

RAPLEYS

Hearing Statement for
Bellcross Company Limited (ID No: 6622)

NORTH HERTS DISTRICT PLAN EXAMINATION MATTERS AND ISSUES MATTERS 7 AND 9

02 November 2017

Our Ref: 503/55/1

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Appendix 1 Site Location Plan

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QUALITY ASSURANCE

This report has been prepared within the quality system operated at Rapleys LLP according to British Standard ISO 9001:2008.

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2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 This Hearing Statement has been prepared on behalf of Bellcross Company Limited ('Bellcross') in response to the Examination Matters 7 and 9.
- 2.2 Bellcross is the freehold owner of the site at Highover Farm, Hitchin ('the Site') which is allocated as a strategic housing site within the emerging Local Plan (Policy SP17) as shown on the Site Location Plan at **Appendix 1**.
- 2.3 As stated in our representations to the Pre-Submission plan consultation in November 2016, Bellcross has an excellent track record at delivering high quality residential development in the District and has sought to work closely with the local authority to assist in meeting the objectively assessed housing need of the District. Our client therefore seeks adequate planning policy support for residential development on the Site.
- 2.4 This Hearing Statement responds to the Inspector's Issues in respect of the Green Belt Review and the basis for the housing allocations and settlement boundaries.

3 MATTER 7: COUNTRYSIDE AND GREEN BELT - THE GREEN BELT REVIEW AND THE APPROACH TO SAFEGUARDED LAND (POLICY SP5)

Do the exceptional circumstances necessary exist to warrant the proposed alterations to Green Belt boundaries, in terms of both removing land form and adding land to the Green Belt?

- 3.1 We consider that the following exceptional circumstances exist, warranting the local authority's proposed alterations to Green Belt boundaries:
1. The local authority has an objectively assessed housing need (OAN) of 13,800 homes over the 20 year period 2011-31¹.
 2. In the shorter term, the local authority is unable to demonstrate a 5 year supply of housing land within its current settlement boundaries².
 3. Less than half (46%) of local authority's OAN can be delivered on non-Green Belt sites over the plan period, according to the local authority's latest evidence base³. As such, there is an insufficient supply of sites within current settlement boundaries for the local authority to meet its OAN.
- 3.2 The local authority's Green Belt boundaries have not been reviewed since the early 1990s and the NPPF at paragraph 83 is clear that boundaries of the Green Belt can be reviewed in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation of the Local Plan. The considerable shortfall of available land to meet housing need within settlement boundaries are considered to be clear exceptional circumstances in this case.

¹ Updating the Overall Housing Need (ORS, 2016).

² Housing and Green Belt Background Paper Partial Update September 2017, Housing Monitoring and Five-Year Supply.

³ Housing and Green Belt Background Paper (Ref No: HOU1).

What relationship, if any, is there between the exceptional circumstances leading to the alterations proposed to the Green Belt and the proposed spatial strategy/distribution of new housing?

- 3.3 The local authority's spatial strategy/distribution of new housing is predicated on new housing within settlement boundaries where possible but also recognising that housing will also need to accommodate on sites removed from the Green Belt. This is clearly in accordance with the local authority's evidence base and the exceptional circumstances reviewed above.
- 3.4 In line with paragraph 84 of the NPPF, the local authority promotes sustainable patterns of development within its Local Plan by directing the majority of housing development within or adjoining towns and villages inset within the Green Belt.
- 3.5 Our client therefore considers that there is a clear relationship between the exceptional circumstances that exist to the proposed Green Belt alterations and spatial strategy/distribution of housing and continues to support the managed release of land outside settlement boundaries within the Green Belt as set out in Policy SP5.

Is the Green Belt review based on a robust assessment methodology?

- 3.6 Whilst there is no nationally specific methodology for undertaking a Green Belt Boundary Review, the method employed in the local authority's Green Belt Boundary Review has drawn upon similar studies from across the country which reflects the relevant Green Belt tests contained within the NPPF, resulting in both the appropriate removal and designation on land from and within the Green Belt to ensure its permanence in the long term and endurance beyond the plan period.
- 3.7 Our client therefore considers that local authority's Green Belt Review methodology is robust and should be supported.

4 MATTER 9: THE BASIS FOR THE HOUSING ALLOCATIONS AND SETTLEMENT BOUNDARIES

Have all sites put forward for allocation been considered through the SA? Is the SA based on appropriate criteria and is it robust and sound base of evidence?

Overall, has the SA of sites and the selection process been appropriate and robust?

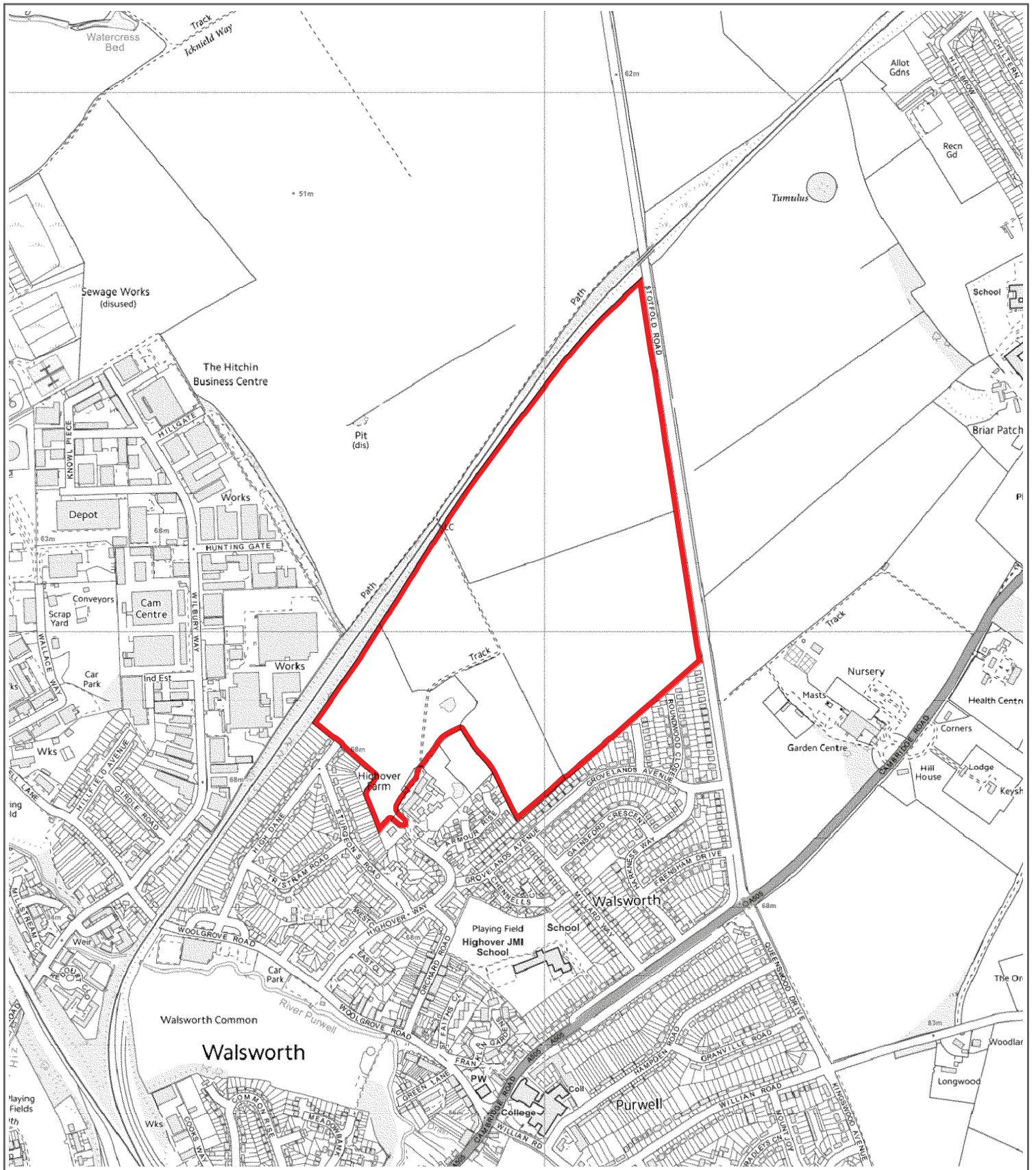
- 4.1 Our client considers the local authority's SA (September 2016) to be robust and sound evidence as it assesses the extent to which the emerging plan, when judged against reasonable alternatives, is able to achieve relevant environmental, economic and social objectives. The SA identifies, describes and evaluates the likely significant impacts of the plan's housing allocations and settlement boundaries thus incorporating the requirements of the EU SEA Directive and SA guidance. This is clearly demonstrated in the SA's review of Bellcross' Site on the edge of Hitchin where the document sets out the site-specific criteria requiring consideration, including the Green Belt, whilst balancing the Site's critical contribution to achieving housing numbers and opportunity to make a "significant contribution to five-year land supply" (page 12), concluding that these outweigh the harms.

5 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 As stated in our previous representations, Bellcross has a strong track record in delivering high quality residential development within the District and at a strategic level, and we therefore support the local authority's Green Belt Review and approach to removing and designating land from and within the Green Belt in order to deliver sustainable patterns of housing development, within and adjacent to towns such as Hitchin through appropriate site allocations to meet its OAN.
- 5.2 We therefore support the local authority's identification of Bellcross' Site as a strategic housing allocation for approximately 700 new homes under Policy SP17 which is required to meet the District's OAN and five year housing land supply.

Appendix 1

SITE LOCATION PLAN



SITE LOCATION PLAN

Highover Farm,
Highover Way,
HITCHIN. SG4 0RQ.



Scale @ A4 : 1:10,000

Plan No. :

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