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**EXAMINATION OF THE NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE LOCAL  
PLAN 2011-2031**

**EXAMINATION HEARING STATEMENT – MATTER 11 THE  
HOUSING ALLOCATIONS AND THE SETTLEMENT  
BOUNDARIES: THE CATEGORY A VILLAGES**

**Prepared by Strutt & Parker on behalf of Penelope Laing, Carolyn  
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**January 2018**

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## **North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 – 2031 (Examination)**

### **Matter 11: The Housing Allocations and the Settlement Boundaries: the Category A Villages**

#### **Introduction**

1. Strutt & Parker has been instructed by Penelope Laing, Carolyn Hill, and Fiona Hudson to submit this Hearing Statement to the Examination for the North Hertfordshire Local Plan. Previous submissions by other consultants have been made on behalf of our clients to North Hertfordshire District Council (EHDC) at the Regulation 19 stage of the Local Plan process.
2. Since the previous submission of representations, which were made on my client's behalf by Savills, discussions have taken place between the landowner and national house builder, Countryside Properties, and an option agreement between the parties is now at an advanced stage.
3. This Hearing Statement addresses issues raised by the Inspector in Matter 11 of the Inspector's Schedule of Matters and Issues for Examination. It specifically relates to the questions relating to land south of Waterdell Lane, identified as site ref: SI1 in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan.
4. This statement confirms that the site is appropriate, justified, and deliverable, providing answers to the questions posed by the inspector. It demonstrates why the site's removal from the Metropolitan Green Belt is appropriate and would not undermine the purposes of the Green Belt.
5. This statement is accompanied by:
  - a Landscape, Visual and Green Belt Technical Note and accompanying visuals;
  - an indicative site layout plan showing how the site could be developed for 40 units;
  - an indicative site layout plan showing how the site could be developed for 70 units.

**Are the proposed housing allocations deliverable?**

6. Land south of Waterdell Lane (Site ref: SI1) is proposed for allocation of 40 homes – it should be noted as confirmed in paragraph 13.3 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan that *'These figures are not a target and do not necessarily represent the maximum number of new homes that will be built'*. Additional supporting survey work has been undertaken and this has confirmed that the site is capable of delivering in excess of the housing dwelling estimate up to a maximum of 70 dwellings. Accompanying site layouts are attached, which provide indicative schemes demonstrating how the site could be developed.
7. The landowners Penelope Laing, Carolyn Hill, and Fiona Hudson can confirm, that the land involved is available for the proposed use. Indeed, Penelope Laing, Carolyn Hill and Fiona Hudson have entered into an option agreement with national house builder, Countryside Properties for development of the site. Purchase of the land is dependent upon gaining planning permission for housing development.
8. The proposed housing allocation is underpinned by evidence that confirms that safe and appropriate access for pedestrians can be provided. Ardent Engineering consultants were appointed to undertake an initial high-level review of the transport and highway access issues, and have confirmed that there are no impediments to development of the site in highway terms.
9. The work undertaken by Ardent confirms that there is sufficient capacity within the existing highway network to support the proposed development of the site. The initial desk-top study confirms that the site is in a reasonably sustainable location in terms of access to alternatives to the private car, and is located just 3 kilometres from Hitchin town centre, which has an excellent range of shops, services, and facilities.
10. The site is located within a Category A Village. These are the most sustainable settlements outside the towns, (and the proposed additional tier of five growth villages, which has been proposed as a draft revision to Policy SP2). St Ipployts has the additional benefit not only of being in itself a sustainable Category A Village but also being located just 500 metres away from the district's largest town, Hitchin, and also in close proximity to Stevenage, just over the district boundary to the south-east.
11. St Ipployts, for the purposes of its position within the settlement hierarchy comprises the conjoined settlements of St Ipployts and Gosmore respectively. It is one of the largest villages in the District with a population of 2,047 in 2011 (Census). It benefits from a village hall at Waterdell Lane immediately adjacent to the site on its northern

boundary, a primary school within 500 metres of the site, children's play areas, and other local facilities.

12. The site is within easy walking and cycling distance of Hitchin and there is also a regular bus service from London Road, which provides regular bus services to Hitchin and Welwyn Garden City/St Albans, all of which have a large range of shops, services, and facilities including mainline railway stations, providing services to London Cambridge, Peterborough, and the North of England.
13. Additional sustainable transport measures will be provided within the proposed development to accommodate cyclists and pedestrians. Early delivery of these measures will ensure that all new residents are encouraged to adopt sustainable travel patterns from the outset.
14. It is noted that site ref SI1: land south of Waterdell Lane states that '*Detailed drainage strategy identifying water infrastructure required and mechanism(s) for delivery*' should be undertaken. A pre planning enquiry was submitted to Anglian Water to understand more fully the issues and to demonstrate the delivery of the site.
15. The site has been assessed for up to 70 units, in excess of the minimum housing estimate of 40 units set out in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan.

**Are the proposed housing allocations justified and appropriate in terms of the likely impacts of the development?**

16. The proposed allocation Site SI1 is justified and appropriate on the basis that it is a well-contained site, that does not contribute significantly to the five purposes of the green belt.
17. Much of North Hertfordshire is located within the Metropolitan Green Belt. Given that many of the most sustainable parts of the district close to the major towns and principal road and railways are located within the Green Belt it is essential that a proportion of the overall housing allocations are located within the Green Belt. North Hertfordshire District Council has an undertaken a comprehensive Green Belt Review that provides justification for the removal of specific sites including Site SI1 from the Green Belt
18. It is agreed that the relevant infrastructure to service the proposal primarily comprises the diversion and reinforcements for water, gas, electricity, telecoms, media and street lighting. Utilities providers have been approached in relation to the capacity of resources in the vicinity of the site. The existing water supply infrastructure is owned

by Anglian Water. Water capacity enquiries have confirmed that there are no off-site upgrade works required and there is sufficient capacity within the existing system to provide water.

19. In terms of electricity, the proposed development point of connection would be at the substation adjacent to the site on London Road. The plant in the substation will be upgraded and new LV mains and service cables will be laid throughout the site to provide enough supply for connection to up to 70 gas-heated homes.
20. In order to fully assess the proposed development's impact on archaeology and heritage assets, an archaeological/historic environment risk appraisal has been undertaken. There are a small number of listed buildings to the north of the site that will be a consideration underpinning any future proposal. Additionally, there is a Grade II listed ice house just outside the proposed site allocation to the south-east, but within the option agreement area, and care will be taken in any proposed scheme to ensure that its setting is protected.
21. The site is not located within a conservation area and there are no tree preservation orders or TPOs. The trees of most significance are located in the south-west corner of the site. Trees and hedgerows of merit will be incorporated within any future proposed development scheme.

**Are the proposed allocations the most appropriate option given the reasonable alternatives?**

22. Site SI1 is appropriate given the reasonable alternatives. North Hertfordshire District Council has a challenging housing target to meet and much of the District is located within the Metropolitan Green Belt. While the north and east of the district are located outside the Green Belt, many of these areas, (with the obvious exception of the market town of Royston) are relatively poorly connected areas with limited shops, services, and facilities. It is therefore appropriate that a proportion of the District's overall growth is directed to some sustainable Green Belt settlements.
23. A series of reports have been undertaken to understand more fully any issues relating to delivery and to demonstrate the overall delivery of the site, and these have concluded that Site SI1 is free of constraints that would prejudice it coming forward for development, and given its relatively small size it could be delivered in a timely manner providing much needed new housing in a sustainable location to meet the housing needs of the District.

24. Land south of Waterdell Lane holds very low ecological merit. The site is bounded by mature trees and hedgerows and is likely that these will have ecological value and will be retained and enhanced as part of the proposed development of the site. The area to the north-west of the site was previously used for allotments but is now redundant.
25. The site is the most appropriate option given the reasonable alternatives. It is well-related to the settlement and is well screened from the south by an area of woodland, residential development to the north and east, and a tree belt and ridge line to the west. It also plays a limited contribution towards the five purposes of the Green Belt as explained in more detail below.

**Do exceptional circumstances exist to warrant the allocation of the site for new housing in the Green Belt?**

26. Exceptional circumstances exist that justify the allocation of Site Ref SI1 for new housing in the Green Belt. Much of the District is located within the Metropolitan Green Belt and many of these are in the most sustainable locations close to the principal towns and larger villages and with good access to the A1(M) motorway, and the East Coast Main Line railway. In contrast, much of the northern and eastern parts of the district (with the exception of the large market town of Royston) comprise of smaller, less sustainable settlements often with very few shops, services and facilities, and generally limited access to public transport opportunities.
27. It is important to support economic activity in rural areas such as those villages like St Ippolyts with shops and public houses. In order to achieve this, these villages should be allowed to grow sustainably in order that the population for those facilities does not diminish thus reducing the long-term viability of those businesses and thus in turn making those settlements less sustainable.
28. Additionally, there is a strong social sustainability benefit by allowing growth in Category A villages such as St Ippolyts to ensure the long-term future of facilities such as the primary school. Indeed, the environmental impact of transporting pupils from the village to elsewhere would have a significant detrimental impact on the sustainability of villages like St Ippolyts, and measures to support the school by ensuring that younger families can afford to live in the area are important.
29. Land south of Waterdell Lane (Site Ref SI1) is located within an area assessed within the North Hertfordshire Green Belt Review as Study Area 11d. Based on an analysis of the purposes of the Green Belt Review, it concluded that land south of Waterdell

Lane should be removed from the Green belt to enable St Ipployts to grow sustainably. It concludes that *'the scale and largely open character of the original village means that it has a strong relationship with the surrounding landscape and the Green belt in this location'*. However, the scale and density of development in the Gosmore area means that the inseting of the village as a whole is appropriate.

**What is the nature and extent of the harm to the Green Belt of removing the site from it?**

30. In addition to the Green Belt Review undertaken by North Hertfordshire District Council, this matter statement is accompanied by a Landscape, Visual and Green Belt Technical Note, which describes the site at land south of Waterdell Lane *'as making some to a limited contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt, making moderate contribution to preventing sprawl and a limited contribution to the remaining three purposes assessed'*<sup>1</sup>.
31. The Technical Note notes states that the *'The visual envelope of the Site is limited and, from where it is visible, it is seen within the context of the neighbouring built form of Gosmore. As a result, there is limited visual encroachment into the wider Green Belt. There are strong defensible boundaries to the south and east and the opportunity to create defensible boundaries to the west. There will be limited harm on the wider Green Belt from removal of the Site'*.

**To what extent would the consequent impacts on the purpose of the Green Belt be ameliorated or reduced to the lowest practicable extent?**

32. The Technical Note states that *'The introduction of new planting along the western boundary will contribute to the effects of the rise in the landform to further reduce views from the south west. Management and maintenance of the tree belt along the eastern boundary will also reinforce this as a defensible boundary'*.
33. In order to ameliorate the impacts, the Technical Notes states that *'The proposed development will extend no further western edge of Gosmore in this area. The introduction of new planting along the western boundary will contribute to the effects*

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<sup>1</sup> The remaining three purposes assessed are: to prevent neighbouring towns from merging, to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment, to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.

*of the rise in the landform to further reduce views from the south-west*'. This approach would result in the allocation of the site making a limited contribution to all four of the five Green Belt purposes assessed.

34. The proposed allocation of Site SI1 would have a limited impact on the Green Belt. It is located to the south of Gosmore and would not lead to the coalescence of settlements.
35. A balance needs to be provided with protection of the Green Belt and providing housing in the most sustainable locations within the District. The Council has successfully achieved this balance at housing allocations in sustainable Green Belt villages such as St Ipployts are vital to the overall soundness of the Local Plan and should therefore be supported.

**If this site were to be developed as proposed, would the adjacent Green Belt continue to serve at least one of the five purposes of Green Belts, or would the Green Belt function be undermined by the Site's allocation?**

36. The Technical Note states that *'Removing this Site from the Green Belt will not reduce the ability of the neighbouring areas to perform their function. The wooded grounds of St Ibbs to the south will remain as a strong defensible boundary as will the parkland to the east of London Road. Creating new planting along the western boundary will create a defensible boundary, reducing the pressure on the land to the west'*.

**Has the Green Belt boundary around the site been defined clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanently open?**

37. The Technical Note advises that *'The southern boundary is formed by the wooded parkland of St Ibbs...The wooded tree belt along the eastern boundary, combined with London Road, form a strong defensible boundary to the east, further supported by the grounds of the property to the immediate east of London Road. The western boundary is currently unmarked by a defensible boundary, but it is partially marked by a hedgerow. Reinforcing this hedgerow and creating new areas of planting and open space in the land between the western boundaries of SI1 and the Site<sup>2</sup> will create a*

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<sup>2</sup> The Site refers to land within my client's ownership, under which an option agreement with Countryside is being agreed.



*more defensible boundary in this area and, combined with the ridge of land, will further contribute to visual screening from... the west'.*

**Is the proposed settlement boundary consistent with the methodology for identifying settlement boundaries and is it appropriate and justified?**

38. The proposed settlement boundary is consistent with the methodology for identifying settlement boundaries and is appropriate and justified. Figure 10 of Housing and Green Belt background paper (ref: HOU1) sets out the facilities in each of the villages. It confirms that St Ippolyts (comprising St Ippolyts and Gosmore) has a food shop, a public house, a primary school, and a village hall.
39. The inclusion of St Ippolyts as a Category A Village with appropriate modest scale housing allocation is fully justified. The Housing and Green Belt background paper states that *'Having considered the economic, social and environmental impacts of development in the rural areas, the Council concludes that there is a clear social and economic case for allowing further growth in those villages with schools'*<sup>3</sup>. This approach is entirely justified, as a more restrictive approach to development in these areas would cause significant economic and social harms to those villages with schools.
40. The Council's approach for St Ippolyts, which proposes a village boundary for St Ippolyts (also covering Gosmore) is supported, and fully justified on the basis that the two settlements effectively function as one with good links between the two and with shared services and facilities such as a primary school, shop, public house, and village hall.

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<sup>3</sup> Paragraph 5.41 of the Housing and Green Belt background paper (HOU1)