

Welwyn Hatfield's District Plan Review – Inspectors Report

Inspectors Reasoning's and Conclusions

4.2.5 I therefore conclude that this plan should not alter the Green Belt boundaries to accommodate long-term development needs beyond the Plan period.

'Should the allocation of land under Policy GBSP3 at Panshanger be deleted as an area of Special Restraint (ASR)? Should other land be identified in the Plan as ASRs in place of, or in addition to, Panshanger?'

4.2.6 Landmatch Limited, the Marshmoor Consortium and Samuel Beadie Ltd have objected in one way or another to the continued safeguarding of the panshanger site as an Area of Special Restraint. Three other sites have been proposed as ASRs, or housing sites, by those Objectors at Welham Green, Woolmer Green and Cuffley. I have considered the merits of each site in the next part of my report.

4.2.7 For the reasons I have already stated, I do not consider there is a general case to support the release of the sites put forward as alternatives in order to meet longer-term development needs in this Plan, irrespective of their merits as compared to the site safeguarded at Panshanger. However, I consider that many of the objections to the suitability of Panshanger as a means of meeting any longer-term housing development needs are well founded. I note that the site has been safeguarded since at least 1993 and it seems to me that it would now perform poorly against many of the criteria, which are set out in Annex B of PPG2 and the Governments objectives for housing contained in PPG3 and PPG13.

4.2.8 In particular the site is on the edge of Welwyn Garden City in a location where significant development would be likely to have a major visual impact on adjoining attractive countryside, which could only partly be mitigated, as envisaged in Policy GBSP3, by the prior provision of structural landscaping. Such landscaping would have to be provided well in advance of any development to be effective and must therefore be regarded as a constraint to the availability of the site for housing development. The site adjoins an extensive area of residential development, which in my view relates poorly to the rest of the town in terms of layout, design and character and in parts displays many of the worst characteristics of past planning of residential development. It seems to me that it would be a very considerable challenge to avoid perpetuating some of those characteristics by further extending the town in this location. Furthermore, the ASR appears to be poorly located to any public transport facilities and the majority of the town's services and facilities and has poor linkages to the town's main highway network.

4.2.9 The site is not therefore clearly consistent with the guidance on identifying safeguarded land in Annex B of PPG2, and other current guidance, particularly in respect to the need to integrate such land in a sustainable way with existing development. In many of the above matters, the sites

proposed by Objectors as alternative ASRs at Welham Green and Cuffley appear to be more suitable and sustainable locations as safeguarded land for housing, if they were needed. There might also be other, better or just as suitable and sustainable sites, but the proper way of considering the matter is through a review of the plan and not by my ad hoc consideration of the sites which have arisen as objections.

4.2.10 I do not therefore consider that this plan should seek to identify other sites in place of or in addition to the Panshanger ASR. I have given careful thought to whether Panshanger should be deleted as an ASR for the reasons I have given above. However to be consistent, such deletion should also involve altering the Green Belt boundary back to the edge of the existing built-up area and it might then need altering again if a review of the Plan indicates that Panshanger is a suitable location for longer-term development. Such changes would not be in line with the need for Green Belt boundaries to be permanent. Paragraph 4.17 of the Plan also clearly states that the release of the site after 2011 will be a matter for consideration in future reviews of the plan, in the light of longer-term development requirements and advice on the sequential selection of land contained in Government guidance. Such consideration should include the suitability and availability of any more sustainable locations for development such as the sites put forward by Objectors to this Plan.

4.2.11 I therefore conclude that the Panshanger ASR should not be deleted replaced or added to, in response to the objections by Landmatch Limited, the Marshmoor Consortium and Samuel Beadie Ltd.

Will Policy GBSP3 prejudice the investigation of mineral resources on the site identified as an ASR in the Plan?

4.2.12 The County Council suggests that the ASR at Panshanger is likely to be a valuable source of minerals and any development of that land may therefore give rise to mineral sterilisation. Policy GBSP3 does not allocate the ASR for development in the Plan period and, as I have indicated above, its future suitability for development would be considered in the context of factors including its potential for the extraction of minerals. In any case, Policy 52 of the Structure Plan and Policy 3 of the Minerals Local Plan, both of which form part of the Development Plan for the District, safeguard mineral resources. I do not therefore consider there is any need to amend Policy GBSP3 in response to this objection by Hertfordshire County Council.