

Hearing Statement re NHDC Local Plan  
Nikki J Hamilton (local resident):

Further to my original objection dated 30/11/2016 which was submitted against the local plan, I would like to add further information and links to substantiate what I previously submitted.

#### Green Belt & Support of the Community:

I found many policies of the plan unsound, unjustified and not in line with the NPPF; 17 empowering local people, 150 reflecting visions of local community, 69 a shared vision - NHDC failed on all counts with their local plan. There are 4 main footpath starting points around GA2 in which NHDC could have posted up their proposals but instead they placed 1 document at the furthest point away from these - I have spoken with many residents in Ashby, Stevenage, a colossal number of these people still unaware of the GA2 development advised they either do not receive a local paper or attend the library or listen to the radio. How are residents supposed to access consultations when they have no idea about the proposed developments? Stevenage and other authorities sent out literature, maybe NHDC should have followed this example.

I also stated previously why I felt SP5 (and SP18) was unsound, unjustified and not in line with the NPPF with regards to exceptional circumstances and we have not altered our view on this and my reasonings are laid out in my original objection. Both myself and my family stand by our view that NHDC should identify a 5 year local plan and work with other authorities on a new garden settlement, backed by residents in North Hertfordshire, MP's and councillors - providing us with much needed infrastructure, jobs and remove pressure already being placed on failing/weakened infrastructure in our towns, full list of reasons are highlighted in my original objection.

#### Green Belt Current/Proposed Maps:

I am rather concerned that the NHDC current green belt map does not give a true oversight in regards to the green belt surrounding our town and what we have already lost. It is every easy for an authority to produce a current overview showing current green belt but failing to highlight areas that are currently green belt but are being removed by another authority or have already been removed and built upon; they will then do the same in another 5/10 years and people will assume just a small amount of green belt has been removed. I have attached Appendix 1, NHDC current green belt in which I have highlighted in yellow - areas to the North, West, South-East and East which WERE green belt and are currently proposed developments under Stevenage Borough Council 7,600 homes/local centre and EHDC 600 homes and a local centre and Great Ashby which was also green belt highlighted in orange. On Appendix 2, NHDC proposed green belt I have again highlighted in yellow and orange, all of the areas that were originally greenbelt. If one compares the green belt boundaries originally around Stevenage (with the highlighted areas taken as green belt) against the new proposed green belt - this highlights just how much green belt we have lost.

#### Brownfield Register & Non-Green Belt Sites:

In my previous objection and at the hearings, I questioned NHDC regarding brownfield sites. I am aware that a brownfield register was added to their website on 2/1/2018 but I reiterate my concerns as to why this was not carried out previously to putting together the local plan, surely this is totally back to front - I do not see a number of the areas included in the register within the current local plan? I also asked at the hearings how many non-green belt sites that were put forward, (164 sites were put forward in total) have been included in the plan but do not appear to have had a response.

#### Weakened Infrastructure/Amenities Under Pressure:

As mentioned in my previous representation PTB Transport Consultants Ltd carried out a full report on behalf of the local parish councils and highlighted a number of flaws. There are serious traffic

-2-

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issues already throughout Great Ashby, further traffic from a development such as GA2 would cause gridlock to a scale of putting lives in serious danger. There has been talk for many years as to widening the A1M which is at constant gridlock around the Stevenage area and up to Welwyn Garden City. This should have been met before any further developments were considered around Stevenage/Ashby - the A1M is the fourth most congested road outside of London. Likewise there have been discussions regarding a new train station to meet demand. Trying to get in or out of Stevenage during rushhour is horrific.

There are serious concerns with our water supply - Affinity Water reported that our groundwater resources remained below average for 2016/2017 and current levels are low and that is without a further 7,600 homes by Stevenage BC and the proposals EHDC and NHDC are trying to put through. Our hospital recently released a statement regarding the extreme pressure it is under; we have had no new doctors' surgeries built since Great Ashby or Chrysalis Park were developed and our mental health services and childrens' services are at breaking point.

#### Population/Lack of Jobs:

The population of Stevenage has seen an increase of approximately 500 per year; 85,500 in 2013, 85,997 in 2014 and 87,100 in 2016. Although Stevenage is a commuter town, it once flourished with organisations in the Town Centre (many have left and 4 large office blocks have been turned into apartments), Gunnels Wood Road Industrial Estate - many buildings are now available to let and Pin Green Industrial Estate which was once thriving, now over a third has been turned into homes.

There were 49,540 jobs in Stevenage in 2014 (as reported in the Functional Economic Market Area Study commissioned in 2015), 48,000 jobs a year later (as reported in nomis official market statistics) - a drop of over 1,500 in 12 months. Last year we saw hundreds of further job losses as companies closed down/moved away such as Fujitsu. Our unemployment figures have increased, homelessness has increased (Shelter reported from figures from the Ministry of Justice that Stevenage is in the highest 20% for possession (housing), use of foodbanks has also increased. Many residents in this area are 'not' living - we are merely existing.

#### GA2 - Social/Health & Wildlife:

As said previously, thousands of us use this area every year - I spent 2 hours in the area on Sunday 7th January 2018 between 11am and 1pm and spoke with 51 adults (many were walking their dogs or out for a stroll with their children). Only half of them knew of a development and some of the 50% thought I was at first referring to Gresley Park by EHDC and knew nothing regarding the area they were walkin in. There are still so many who are unaware which is wrong and the fault of NHDC. GA2 is one of the most important areas for residents' health and social benefits on the outskirts of Stevenage and Great Ashby; as well as being home to a huge abundance of our wildlife and protected species; badgers, bats, red kites and buzzards, hedgehogs and a surfeit of insects.

Please do not allow the area of GA2 to be destroyed, we all need this area of countryside and please consider the developments North of Stevenage - we are in crisis, please do not exacerbate the situation. I would like to add that I have serious concerns that a new representation was submitted for consideration in December 2017 regarding Chesfield Park a year after the original public consultation closed - how is anyone able to comment on this when it was NOT part of the original local plan up for consultation? Thank you for your consideration.

Nikki J Hamilton

#### **Nikki J Hamilton, Online Petition Details re NHDC Local Plan:**

The online petition SAY NO TO GA2 - Saving North Herts Green Belt became active on 9th December 2017 and is still active until the GA2 hearing date.

The link is: [https:// www.change.org/p/simon-berkeley-ba-ma-mrtpi-say-no-to-ga2-saving-north-herts-green-belt](https://www.change.org/p/simon-berkeley-ba-ma-mrtpi-say-no-to-ga2-saving-north-herts-green-belt)

The reasons for our petition: NHDC are still proposing 3 developments on precious greenbelt after hundreds of residents signed petitions and objected to the original proposals. They are proposing nearly 2000 houses to be built in 3 areas, GA1, GA2 and NS1 – the impact would be huge for residents of Stevenage, Great Ashby, Graveley and other villages/hamlets, as well as seriously harming our remaining wildlife habitat to the North of Stevenage. Two of the developments have been increased in size, GA2 in particular has been more than doubled.

NHDC have seemingly ignored residents' objections as well as those from groups and MP's and we believe their plan to be unsound and unjustified. NPPF 17 states planning should empower local people - NHDC have failed to do this; contrary to NPPF 150, their plan does not reflect our vision and aspirations. Large areas of green belt have already been removed from around Stevenage - West, South and North in regards to Stevenage Borough Council's local plan of 7,600 homes and EHDC are looking to build a further 600 houses to the East of Stevenage. Green belt was put in place to restrict urban sprawl, stop areas from merging and safeguard the countryside - NHDC's local plan does not reflect the purposes set out in paragraph 80 of the NPPF. We would therefore ask the Planning Inspector to impress on NHDC that GA2 is removed from the local plan in its entirety and that great consideration is also given in regards to GA1 and NS1 being withdrawn from the plan for the following reasons:

- Failing infrastructure - serious issues with traffic; Great Ashby is often congested with parked cars and health & safety needs to be considered as an emergency vehicle would not be able to gain access. Trains are already at full capacity during peak times and the A1M is congested daily. Our hospital is under pressure. Mental health services/children services are over stretched, doctors are struggling from the extra volume of patients and this is before a further 7,600 homes on the Stevenage local plan
- Failing economy - Proposed developments are remote from the retail and commercial centres of Stevenage and Hitchin, many business are already struggling in Stevenage and a number of shops have closed in the town centre. Extra housing would put severe pressure on an already lack of employment, Stevenage lost 5,540 employment roles in the space of 24 months, not including the many jobs recently lost at Fujitsu. Unemployment figures have increased, use of food banks have increased
- Concerns in regards to future water supplies - Affinity have recently released a statement with their concerns surrounding this
- Loss of precious green belt (open space). GA2 area and its footpaths are used by thousands of people each year for social and health benefits - walkers, riders, joggers, wildlife photographers - people of all different ages and from different backgrounds. NS1 is also regularly used by walkers and riders (and wildlife).
- Loss of wildlife habitat. The land in GA2 houses a rich and diverse amount of wildlife including endangered red kites, barn owls and protected species including bats and badgers. It is home to the most concentrated numbers of wildlife around the immediate area of Stevenage/Great Ashby and needs to be protected. The muntjac deer population has already seriously decreased since Great Ashby was built and setts have been destroyed and disturbed. Further development would be catastrophic to our local wildlife.

GA2 would totally encompass ancient woodlands and a natural spring; building in this area would destroy our valuable wildlife habitat.

- Harming the landscape. These developments would be visibly intrusive and harm the character and appearance of an area of outstanding beauty (residents' opinion) scattered with pockets of woodland and villages, such as Graveley.

We understand that housing is needed but feel it would be more sensible to build a completely new settlement/garden city with reasonable transport links and NOT at the loss of important green belt or woodland. This is something many residents in North Hertfordshire have been vying for over the years. A new settlement that over time can grow to meet the needs of the people with the correct infrastructure designed into it from the beginning, creating thousands of jobs and a flourishing new economy. In the interim, we ask NHDC propose brown field sites as an alternative and to also look at the many properties laying vacant.

At 12.36am on 12th January 2018, we had 1,165 signatures who are all in agreement with the above reasons and are against GA2 and would like NS1 and GA1 to also be seriously considered.

**For The Attention of Mr Berkeley & NHDC:**

Of the 1,165 signatories - 160 residents left comments - their reasons why GA2 should be removed from the local plan and why they have asked for NS1 and GA1 to be reconsidered. Please, on behalf of us all - take time to read the comments and I would ask NHDC to actually listen to its residents and other residents of North Hertfordshire. As inline with the NPPF - we do not as a community support this development.

**Manual Petition:**

Further signatures were collected manually for many not online and those who were unaware of the developments, based on the same reasons as detailed above;

A total of 81 signatures were collected, all against the developments; 35 were collected at the Christmas Fayre at Round Diamond School, Great Ashby on 12th December 2017; 46 were collected between 11am and 1pm in the GA2 area on 7th January 2018. 1 adult declined to sign stating we need more houses and 4 adults took the link so they could read about the petition online - 2 have since added their signatures.

The hard copy of the manual petition will be submitted for the perusal of the Inspector and NHDC.