

Memorandum of Understanding under the Duty to Co-operate

between

**Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council (WHBC) and Stevenage Borough Council
(SBC)**

on

Stevenage Borough Local Plan 2011-2031

Date of agreement: 25 August 2016

1. Scope of the statement

This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been prepared under the Duty to Cooperate requirements. It provides a position statement on the extent of co-operation and understanding in respect of the preparation of a local plan for SBC. The MOU is intended to set out the position of both signing authorities and be kept up to date as SBC as a local planning authority reaches key milestones in the preparation of their plan.

This MOU is intended to highlight the extent of agreement, or otherwise on strategic Stevenage and county wide matters. It is a shared objective of both WHBC and SBC to facilitate the timely progression of sound local plans towards adoption in accordance with planning legislation and the NPPF.

2. Stevenage Borough Local Plan 2011-2031

This MOU has been prepared in the context of the publication version of the Stevenage Borough Local Plan (2011-31) which was placed on public deposit for a six-week period ending 17 February 2016. The MOU was prepared in June 2016 in the period leading up to the planned 22 July 2016 submission of the plan to the Secretary of State for independent examination.

3. Matters agreed

Engagement between the two under the Duty to Co-operate has focussed on the quantum and location of housing and employment, along with the impact of this on local physical and environmental infrastructure. Following a period when there was uncertainty on the most appropriate way in which future growth might be handled this MOU highlights how there is a shared and common objective to resolve the issues in a manner which encompasses joint technical working, continuing Member involvement and through to the timely adoption of the local plan.

We, the undersigned, set out in this memorandum those matters of joint strategic interest to both groups as they are dealt with in the Stevenage Borough Local Plan, Submission Version, July 2016 (hereinafter 'the plan') in accordance with paragraph 181 of the National Planning Policy Framework, March 2012.

It is important to place on record that discussions between WHBC and SBC have embraced the full range of strategic cross-boundary matters covered by the Duty to Co-operate. Both WHBC and SBC are content that the duty to co-operate has been met thus far and ongoing liaison will ensure that this continuing requirement will be effectively addressed. It is the opinion of WHBC that SBC's Local Plan 2011-2031 has been correctly prepared and meets duty to cooperate requirements. Both WHBC and SBC agree they will continue to work together to try find solutions to support the delivery of the plan.

More specifically on issues raised by WHBC in the consultation responses:

- (i) Policy SP7: High Quality Homes. WHBC supports SBC's housing targets, the supply of sites within SBC and the Gypsy and Traveller provision. WHBC would welcome further discussions about the likely supply timetable. SBC note this and will work with WHBC to explore more detailed timings.
- (ii) Policy SP4: A Vital Town Centre. WHBC supports the out-of-town restriction and WHBC are considering a similar policy to TC13. Noted.
- (iii) Policy TC13: Retail impact assessments. WHBC welcome this approach. Noted
- (iv) Policy TC4: Station Gateway Major Opportunity Area. WHBC supports the proposals for Stevenage Central and Stevenage Railway Station. Noted
- (v) 'Infrastructure and Delivery'. WHBC supports the programme of highway mitigation, improvements, and cycle route extensions, but would like to see improvements to the B197 and B656 in northern WHBC. WHBC have concerns over the timing and funding of A1(M) junction. SBC note this and will work with WHBC to explore options as members of the Hertfordshire A1(M) Corridor Consortium.
- (vi) Policy SP3: A strong, competitive economy. WHBC expressed concern over some of the supporting text but welcomed the proposals to maximise the amount of employment land and floor space. WHBC raised concerns over the potential exemption of office to residential PD post 2019 in Gunnels Wood. SBC will apply for an Article 4 direction to protect the currently exempted sites, but this will not be stated in the Plan as the current exemption runs until 2019.
- (vii) Policy SP3: A strong, competitive economy. WHBC noted the overlapping nature of the FEMA and differing methodologies, and that WHBC may not long be able to provide employment land for SBC. SBC will explore with other areas options to increase the amount of employment space elsewhere and potentially not seek employment space from WHBC. SBC to progress discussions with others and keep WHBC informed.
- (viii) 'Stevenage Town Centre', WHBC support the principle of regenerating Stevenage Town Centre and the target of 4,600 m² of new retail space. WHBC expressed concern at the effect of the potential improvements on the viability and vitality of Welwyn Garden City Town Centre. SBC will seek to assure WHBC that is not the intention or desire of the policy, by clarifying the supporting policy text. Potential alterations to the policy will be considered by SBC. WHBC will reserve its position until it has seen these alterations.

- (ix) Policies TC4, TC6, TC7 and TC12: Retail. WHBC raised concerns about the level of retail (A1) floor space in these mixed used developments. SBC is only seeking to meet the local demand from the new residential and employment uses. SBC will discuss further with WHBC but believes the text is clear.

4. Outstanding matters

Other than (v) of the above, there are no other outstanding matters between the two authorities at the present time (i.e., the date this MOU was signed) other than supporting each other on the on-going highway modelling and potential mitigation that may be required.

5. Commitment to future co-operation

Both SBC and WHBC remain committed to effective co-operation on all matters relating to the Duty to Co-operate. As such both SBC and WHBC undertake to review and update this agreement as appropriate as key milestones are reached in plan preparation and any review.

6. Evidence of co-operation

- Stages of local plan preparation since April 2012 with dates of consultation responses:

Plan	Consultation	Date of response
Stevenage Borough Local Plan 2011-31	Stevenage Borough Local Plan – early-stage consultation	January 2013
Stevenage Borough Local Plan 2011-31	Stevenage Borough Local Plan – Key Issues and preferred options consultation	July 2013
Stevenage Borough Local Plan 2011-31	Stevenage Borough Local Plan – Revised housing target consultation	July 2015
Stevenage Borough Local Plan 2011-31	Stevenage Borough Local Plan – Publication stage consultation	February 2016

- Quarterly meeting of the Hertfordshire Planning Group – Local Plans (HPG Local plans), Hertfordshire Planning Group (HPG), Hertfordshire Infrastructure & Planning Partnership (HIPP) meetings which both SBC and WHBC actively attend.
- Post consultation meeting on the 19 April 2016, previous member / officer Duty to Co-operate meetings over the last 18 months.
- Numerous and ongoing meetings on specific topics as the need arises.

Signatories to the Statement of Common Ground

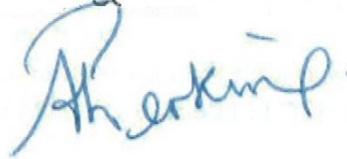
For and on behalf of Stevenage Borough
Council



Councillor John Gardner
Portfolio Holder for Planning & Environment

Date:

For and behalf of Welwyn Hatfield
Borough Council



Councillor Mandy Perkins
Executive Member for Planning

Date:

25/8/16.