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For and on behalf of
**Bovis Homes Ltd and
New Road Property Developments Ltd**

**North Hertfordshire Local Plan Examination
MATTER 11 – LITTLE WYMONDLEY**

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0.0 INTRODUCTION

0.1 These submissions are made on behalf of Bovis Homes Ltd and New Road Property Developments Ltd.

0.2 New Road Property Developments Ltd has an option to promote the land comprising site allocation WY1, known as Bungalow Farm. Bovis Homes have a contract with New Road to develop the site subject to a satisfactory planning permission and have acted as the lead interest in the promotion of the site as an allocation in the Submission Draft Local Plan.

0.3 Site WY1 was subject to a pre-application submission in August 2015 following the prospective allocation of the land in the Reg18 Consultation in December 2014. Subsequent to this, matters raised in the advice have been addressed and following continued discussions, NHDC invited a further formal pre-application having regard to the evolution of the scheme particularly in respect of the relationship between the proposed development area, the land designated on the Proposals Map as Urban Open Land (Policy CGB5) and the scale and location of the potential primary school site.

0.4 As part of this pre-application process and in order to assist this Examination, a Vision Document was prepared containing a concept masterplan and subsequently a Statement of Common Ground was agreed with NHDC in respect of the matters that were subject to objections in respect of this Plan concerning the boundary and status of the Urban Open Land policy designation.

0.5 Arising from agreement of common ground on this matter, from further discussions with the Education Authority and from the outcomes of the pre-application consultations, the Vision Document and concept masterplan has been revised and is attached to this document as Appendix 1.

0.6 A further Statement of Common Ground is currently in draft form and being reviewed by NHDC in respect of the broad principles of development and its delivery, which we hope can be agreed in advance of the specific hearing date regarding Matter 11.

11. MATTER 11 - LITTLE WYMONDLEY

11.42 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?

11.42.1 Yes.

11.42.2 The site is in a single ownership subject to an option to New Road Property Developments Ltd who have a legal agreement with Bovis Homes who will be the sole developer. This includes all the land covered by Allocation WY1.

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

11.42.3 Yes.

11.42.4 A suitable vehicular access can be achieved off Stevenage Road which conforms to all of HCC's highway design standards. A separate emergency access can be provided to Blakemore End Road if required. There is also scope for informal pedestrian access to existing community recreation facilities which are located adjoining the eastern site boundary.

11.42.5 A separate pedestrian access will be provided directly to Stevenage Road adjacent to the property known as The Croft and there is an existing public right of way following the eastern boundary connecting to Stevenage Road.

11.42.6 Arising from specific pre-application consultation with the Highway Authority it is agreed that there is no objection in principle from the Highway Authority subject to detailed information to be prepared and submitted in accompaniment of a planning application.

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

11.42.7 Yes.

11.42.8 There are no exceptional infrastructure issues or constraints arising from the pre-application consultations and the due diligence undertaken by Bovis Homes.

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

11.43.1 The proposed allocation is justified and appropriate.

11.43.2 It proposes a well-connected extension to the local community that is visually and physically contained within the immediate landscape south of the village, and by

established and robust boundaries. The bypass forms a new defensible Green Belt boundary with land not suitable for development subject to Policy CGB5.

- 11.43.2 The site is well related to the village, with permeable boundaries – see 11.42.5 above – giving good access to existing facilities.
- 11.43.3 The site does not harm the setting of the village and in particular the presence of a number of listed buildings both in proximity to the site and elsewhere in the neighbourhood – see Vision Document assessment of the historic environment.
- 11.43.4 The site can be developed with regard to the landscape context and will not appear prominent in landscape views in either summer or winter – see Concept Statement section 2.3.
- 11.43.5 The proposed form of development and the capacity of the site to accommodate up to 350 dwellings has regards to a detailed site appraisal taking into account the existing hedgerows and trees, ecological considerations and the proper management of surface water through a SUDs scheme – which in turn will avoid exacerbating any flood risk to the existing village (noting the outfall to the Ash Brook will be downstream of the existing and proposed built up area).
- 11.43.6 Little Wymondley is an active community with a variety of local services including a small industrial estate, primary school, recreational facilities and public transport. The location and permeability of the site, together with the inclusion of a potential new primary school, significant areas of public open space, community allotments, recreation and play areas and walking/cycling routes throughout the scheme and connecting to the village, will help ensure the integration of an expanded population into the community.

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

- 11.44.1 Yes.
- 11.44.2 The overall location is highly sustainable, lying mid-way between Hitchin and Stevenage with good access to higher order facilities e.g. Sainsbury's (1900m), Lister Hospital (2350m) major areas of employment in Hitchin and Stevenage (5km and 4km respectively) and railway stations at Hitchin and Stevenage (4.0km and 4.7km).
- 11.44.3 The site has clearly defined and defensible boundaries which will prevent pressure for future sprawl, is in a community capable of accommodating a suitable level of growth – see 11.43 above – and can provide significant new infrastructure for the community, particularly in regard to the replacement of the existing 0.5FE school – which is of a scale and capacity no longer considered to be sustainable.

11.45 Site WY1 comprises of land in the Green Belt.

a) Do exceptional circumstances exist to warrant the allocation of the site for new housing in the Green Belt? If so, what are they?

- 11.45.1 The need to meet OAN is of itself a reasonable justification to review a Green Belt boundary which has endured since it was last reviewed in 1992 (CG1 s2.1).
- 11.45.2 The Council has not exercised its Duty to Cooperate in relation to the constraining effect of Green Belt. Indeed, it has acknowledged its need to accommodate unmet growth from a neighbouring authority – Luton.
- 11.45.3 Whilst significant parts of the District are not within the Green Belt the scale of growth required cannot be met on a sequential basis by reliance on urban development and redevelopment and by sites in locations beyond the Green Belt - both Baldock and Royston are small towns with significant constraints particularly in relation to landscape.
- 11.45.4 Framework paragraph 84 requires that when reviewing Green Belt authorities take account of the need to promote sustainable patterns of settlement.
- 11.45.5 In the instance where there is an implication for existing Green Belt boundaries in meeting future housing requirements, it is important that regard is had to matters of sustainability which, in the case of North Hertfordshire, indicates that the most sustainable locations for development are those which are in, on the boundary of, or well related by proximity and accessibility, to the largest and most sustainable urban areas within and adjoining the boundary of the district.
- 11.45.6 Site WY1 meets these considerations by being well located in proximity to both Stevenage and Hitchin and capable of being delivered in a timely manner with limited infrastructure impacts which would act to constrain early delivery and consequently can make a material contribution to sustaining the supply of land in the early years of the Plan.
- 11.45.7 Overall therefore, we consider that the exceptional need to meet housing requirements on deliverable sites, especially within the initial years, and the absence of demonstrable and overriding harm to the Green Belt, its purpose or functions – see below - and the availability of a permanent, durable alternative boundary which will not give rise to pressure for future amendment, constitute exceptional circumstances for altering the Green Belt boundary as proposed.

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

- 11.45.8 With specific respect to WY1, the site has clearly defined boundaries formed by existing highways and the existing edge of development. GC1 Table 2.4 sets out an assessment of the strategic role of Green Belt in the area lying between Hitchin and Stevenage (Area 10). Table 3.1 then provides a less coarse assessment, subdividing Area 10 into 5 sub divisions, parcel 10d including the whole of Little

Wymondley and its environs south west of the main railway. At these levels the general conclusion is that the Green Belt serves a function in two of the principal Green Belt purposes and has a lesser effect in relation to a third. Only in respect of the absence of function in relation to protecting the historic character of one of its principal neighbours does the Green Belt perform no function. As such the role of the Green Belt in Area 10 is not specifically distinguishable from much of the rest of the Green Belt as assessed

- 11.45.9 However, it is necessary to look at the specific functions of individual parcels within this broad overview in order to fulfil the obligations of Framework paragraph 84 to ensure that patterns of development are sustainable; and paragraph 85, particularly with regard to not including land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open, and to defining boundaries that are readily recognisable and, accordingly, permanent.
- 11.45.10GC1 Table 5.3 sets out this site specific analysis against established, and therefore consistent, criteria as set out in Table 5.2. WY1 is recorded under reference Site 122 where it is concluded that the site makes a 'moderate' contribution to the Green Belt.
- 11.45.11It is considered that it has an impact on 'openness' as the development is adjoining a built up area on only one side. However the summary notes that this is mitigated by the strong boundary formed by the A602 bypass to the south and by the northward aspect of the land which provides visual containment. We consider that these characteristics are reinforced by the presence of significant built development to the west comprising the Needham House Hotel, Blakemore End Road and by established village facilities to the east which form a functional part of the community, are appropriate to the Green Belt but which nevertheless have an impact on openness.
- 11.45.12Table 5.3 also notes as a matter of fact that the site lies with 2-5km of a principal settlement. However we consider that this potential Green Belt impact is mitigated by the requirement of Framework paragraph 84 to ensure that Green Belt boundaries promote sustainable patterns of development – where residents of Little Wymondley have access to a wide range of facilities and services in relatively close proximity as a benefit of the location of the village.
- 11.45.13Equally, as matters of fact, the site is outside the existing settlement boundary but does not impact on the conservation area of a historic town.
- 11.45.14Accordingly it is only in respect of the impact on openness that the retention of the site itself – as opposed to the wider area covered by parcel 10d – that the allocation of the land is potentially in conflict with the desirability of retaining the land undeveloped. However when subject to detailed analysis it is clear that the site specific circumstances in relation to aspect, surrounding development and the strength and durability of the proposed new permanent boundary significantly mitigate against that impact. Indeed we consider that the boundaries and the self-contained relationship of the site to the existing built up area – with consequently little or no landscape impact on views from either north or south - also mitigate the potential consideration of coalescence with either Stevenage or Hitchin. Neither town is intervisible to or from the site.

11.45.15 As such, no overriding harm to the Green Belt or its functions would arise from the exclusion of Site WY1.

c) To what extent would the consequent impacts on the purposes of the Green Belt be ameliorated or reduced to the lowest reasonably practicable extent?

11.45.16 Given that the land does serve only a limited Green Belt function, and the impact of its development in terms of the Green Belt is mitigated by the strength of its physical boundaries, the absence of landscape impact that would arise from development and the aforementioned northerly aspect of the land which sits to the south of the village, the consequent impact of development would be limited.

11.45.17 Nevertheless any residual impact on the Green Belt arising from development can be mitigated by development of the form illustrated in the Vision Statement. Notably, the limitation of the southward extent of development in accordance with the agreed boundary with the designated Urban Open Space and the regard had to wider landscape and visibility considerations will mitigate substantially any perceived impact on openness which is the main potential adverse impact of the allocation – see 11.45.11-13 above.

d) 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?

11.45.18 There would be no undermining of the Green Belt function of land adjoining the site.

11.45.19 In particular land to the south of the A602 bypass would continue to form part of the general separation between Hitchin and Stevenage and no coalescence would arise between the village and its principal neighbours – or with other local communities covered by the policy. Nor would openness be affected again given the strong physical boundaries of the allocated site and the landscape considerations outlined above.

e) Will the Green Belt boundary proposed need to be altered at the end of the plan period, or is it capable of enduring beyond then?

11.45.20 Given the proposed amended boundaries are formed by clear physical features – principally highways - there is no reasonable expectation that the change occasioned in this plan would give rise to further irresistible pressure for future change in this immediate area.

f) Are the proposed Green Belt boundaries consistent with the Plan's strategy for meeting identified requirements for sustainable development?

11.45.21 The requirements for sustainable development are derived from the tests set out in LP4 Appendix 6 s2.22. The mitigation strategies identified in the SA are reflected in the Vision Document or are capable of being delivered through a s106 Obligation.

g) Has the Green Belt boundary around the site been defined clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent? Does it avoid including land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open?

11.45.22 Yes.

11.45.23 The boundaries are clearly defined and logical. The development will take place in accordance with an agreed concept masterplan retaining the balance of land as open space for which appropriate management and guardianship arrangements will be made. In any event, the balance of land to the far south of the site is determined to be unsuitable for development due to landscape considerations which have determined the extent of the developable area shown in the concept masterplan.

11.46 Is the proposed settlement boundary:

a) consistent with the methodology for identifying the settlement boundaries?

11.46.1 The land proposed to be designated as Urban Open Land under Policy CGB5 will be included within a comprehensive planning application and the provision of public open space and recreation can accordingly be governed by planning condition or obligation. In combination with Policy CGB5 it would be illogical to seek to define the future settlement boundary to be other than contiguous with the proposed boundary of the Green Belt as amended. This is because the bypass forms a boundary which as a permanent physical feature is both more clearly recognisable and durable for that purpose. Those parts of the overall site which are designated Urban Open Land will function as part of the settlement in terms of providing visual and functional amenity and can therefore be distinguished from the countryside to the south of the bypass and west of Blakemore End Road whilst being protected from further development by Policy CGB5 and any appropriate conditions attached to a planning approval.

b) appropriate and justified?

11.46.2 The proposed alteration to the Green Belt and the allocation of land for development and the proposed form and extent of development depicted in the Vision Document is appropriate and justified.

APPENDIX

1. Vision Document, January 2018

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