



North Hertfordshire Local Plan Examination

Statements for Weeks 5-6 – January 2018

On behalf of Beck Homes Ltd

This Statement on behalf of Beck Homes Ltd relates to the Examination Hearings for Weeks 5-6 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan.

Matter 11 – The Housing Allocations and the Settlement Boundaries:

The Category A Villages

Ashwell

Question 11.1

Is the proposed housing allocation deliverable? In particular, is it:

a) confirmed by all of the landowners involved as being available for the use proposed?

The site of the proposed housing allocation at Ashwell has been subject to a planning application since July 2016, which has not yet been determined. It would appear this is largely due to technical concerns regarding the deliverability of the site. In addition, the application has had well over 250 local objections and its draft allocation in the Local Plan has similarly seen significant levels of objection, including from the Parish Council. We understand that there may be ownership issues relating to land required for the new site access, but it is unclear from the application information available online what the current position is, which we expect the Council can clarify to the Inspector.

b) supported by evidence to demonstrate that safe and appropriate access for vehicles and pedestrians can be provided?

The planning application on the site has been subject to various iterations and amendments regarding access for both vehicles and pedestrians, with concerns raised on both matters by the Highways Authority. The Local Plan also details that the site has no pedestrian access, which needs to be

included in the proposals. It is unclear from the application information online what the current position is, which we expect the Council can clarify to the Inspector.

c) deliverable, having regard to the provision of the necessary infrastructure and services, and any environmental or other constraints?

The Local Plan itself, at paragraph 13.7-13.9, refers to the potential impact from development in Ashwell in terms of heritage assets and landscape, concluding that “in order to meet our housing requirements over the plan period, it will be necessary to allocate some sites which may impact upon heritage assets and landscape”.

There are several concerns raised as part of the application in relation to these matters, particularly from local residents and the Parish Council.

However, the need to impact on heritage assets and landscape could be limited had the Council undertaken an approach that considered potential development sites from a detailed assessment of the existing settlement boundary of the village, rather than from only undertaking call for sites exercises. This is an approach that we have advocated in our representations and during the first weeks of the Local Plan Examination Hearings.

Whilst we understand that the Inspector is not considering omission sites at this stage, we feel it is paramount to the question of the suitability of sites in Ashwell as only a single site is proposed. Where the Council have acknowledged potential impacts from development in meeting housing land supply, these could have been minimised had a more comprehensive and sensible planning approach to site finding and settlement assessment been undertaken.

My client’s site interests lie in Ashwell on land that was not considered a reasonable alternative and during the Examination Hearings it became clear that the site had not been included in the Council’s assessment as it was submitted two weeks after the Council decided no longer to accept potential sites. Had the Council undertaken a thorough assessment of the existing settlement boundaries as potential sources of housing land, they would undoubtedly have considered the site in the SHLAA, and we encourage the Inspector to visit the settlement boundary to the east of Ashwell on Station Road to fully understand why we feel the Council has failed in its assessment of potential sites, choosing a proposed allocation for Ashwell that has more development impacts than development in this alternative location. By failing in this regard the Council has not fully justified releasing land from the Green Belt in other areas of the Borough.

Question 11.2

Is the proposed housing allocation justified and appropriate in terms of the likely impacts of the development?

See answer to question 11.1 c) above

Question 11.3

Is the proposed allocation the most appropriate option given the reasonable alternatives?

As detailed above, we consider that the proposed allocation is not the most appropriate option as the reasonable alternatives considered in the plan are lacking, through a flawed methodology to find and assess potential land for development.

A review of the plans of Ashwell within the evidence show that little land adjacent the settlement boundary has actually been considered.

Question 11.4

Is the proposed settlement boundary:

- a) consistent with the methodology for identifying the settlement boundaries?**
- b) appropriate and justified?**

In the context of our arguments above, we do not consider that the proposed settlement boundary for Ashwell is appropriate or justified. The proposed settlement boundary has been drawn simply to replicate the old boundary and include changes for the single proposed allocation, defining a definitive boundary for the next fifteen years or so. It does this without either a desktop or on site assessment being undertaken to consider the appropriateness of the old boundary around the village. This is not good planning. Given the age of the boundary and the acute need for new housing across the Borough, an assessment of old settlement boundaries adjacent to sustainable settlements such as Ashwell must be undertaken for the plan to be considered sound. The level of facilities and services in Ashwell, including a GP surgery and multiple examples of particular services, such as public houses and shops, means it is one of the most sustainable villages in the Borough. Accessible bus and nearby train services add to the credentials of the village as a location for future development and an area that should not be overlooked due to a flawed assessment.

This is of even more relevance when one considers that the Council's proposals are to define the settlement boundary based on an arbitrary cut-off date for the SHLAA, and to limit future development outside of the new settlement boundary on this basis without assessing the potential future extent of the village.

We have provided details of the site in previous submissions and would like the opportunity to discuss the site during the Hearing session relating to Ashwell in Matter 11, as it relates to questions over the suitability of the site chosen and demonstrates that the site should have been considered as a reasonable alternative.