational phases of the development.

5.77 The assessment will, in the first instance, identify all key local noise sources and existing and proposed sensitive receptors. A baseline noise survey will then be undertaken to establish the prevailing ambient and background levels at a representative sample of existing noise sensitive receptors, as well as within the site, to characterise the noise climate to assist in the calibration of noise models for future scenarios. This survey will also establish the noise levels arising at the site as a result of dominant local noise sources, including the roads and railway.

5.78 It is anticipated that the baseline noise conditions on the site will be dominated by the transportation sources on the roads surrounding the site. The railway line represents a potential source of noise and vibration which may need to be considered, alongside the need for mitigation through the design process to establish whether there is need to setback development from the railway line.

## AIR QUALITY

5.79 The site is not located in an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) or close to any particular uses that could lead to air quality issues affecting the development. However, an air quality assessment will be undertaken to establish whether this is the case.

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5.80 The nearest existing residential properties and the new residential properties on the site will be sensitive to dust during construction. These impacts will be temporary and subject to routine forms of mitigation and control. Reference will be made to this during consideration of the phasing of the development.

5.81 Given the above, it is considered that the potential for the development to create significant effects on the environment is negligible. However, if the Council considers that significant changes in air quality may be caused by the proposed development, Mouchel will consider the need for an Air Quality Assessment proportionate to the scale of the development and the background air quality conditions as part of the EIA.

#### LANDUSE AND AGRICULTURE

5.82 The agriculture and soils chapter of the ES will assess the potential impacts of the proposed development on soil, agricultural land and farm enterprises.

#### Baseline Conditions

5.83 The site is currently undeveloped and is in agricultural use. The site is shown as Grade 2 (very good quality) agricultural land on the Provisional Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) map, although these maps are intended for strategic purposes and are not accurate for classifying individual sites. A detailed soil and ALC survey will be required to establish the site's agricultural land quality.

#### Receptors

5.84 The main receptor in this case would be the use of land and in turn the farm enterprise as the land would no longer be available for agriculture.

#### Potential Environmental Effects

5.85 The potential impacts would be the loss of best and most versatile agricultural land (Grades 1, 2 and 3a); the loss of soils; and the impact on the continued viability of the farm holding.

#### Assessment Methodology

5.86 A detailed ALC survey would be undertaken in accordance with the established methodology and guidelines for classifying the quality of agricultural land. This would involve examining soil profiles across the site to describe and record their physical characteristics.

5.87 The ALC survey will determine the area of each grade of land within the site. The potential loss of this land will then be assessed according to significance criteria based on the policy within paragraph 112 of the National Planning Policy Framework and the Planning Practice Guidance. The impacts on the farm holding will be established by consulting with the farmer to establish the effects of the loss of land on the residual farm enterprise.

#### UTILITIES/INFRASTRUCTURE

5.88 A utilities chapter will not be provided as part of the ES. It is therefore 'scoped out'. However, an assessment will be undertaken to assess the potential impacts of the proposed development upon the existing utility infrastructure within the site and surrounding area. The findings of this assessment will be provided in a separate report and where necessary any impacts will be assessed under the relevant ES chapter disciplines.

#### ARCHAEOLOGY

5.89 The archaeology and cultural heritage chapter of the ES will consider the impact of the proposal on any archaeological and cultural heritage resources.

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### Baseline Conditions

- 5.90 An Archaeological and Cultural Heritage Assessment will be undertaken. There are no Designated Assets in the Site. There are no built heritage assets in the Site. There are Designated Assets, consisting of two scheduled monuments, a few listed buildings and a conservation area, in the surrounds of the Site.
- 5.91 The assessment will consider significance of the buried heritage assets in the Site and take into account the setting of the heritage assets of high significance in its surrounds, namely the Hitchin Railway and Ranson Recreation Ground Conservation Area, the Scheduled Monuments of the Willbury Hill univallate fort (SM 101640) and the bowl barrows which include the Ickleford Tumulus (1017406) and listed buildings in 1Km radius of the Site

### Receptors

- 5.92 The receptors in the site receptors will in the first instance derived from the known archaeology held by the HER (1Km radius) and documentary evidence. The potential archaeology of the site will be extrapolated from the known buried assets in the site and the model of the archaeology of the surrounds of the site. The significance of the buried archaeological assets will be assessed. Secondly the setting of the Designated Assets in the surrounds of the site will also be considered based on Historic England's data. A detailed site visit and the results of the desktop assessment will inform the assessment of the Designated Heritage Assets in 1km around the Site.

### Potential Environmental Effects

- 5.93 Potential impacts include the destruction of buried archaeology as a result of the construction of the development.

### Assessment Methodology

- 5.94 A review of the desktop study undertaken for the surrounding area (up to 1 km) will be reviewed and supplemented as appropriate.
- 5.95 A geophysical survey of the site will be undertaken consisting of the total magnetometry survey of the site. A programme of intrusive archaeological trial trenching will be drawn up and carried out in light of the desktop assessment and geophysics results. This information will provide the baseline to define the impact of the proposed development on the buried heritage assets in the Site.
- 5.96 Further survey work and an appropriate course of mitigation will be determined as a result of the consideration of the desktop assessment, geophysics and intrusive evaluation and discussions with NHDC officers.

## 6 THE ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

### STRUCTURE

- 6.1 The structure of the ES will adhere to the requirements of the relevant Regulations and other good practice guidance. Essentially the ES will comprise four main parts: Scoping Report, main EIA text, Technical Appendices and Non Technical Summary. The proposed structure is provided below:

Chapter	Title	General Scope
<b>Volume 1: PART A - The Scoping Report</b>		
<b>PART B -The Environmental Impact Assessment</b>		
1	Introduction	Outline the proposed development, legislative framework, structure of ES and details of the design team
2	Methodology	Confirming the scope of the ES and methodology adopted, confirming the terminology for assessment of effects, committed development and assumption and limitations
3	Background Development to	Description of site and surrounding area and evolution of the proposals.
4	Alternatives	Summary of the alternatives considered
5	Development Description	Summary of proposed land use and form of development, including phasing where appropriate
6	Planning Context	Summary of the planning context of the site
7	Economy, Population and Society	Assessment in line with relevant guidance and Regulations.
8	Water Resources	Assessment in line with relevant guidance and Regulations.
9	Transportation	Assessment in line with relevant guidance and Regulations
10	Ecology and Conservation	Assessment in line with relevant guidance and Regulations.
11	Landscape, Visual Impact and Built Environment	Assessment in line with relevant guidance and Regulations.
12	Noise	Assessment in line with relevant guidance and Regulations.
13	Land Use and Agriculture	Assessment in line with relevant guidance and Regulations.
14	Archaeology	Assessment in line with relevant guidance and Regulations
15	Overview of Effects	Summary of the Cumulative and Residential Effects
	References	
	Glossary	
	Abbreviations	
<b>Volume 2 - Technical Appendices as Necessary</b>		
<b>Volume 3 - Non-Technical Summary (NTS)</b>		

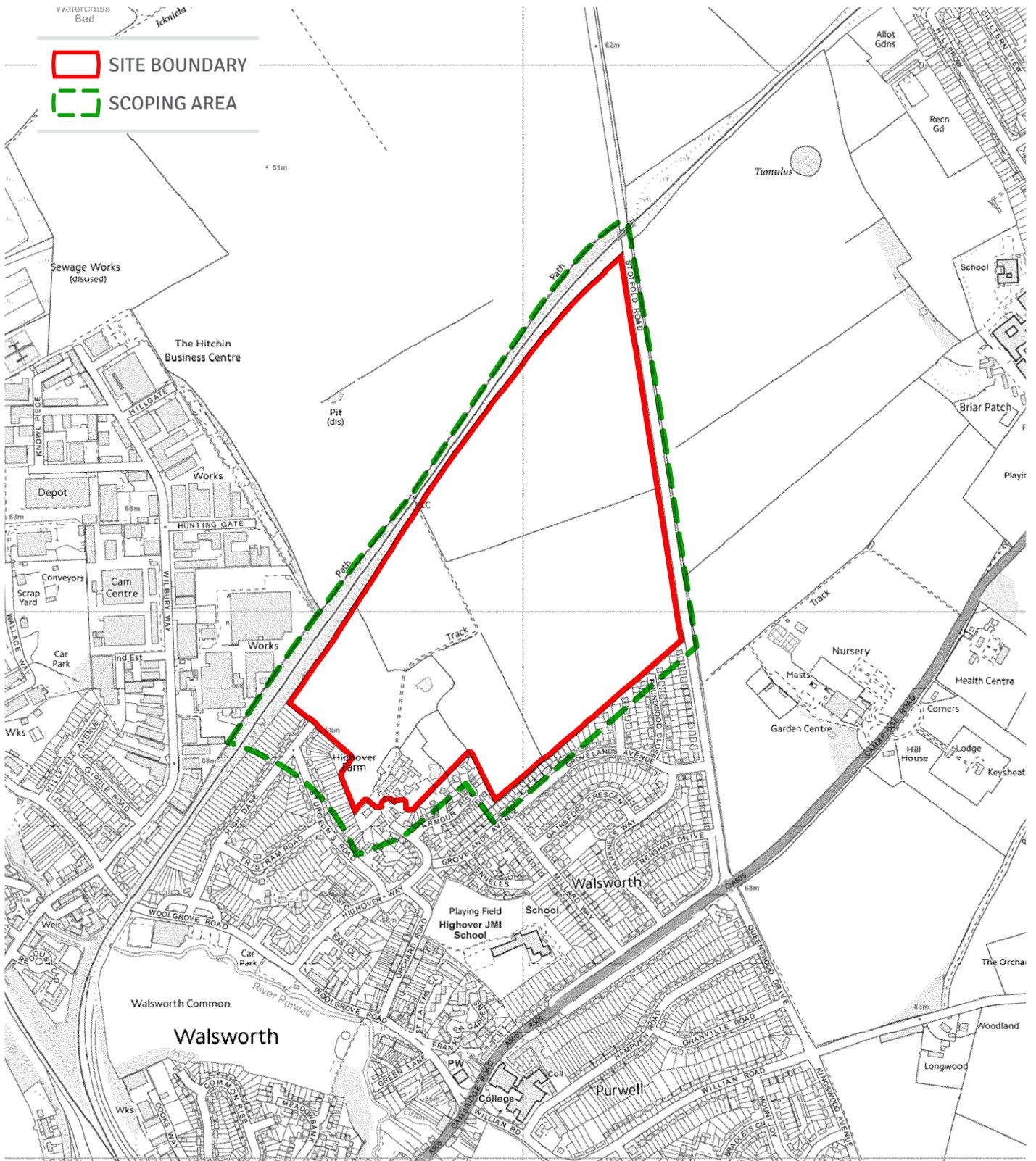
Figure 1

# SITE LOCATION PLAN



Figure 2

# SCOPING AREA PLAN



**SCOPING PLAN**  
 Highover Farm  
 Highover Way  
 HITCHIN SG4 0RQ



Scale @ A4 : 1:10,000  
 Plan No. : 503/55/1\_SLP02

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 0370 777 6292

LONDON  
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 BRISTOL  
 EDINBURGH  
 HUNTINGDON  
 MANCHESTER

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Appendix 8

# MEETING NOTE, DATED 11 FEBRUARY 2016



## **AGREED MEETING NOTE**

### **HITCHIN – LAND AT HIGHOVER FARM (HT1)**

**11 FEBRUARY 2016 – 14.30**

### **NORTH HERTS DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES**

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#### **Attendees:**

Nigel Smith (NS) – North Herts District Council

David Hill (DH) – North Herts District Council

Pat Tattan (PT) – Bellcross Homes

Jason Lowes (JL) – Rapleys LLP

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Following introductions, PT confirmed that the site allocation HT1 and the land to the north-east (bounded by Stotfold Road and the railway line) were in a single ownership. Furthermore, PT confirmed that due to recent circumstances, the site was immediately available for development.

## **2 EMERGING POLICY AND EVIDENCE BASE**

- 2.1 NS and DH confirmed that they were still reviewing comments made during the most recent planning consultation, as responses had exceeded 8,000. In addition, the local authority has updated its SHMAA, and the objectively assessed need for housing within the borough is 14,400 homes (an uplift from 12,100 within the previous SHMAA). In these terms, they were exploring options for identifying additional land, over and above that identified in the 2014 consultation exercise, for housing.
- 2.2 NS indicated that no objections have been received from statutory consultees relative to HT1, and that comments received pertained largely to development management issues. In these terms, officers retain their support for this emerging allocation.
- 2.3 In terms of timescales, NS confirmed that the latest version of the LDS envisaged a further consultation later in the year, with submission to the Secretary of State in March 2017 and Examination in August 2017.

## **3 LAND TO THE NORTH-EAST**

- 3.1 JL underlined previous representations that the land to the north-east was also available for development, and would make a valuable additional contribution to the Council's housing need in the context of the latest SHMAA. In this context, JL asked for views from NS and DH on what information might assist them in considering the site further. NS indicated that the following issues would need to be considered:



- The strategic gap between Hitchin and Letchworth;
- Landscaping (including consideration of nearby scheduled monuments);
- Education, and
- Flood risk.

3.2 Subject to client instruction, JL confirmed that he would be happy to provide additional information relative to these issues in order to support the site's allocation for housing.

#### 4 **NEXT STEPS**

4.1 JL confirmed that PT was in a position to prepare a planning application, and if possible would prefer to secure planning permission well before the Council's emerging policies were adopted. It was generally recognised around the table that progress relative to a development proposal on the site would assist the local authority whilst it sought to adopt its emerging planning policies.

4.2 In these terms, JL suggested that the next step would be a pre-application package for both HT1 and the land to the north-east. That package would include a development layout and supporting information relative to the main planning issues. The package would be tabled at meeting with NS and DH, and their development management colleagues. JL also proposed that it would be appropriate for Rapleys to submit the earliest EIA screening and scoping package. NS welcomed this suggested approach, and agreed that it would be helpful to secure development management input in future discussions.

4.3 As an aside, NS asked why the farm buildings had been excluded from the allocation. JL stated that this was not deliberate, but that no objections had been raised because – on the consultation proposals map – the farm buildings were shown as “white land” and as such the principle of residential development would be supported in any event. NS agreed with this, but asked JL and PT to consider whether this land, and its housing yield, could be added to the allocation HT1. PT and JL had no objection to this.

4.4 PT and JL thanked NS and DH for their time, the meeting closed at 3pm.

Appendix 9

# MEETING NOTE, DATED 2 AUGUST 2016

## MEETING NOTE

### HITCHIN - LAND AT HIGHOVER FARM

At: North Hertfordshire DC Offices, Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City, SG6 3JF

2 August 2016 @ 14:30am

#### Attendees:

David Hill (DH)	- North Hertfordshire District Council (Planning Policy)
Tom Rea (TR)	- North Hertfordshire District Council (Development Management)
Michael Shanley (MS)	- Bellcross Homes
David Shanley (DS)	- Bellcross Homes
Pat Tattan (PT)	- Bellcross Homes
Robert Clarke (RC)	- Rapleys LLP
Jason Lowes (JL)	- Rapleys LLP

## 1. Introduction

1.1. Following introductions, it was agreed around the table that the focus of the meeting was to build on discussions earlier in the year, in the interests of fostering a collaborative approach between Bellcross and the local authority relative to the site. It was noted around the table that delivery of the site was crucial to meet the local authority's need for housing.

## 2. Policy Update

2.1. DH confirmed that draft strategic policies, including a residential allocation for the site, had been approved by Full Council on 20 July. The draft allocation encompasses the whole of the site, and envisages 700 homes and other supporting elements.

2.2. In terms of future timescales, it is envisaged that draft policies will be submitted to Cabinet for approval in September. Following this will be six weeks of consultation from mid-October, with submission of the Local Plan to the Secretary of State in March 2017. Examination is currently envisaged for September 2017, with adoption in early 2018, albeit this is subject to confirmation from the Planning Inspectorate.

## 3. Planning Application

3.1. It was agreed around the table that the best way of cementing the draft allocation through the emerging policy process was by way of an early planning application, which DH and TR indicated the local authority would support in principle (albeit it was also acknowledged that any application would need to address detailed development management considerations). It was agreed that an outline application would be appropriate.

3.2. In terms of timescales, RC considered that the most appropriate point for the planning application to be submitted was following the local authority's public consultation exercise in October/November. This would provide the opportunity for the application to respond to any comments received relative to the site during the consultation. This logic was acknowledged by DH and TR.

3.3. RC also suggested that it would be advantageous to all for a decision to be made in advance of the Examination, as this would confirm to the Inspector (if confirmation were needed) that the site could be relied upon in terms of suitability and deliverability, thereby assisting local authority in its demonstration of the Local Plan's soundness.

3.4. Again, this was acknowledged by officers, albeit TR indicated that - as the site would still be in the Green Belt until emerging plans were adopted - the proposal would need to be referred to the Secretary of State in advance of planning permission being granted. Although this represented an element of planning risk, it was nevertheless recognised around the table that there were strong grounds to anticipate that the SoS would support the proposal, not least given the following exceptional circumstances:

- At the point of referral, emerging policies would be at an advanced stage and they, and their supporting evidence base, would confirm the site's appropriateness for housing;
- The local authority would be supporting the planning application;
- The application would fully address all relevant planning issues (including those raised in Autumn's policy consultation);
- The extent of the current Green Belt derives from an aged and out-dated Local Plan, and
- The proposal would represent one of the largest contributions to meeting North Herts's current pressing need for housing.

#### 4. Next Steps

4.1. It was agreed around the table that the planning application and its supporting study should be scoped as a matter of urgency. RC confirmed that Rapleys had started work on a request for an EIA screening opinion, and this would be submitted to the local authority shortly. It was also agreed that TR and JL should liaise after the meeting to discuss a formal pre-application approach in the coming weeks.

#### 5. Any Other Business

5.1. None -the meeting ended at 15:30 AM.

Appendix 10

**MEETING NOTE, DATED 3  
MAY 2017**

**MEETING NOTE**

**HITCHIN - LAND AT HIGHOVER FARM**

At: North Hertfordshire District Council, Town Lodge, Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City

3 May 2017 @ 10.00am

Attendees:

- |                       |   |  |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| Tom Rea (TR)          | - | Development Management, North Hertfordshire District Council |
| Helen Leitch (HL)     | - | Landscape Officer, North Hertfordshire District Council      |
| Michael Shanley (MS)  | - | Bellcross Homes  |
| Louise Fountain (LF)  | - | Plan-it  |
| Jason Lowes (JL)      | - | Rapleys LLP  |
| Chloe Ballantine (CB) | - | Rapleys LLP  |

**1. Introduction**

JL opened discussions by making reference to the last pre-application meetings held with Officers in August 2016 and confirming that their previous feedback had since been reviewed by the project team to inform an initial draft masterplan layout.

**2. Principle of Development**

TR reconfirmed that the Council’s emerging Local Plan allocating the whole site as a strategic housing site is due to be submitted to the Secretary of State and the end of the May with Examination expected to take place late Summer/Autumn 2017.

TR confirmed that there were limited representations received specifically for the site’s allocation within the emerging Local Plan, and that engagement with statutory consultees for feedback on the pre-application package was at an early stage.

TR stated that the matter of coalescence could be successfully managed by the railway and Stotfold Road. JL confirmed that this had been taken into account and that the layout had been designed to add further separation between Hitchin and Letchworth.

It was agreed that proposal will contribute towards the Council’s five year housing land supply, which would present a strong case to the Local Plan Inspector. MS emphasised to TR and HL that the site’s delivery is also key priority within Bellcross’ portfolio and that strong interest from house builders has already been received.

With this in mind, TR and HL reconfirmed the Local Authority’s support for the principle of development. However, it was also recognised around that table that the proposal would evidently need to be supported by the ongoing technical work being carried out to support of the ES.

**3. Masterplan Layout**

LF introduced the draft initial masterplan and explained the evolving design process, and advised that a key driving principle was bringing forward a number of measures to produce additional development

restraining measures addition to the railway line and Stotfold Road, for example building set backs, typologies, green buffers and viewing corridors. This was welcomed by TR and HL.

TR and HL confirmed their support for the suggested transitional densities to reflect the site's urban/countryside interface and it was agreed that whilst the site should have its own typology identity it should continue to respect the existing local character.

TR and HL commented on pedestrian/cycle connectivity to the site's surroundings. JL confirmed that the project team would investigate potential options in the interests of maximising such links, albeit it was recognised around the table that this was subject to land ownership/rights of access.

In terms of other infrastructure provision, TR highlighted that existing local retail provision within the surrounding the site was undergoing expansion and upgrade. Consequently, it was agreed that as the application was outline, the provision of approximately 500 sqm of on-site neighborhood facilities should be kept flexible across a range of land uses to meet evolving local need and demand.

TR recommended that the scheme be reviewed by the Hertfordshire Design Review Panel, and JL said that this would be investigated.

#### 4. Public Consultation

CB presented the proposed mailshot consultation area and previous Public Exhibition Scoping Note, which TR confirmed was broadly acceptable whilst also providing the following feedback:

- The mailshot area should be extended further to the south within Hitchin.
- Public consultation should include a weekday day/weekend session, with consideration given to the upcoming general elections. It was agreed that the public exhibition would be after this.
- A list of local resident associations would be provided by TR in due course.
- The Local Plan representations should be reviewed by the project team to inform the invite distribution and exhibition boards.

The above was noted, and it was discussed that public consultation would most likely take place mid June.

#### 5. Sustainability Statement Scope

TR confirmed that the Council did not have an adopted SPD for providing applicants with guidance on sustainability matters, however, he suggested that the site did provide an opportunity for "inclusiveness" and recommended reviewing the Hertfordshire County Council's 'Building Futures' guidance document.

This was noted and JL advised that a skeleton statement would be drafted and provided in due course.

#### 6. Planning Obligations

JL confirmed that the Housing Officer's comments to the Scoping Opinion Request had been helpful.

TR advised that he would be contacting education services for clarification with regards to contributions to education in light of the provision of an on-site primary school. TR also confirmed that he would liaise with other consultees.

It was acknowledged and accepted that a further separate discussion would need to be held to agree the draft heads of terms/planning obligations in advance of the planning application being submitted.

## 7. Timescales

JL confirmed that discussions with the project team and consultees were ongoing, with a target submission in July. TR advised that this could be ambitious and therefore it was agreed that timescales would be kept under review to ensure any matters raised by statutory consultees to the planning application are duly addressed prior to the Local Plan Examination commencing. However, as a general point, it was agreed that it would be advantageous to all for the planning application to be as advanced as possible prior to the Local Plan Examination.

TR advised that formal written pre-application feedback would be issued as soon as possible.

The meeting ended at 11.15 am.

DRAFT

Appendix 11

# PUBLIC EXHIBITION CONSULTATION LEAFLET

# Public Exhibition Land at Highover Farm, Hitchin

## TELL US YOUR VIEWS

Bellcross Homes would like to present their plans for the development of up to 700 new homes, neighbourhood/retail facilities, green infrastructure and open space at land at Highover Farm, Hitchin. You are invited to attend an exhibition to meet the project team and find out more about the proposals. We welcome your feedback on the plans.



**WALSWORTH COMMUNITY CENTRE** 88 Woolgrove Road Hitchin SG4 OAU



- THURSDAY 22 JUNE 4.30PM TO 8.30PM
- SATURDAY 24 JUNE 12 NOON TO 3PM



Bellcross Homes are a leading property developer who have been constructing quality homes in Hertfordshire since 1978. This new sustainable development at Hitchin will provide a wide range of housing choice, local facilities and open space. As you may be aware, North Hertfordshire District Council are currently reviewing their adopted planning policies and have allocated the land as a Strategic Housing Site for up to 700 homes to meet local housing need in their Proposed

Submission Local Plan 2011-2031.

Detailed pre-application discussions are taking place with Officers to deliver a shared vision for the site and we welcome your views. The proposal has taken into account the local neighbourhood and landscape, and hopes to add to the character of the area whilst delivering substantial economic, social and environmental benefits in the long and short term.



## WE WOULD LIKE YOUR FEEDBACK...

You can provide us with your feedback at the exhibition or you can send your comments by email to: [HighoverHitchin@rapleys.com](mailto:HighoverHitchin@rapleys.com) or by post to: **Rapleys LLP 51 Great Marlborough Street London W1F 7JT**

Your views on the proposal will be sought at the exhibition, but if you are unable to attend, please complete the response form below.

**Name:**.....

**Address:**.....

Do you support the proposals for land at Highover Farm?

- Yes
- Yes, with reservations
- No
- Don't know

**Comments:**.....  
 .....

Appendix 12

# NHDC FORMAL PRE- APPLICATION FEEDBACK, 26 SEPTEMBER 2017

**NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

*Correspondence address:*

North Hertfordshire District Council, PO BOX 10613, Nottingham, NG6 6DH  
Telephone: (01462) 474000  
Text Phone: (01462) 474800  
DX 324201, Nottingham 59



26 September 2017

Mr J Lowes  
Rapleys LLP  
51 Great Marlborough Street  
London  
W1F 7JT

Our Ref : 17/01010/1PRE  
Contact : Tom Rea  
Direct Line: 01462 474565  
Email : tom.rea@north-herts.gov.uk

Dear Mr Lowes

**Pre-app advice: Outline application for 705 residential units, new primary school, open space/landscaping (including outdoor sport/recreation facilities, car parking, infrastructure and other associated works).  
Land north of Highover Farm to Stotfold Road, Highover Way, Hitchin**

I refer to your pre-application submission in respect of the above site, received complete on the 24<sup>th</sup> April 2017. I am writing to you following the site visit, an examination of the information submitted and the receipt of a number of consultee responses. I apologise for the delay in replying on this matter.

I would emphasise that this does not constitute a formal determination and is without prejudice to any subsequent formal planning submission.

I note the documents submitted with this application as follows:

- Planning statement
- Shaping the Masterplan
- Concept masterplan

I have previously provided separately the written comments received from the various statutory consultees. I will continue to provide any additional comments received following this formal response.

Policy Background

In relation to the development of land at Highover Farm the following government guidance and policies from the development plan are relevant as follows:

**National Planning Policy Framework:** Generally relevant throughout but specifically the following sections would apply to this development:-

Introduction: Achieving Sustainable Development  
Section 1: Building a strong competitive economy  
Section 4: Promoting sustainable transport  
Section 6: Delivering a wide choice of high quality homes  
Section 7: Requiring good design  
Section 8: Promoting healthy communities  
Section 9: Protecting Green Belt land  
Section 10: Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change  
Section 11: Conserving and enhancing the natural environment  
Section 12: Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

**North Hertfordshire District Local Plan No. 2 with Alterations 1996 (Saved Policies 2007) :**

Policy 2: Green Belt  
Policy 26: Housing Proposals  
Policy 29A: Affordable Housing  
Policy 55: Car Parking  
Policy 57: Residential Guidelines and Standards

**Supplementary planning documents**

- Design
- Vehicle Parking Provision at New Developments and Planning Obligations.

All of the above documents can be viewed on the Council's website:

[www.north-herts.gov.uk](http://www.north-herts.gov.uk)

**North Hertfordshire District Local Plan 2011-2031 Submission Local Plan and Proposals Map:**

Policy SP17 (Site HT1 – Highover Farm, Hitchin)

Policy HS1 Local Housing Allocations

Policy SP2 Settlement Hierarchy  
Policy SP3 Employment  
Policy HS2 Affordable Housing  
Policy SP6 Sustainable Transport  
Policy SP7 Infrastructure requirements and developer contributions  
Policy SP8 Housing  
Policy SP9 Design and Sustainability  
Policy D1 Sustainable Design  
Policy HS3 Housing mix

Policy HC1 Community facilities  
Policy NE1 Landscape  
Policy NE2 Green Infrastructure  
Policy NE5 New and improved public open space and biodiversity  
Policy NE7 Reducing Flood Risk  
Policy NE8 Sustainable Drainage Systems  
Policy T1 Assessment of Transport matters  
Policy T2 Parking

The site has been identified as site **HT1** for housing in the emerging Local Plan. Hitchin is identified in the emerging plan as a main town under **Policy SP2** (Settlement Hierarchy).

The Submission Local Plan was submitted to the Secretary of State in June 2017. An Examination in Public (EIP) is expected to take place in October / November 2017.

Please note that the Local Plan can be viewed under the Planning Services section of our website: [www.north-herts.gov.uk](http://www.north-herts.gov.uk).

#### Principle of the proposed development

The Local Planning Authority is required to determine all planning applications in accordance with the development plan, which currently consists of the North Hertfordshire District Local Plan no.2 with Alterations 1996 and the NPPF, with some limited weight also afforded to the emerging North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031.

Paragraph 11 of the NPPF confirms *'that planning applications must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise'*.

Currently and at the time of writing this pre-application advice, the site is located within the Metropolitan Green Belt. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states at paragraph 88 that *'When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt.'* The proposed development would be an inappropriate form of development within the Green Belt as it would not fall under any of the exceptions as outlined under paragraphs 89 and 90 of the NPPF and so would be contrary to the NPPF and Policy 2 of the current Local Plan.

Paragraphs 14, 47 and 49 of the NPPF outline that if the Council cannot demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply, that the current policy should be considered out of date and that there should be a presumption in favour of sustainable development, whereby the LPA should be *'granting permission unless:*

- *any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole; or*
- *specific policies in this Framework indicate development should be restricted*

The footnote to Paragraph 14 indicates that Green Belt policies are included in these specific policy restrictions.

Whilst the Council can not currently demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply, as has been referred to in the Planning Statement, in accordance with government advice and recent Secretary of State decisions, this does not outweigh the inappropriateness of the development and the harm to the Green Belt. As such, if an application were to be determined today, it is possible that it would be recommended for refusal being contrary to Green Belt policy and premature in the light of the emerging plan.

As mentioned the site is listed as a Local Housing Allocations site within the emerging Local Plan, reference HT1. The emerging/ submission plan has now been submitted to the Secretary of State for Examination in Public (EiP). Even at this stage only limited weight can be afforded to it and so at this stage, this would not outweigh the harm to the Green Belt in my view. However, the weight afforded to the emerging plan, and the sites inclusion as an allocated housing site, gains increased weight as the emerging plan progresses.

Notwithstanding the above it is my view that the Submission Local Plan is at an advanced stage when looking at the criteria in Paragraph 216 and so in my opinion the Local Planning Authority can start to consider the possibility of housing sites allocated in the Plan such as HT1 as being acceptable in principle.

Even at this post – submission stage the current local plan would still take precedence, the site would remain within the Green Belt and the proposals indicated in this pre-application submission for site HT1 would remain inappropriate development. This would be the case up until full adoption of the emerging/ Submission Local Plan. Therefore, if an application were to be submitted prior to full adoption, a case for very special circumstances would have to be made, which would need to demonstrate that there are considerations and circumstances which would ‘clearly outweigh’ the harm to the Green Belt’ in accordance with paragraph 88 of the NPPF.

The Planning Statement sets out in section 7 what are considered to be very special circumstances that collectively would weigh in favour of permission being granted for a residential led scheme at Highover Farm. These are given as follows :

- the adopted local plan is out of date
- the Councils housing need cannot be met within existing settlement boundaries thus requiring a review of its Green Belt
- the site is identified as a residential housing allocation in the emerging local plan accounting for approximately 5% of the District’s objectively assessed need between 2011 and 2031
- the Council cannot demonstrate a five year housing supply – HT1 would assist in remedying this situation

- the development at HT1 would not conflict with the 5 purposes of Green Belt as set out in paragraph 80 of the NPPF
- the proposals are sustainable
- the proposals would bring forward substantial benefits

Having considered these I consider that that cumulatively they could potentially amount to a fairly strong argument in favour of granting planning permission.

I have mentioned paragraph 216 of the NPPF above as being relevant to any early consideration of a planning application in advance of full adoption of the emerging local plan.

One of the criteria is ‘ *the extent to which there are unresolved objections to relevant policies*’. I have previously provided the full list of representations on the Local Plan 2011 – 2031 Proposed Submission Draft in respect of Policy SP17 : Site HT1 Highover Farm .

I note that objections to the policy and allocation include those from CPRE Hertfordshire, Hertfordshire County Council Property Services, Natural England, Highways England, the Environment Agency and Hertfordshire Gardens Trust. If these objections remain to be unresolved any application will need to demonstrate how these objections could be addressed and overcome.

To reiterate, it would be for the applicants to outline the VSC’s which would need to clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt if an application were to be considered favourably by the Local Planning Authority.

Other than those VSC’s mentioned in section 7 of the Planning Statement I would also suggest the additional social , economic and environmental benefits:

- Up to 40% affordable housing provision
- Council tax payments benefit to the local economy
- New homes bonus payments to the Local Authority which assists local authorities in maintaining and providing services
- Increased connectivity between the existing and new settlement with existing rights of way
- That reference is made to the site being a strategic housing site in the emerging local plan and therefore of considerable significance particularly in terms of the encouragement in the NPPF to boost the supply of housing and for Councils to provide a five year supply of housing land
- The site is available, achievable and deliverable within the next five years.

To summarise on the matter of principle, I consider that given the current and relatively advanced status of the Council’s emerging Local Plan, the sites inclusion within the emerging local plan as a strategic housing site and the current lack of a 5 year land supply, the situation is such that there is a presumption in favour of supporting the principle of the proposed development notwithstanding its Green Belt status.

Please note that should an application be submitted prior to adoption, it would be deemed a departure from policy and so would need to be referred to the Secretary of State before a decision could be made by the Local Authority.

### Layout, Design and Impact on the visual amenity of the site and surrounding area

A Concept Masterplan has been provided as part of this pre-application submission supported by a 'Shaping the Masterplan' document.

It is appreciated that the concept plan is only indicative at this stage however it is useful, having regard to comments received from statutory consultees and following our site meeting to provide some comments for discussion at this stage which perhaps can be explored further at the forthcoming Design Review meeting.

### General layout

In general terms, I consider that the indicative layout is broadly acceptable – focussing the more urban aspects and density of the proposal towards the boundaries with the existing built up part of Hitchin and reducing density towards the northern and eastern boundaries. It also makes use of the main landscape features of the site making sure that the site's characteristics inform the layout.

I provide the following comments on specific aspects of the proposals:

- It is acknowledged that the northern section of the site is to be relatively undeveloped and this is crucial in ensuring that the proposals have regard to the purposes of the Green Belt. It is recommended that any ancillary buildings and / or structures associated with the sports pitches are kept to a minimum here. The site slopes at this point so any re-grading of the land will need to be understood.
- The Rights of Way unit at Hertfordshire County Council advise that '*This site would represent a significant addition to the residential population of the area and so appropriate provision must be made for their access to the surrounding countryside for the purposes of leisure, health, and sustainable transport appropriate*' It is essential that there is a safe footpath and cycle access across or underneath the railway to connect to footpath 89 to the north of the site and linkages are explored to the east across Stotfold Road and to the Letchworth Garden City Greenway trail
- The Stotfold Road frontage should include a pedestrian access southwards to link up with the existing footpath.
- Pedestrian / cycleway linkage are provided through Roundwood and Collison Close onto Grovelands Avenue

- Investigate the possibility of a pedestrian linkage from the site onto Armour Rise / Highover Way
- To ensure that the Emergency access off High Dane includes a facility to allow for buses to access the local centre and primary school.
- Investigate the potential for some of the housing areas to incorporate small informal areas for play
- The Council manages an existing Locally Equipped Area for Play (LEAP) located just to the south of the site off Harkness Way and Millard Way ('Rosehill') . The Council would like to negotiate that this play area is re-provided within the application site to serve both the new and existing community
- Consideration should be given to providing a doctors surgery / chemist within the Local Centre subject to consultation with the local NHS trust and Community Care Group
- Early consultation with the Lead Local Flood Authority is encouraged given the significant existing and proposed water features and the need to accommodate SUDs
- Early engagement with the Highway Authority is recommended particularly with regard to the Stotfold Road junction and any off-site works that may need to be undertaken. Currently traffic backs up along Stotfold Road from the Cambridge Road roundabout during the peak AM period in particular. The capacity of the A505 and Stotfold Road junction to accommodate the development will need to be assessed
- The provision of a central spine road ('The Avenue') is supported. It is suggested that the footway incorporates a cycleway between High Dane and Stotfold Road and is separated from the vehicular highway as far as possible. Some of the housing indicated along this route could perhaps be set back to emphasise / enhance its landscaped character.

### Highway matters

It is not appropriate to comment in any detail on this matter, as I your own consultant will no doubt be discussing the proposals with the Hertfordshire County Council Highway Officer. I would observe that currently traffic speeds along Stotfold are very high and a new access onto Stotfold Road will require detailed consideration. There is the potential however for the design of the junction to slow traffic speeds and thus deliver some considerable benefit in highway safety terms

### Car parking provision

Car parking provision would need to comprise at least 1 space per one bedroom dwelling and 2 spaces per 2 bedroom dwelling, plus the applicable ratio of visitor parking provision, in order to meet the minimum standards within the Supplementary Planning Document – Parking provision at New Development. Please see the SPD for details on garaging sizes, cycle parking and visitor parking requirements.

### Affordable Housing and Housing mix

I refer to the comments of the Council's Housing Supply Officer. If this site were to be considered acceptable, this would be on the basis of its inclusion in the emerging/ submission Local Plan and so the policies of the emerging plan would be applicable. In this regard, I would refer you to Policies HS2: Affordable Housing and HS3: Housing mix. The development would need to provide 40% affordable housing. If an application were made early (prior to full adoption of the submission plan), I would suggest that in order to be acceptable on the grounds of VSC, at least 40% of the units would need to be affordable. Furthermore, it would appear at this stage that there are no clear 'constraints' to the proposed development and so there would not appear to be a viability issue with regard to deliverability of affordable units.

### Housing standards

Although the Code for Sustainable Homes has been withdrawn it has been replaced by new technical standards regarding water and access as well as new national space standards. Emerging Local Plan Policy SP9 encourages developers to adopt the Government's technical standards and given this and that environmental sustainability is a key theme in the NPPF, the development proposals on this site should demonstrate that all reasonable efforts have been made to reduce carbon footprint through the design process.

### Construction routes

From experience with the construction of the Hitchin rail curve and more recent large scale residential schemes the question of appropriate construction routes to and from the development site will be a key consideration particularly given the large scale of the development and likely construction period of several years. It may that some local road widening will be required e.g. at Wilbury Hills Road.

### Planning obligations and developer contributions

Although I have provided formal comments it is understood that your client has been involved in detailed discussions with Hertfordshire County Council as the education authority and that these discussions will determine the form of entry size for the primary school and other detailed site considerations.

With regard to contributions relation to District Council services the following services are likely to be impacted upon:

#### Waste and recycling collection

- Standard charges in accordance with Planning Obligations SPD
- planning conditions are likely requiring full details of household waste and commercial waste storage facilities
- planning condition relating to circulation routes for waste collection vehicles

#### Leisure and community services

- contributions towards capacity improvements to Walsworth Community Centre
- contributions towards Walsworth Common infrastructure improvements
- relocation of Rosehill play area to within the site

#### Environmental protection

I again refer you to the comments from the NHDC Environmental Health Officers regarding matters of contaminated land, air quality and noise. As you will note, it is recommended that a noise assessment be carried out and submitted together with any future application.

The proposed school and retail aspects of the local centre (depending upon class uses) may give rise to associated noise from plant (air cooling units, kitchen extraction systems) and hours of use, which may affect nearby residents. These noise sources can be assessed when more detailed information is available and controlled by Planning Conditions if necessary.

#### Environmental Statement

As confirmed with the Screening Opinion an Environmental Impact Assessment will be required and the topic areas have been previously suggested.

#### Draft Sustainability Statement

The submitted draft sustainability assessment is noted. Most of the topic areas set out are what would be expected to be included within the Environmental Statement.

With this particular document I would expect the following areas to be covered:

- Policy background setting out national, regional and local policy objectives. For the local perspective reference should be made to the Sustainability Appraisal as a background document to the Submission Local Plan.

- The Approach to sustainability at Highover Farm looking at the various locational aspects of developing the land adjacent to the existing built up area and having regard to the key principles of sustainable development – Economic, Environmental and Social dimensions as well as an assessment of natural resources
- An assessment of potential building designs
- Sustainable energy options for the site looking at renewable options such as Combined Heat and Power, Ground and Surface Water cooling systems, geothermal energy, ground source heating and photovoltaics
- A full sustainability assessment including all the relevant topics such as energy, water, waste and pollution and transport, community and social needs; the natural environment; built environment, economic prosperity and land use.
- A summary of sustainable energy initiatives integral to the scheme such as recycled aggregates in construction, energy efficient building materials, sourcing local goods, materials, services and labour where possible, maximising the accessibility of the development by walking, cycling and public transport and maintainign and enhancing the local landscape character.

### Conclusions

The proposed residential led development of this site would, at present, represent inappropriate development within the Green Belt which would by definition, be harmful to the Green Belt. However, as the emerging/ submission Local Plan gains more weight as it progresses through the local plan process including the key EIA stage which is due to commence shortly, the policy basis for considering the development will change to a more favourable one particularly if an application is supported by Very Special Circumstances along the lines that has been mentioned in the Planning Statement and reinforced the additional grounds that I have set out above. Clearly if an application is made on the basis of the emerging plan then the policies of the same plan would become applicable, including polices regarding affordable housing and housing mix requirements.

I hope you find the comments above useful. To reiterate, the views of planning officers do not constitute a formal determination but are intended to help in the process of promoting acceptable standards of development. The comments provided above are given on the basis of the information submitted and as the professional opinion of officers of the Council and its consultees and are not binding on any formal decision of the Local Planning Authority.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you wish to discuss the above in greater detail.

Yours sincerely

Tom Rea  
Area Planning Officer

Appendix 13

# HCC EDUCATION TEAM FEEDBACK, DATED 22 SEPTEMBER 2017

## Chloe Ballantine

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**To:** Chloe Ballantine (Chloe.Ballantine@rapleys.com)  
**Subject:** FW: Highover Farm, Hitchin

**From:** Sarah McLaughlin [<mailto:Sarah.McLaughlin@hertfordshire.gov.uk>]  
**Sent:** 22 September 2017 13:58  
**To:** Chloe Ballantine; Jason Lowes  
**Cc:** Alice Carrington; Peter Oddy  
**Subject:** RE: Highover Farm, Hitchin

Chloe/ Jason,

Just by way of an update, I attach some further comments to our previous email dated 01 September 2017 below.

I am about to go on leave for two weeks so please could you ensure to copy in Alice and Peter in replies? Peter will be overseeing the due diligence checks so the technical evidence will be necessary for that piece of work.

I understand that you would like confirmation of the land parcel being acceptable prior to the Design Review Panel on 19 October and we will endeavour to assist you in that timeframe.

Thanks and regards,

Sarah

1. The on-site primary school's proposed location and site area (circa 2ha including adjacent sports pitches) would be acceptable. The site visit went well and from a visual inspection the site seemed broadly acceptable. HCC will need to complete some due diligence checks. Do you have copies of any technical work which may be of assistance? I think you mentioned that you were completing some of this at the moment. Any GIS layers (electronically) would be very helpful.
2. Modelling update is being carried out by HCC and a final report will be available from the end of September 2017. I will complete this when I get back from leave.
3. Build and expansion costs are being drafted by HCC for Board approval on 15 September 2017. This has been deferred to 12 October.
4. Prior to the planning application going to Planning Committee, the draft heads of terms (including any phasing triggers) are to be agreed. We would encourage early engagement on S106 matters and would be happy to draft some Heads of Terms for your consideration. Once we have further detail on an indicative mix and trajectory we can look into this further for you. I acknowledge that you will have further detail on conclusion of your environmental work.
5. Proportionate and bespoke contributions would be sought for any outline application proposals, taking into account any land required to be purchased by HCC to provide for an on-site 2FE.
6. HCC's 2008 Planning Obligations Toolkit (to be reviewed early next year) would be applied to the forthcoming planning application. The Toolkit would be utilised for all obligations with the exception of the primary education element which would need to be bespoke to allow for the cost of a new primary school to be included.

Going forward, the following agreed actions are set out below:

- Indicative housing delivery trajectory (Rapleys)
- Topographical survey (Rapleys - see zip file and DWG attached) Noted, thank you.
- Site visit dates for education / estates team (HCC) We would ask whether a site visit at around 2.30pm on 15 September would be acceptable? Completed, thank you for arranging.
- Further clarification on childcare services contributions/provision in proposed primary school and youth services (HCC) I have contacted the relevant services and will provide further information in due course.
- Expansion projects' yield for contributions to off-site secondary school places within Hitchin (HCC). HCC would seek secondary contributions towards the Priory School, Hitchin.

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