

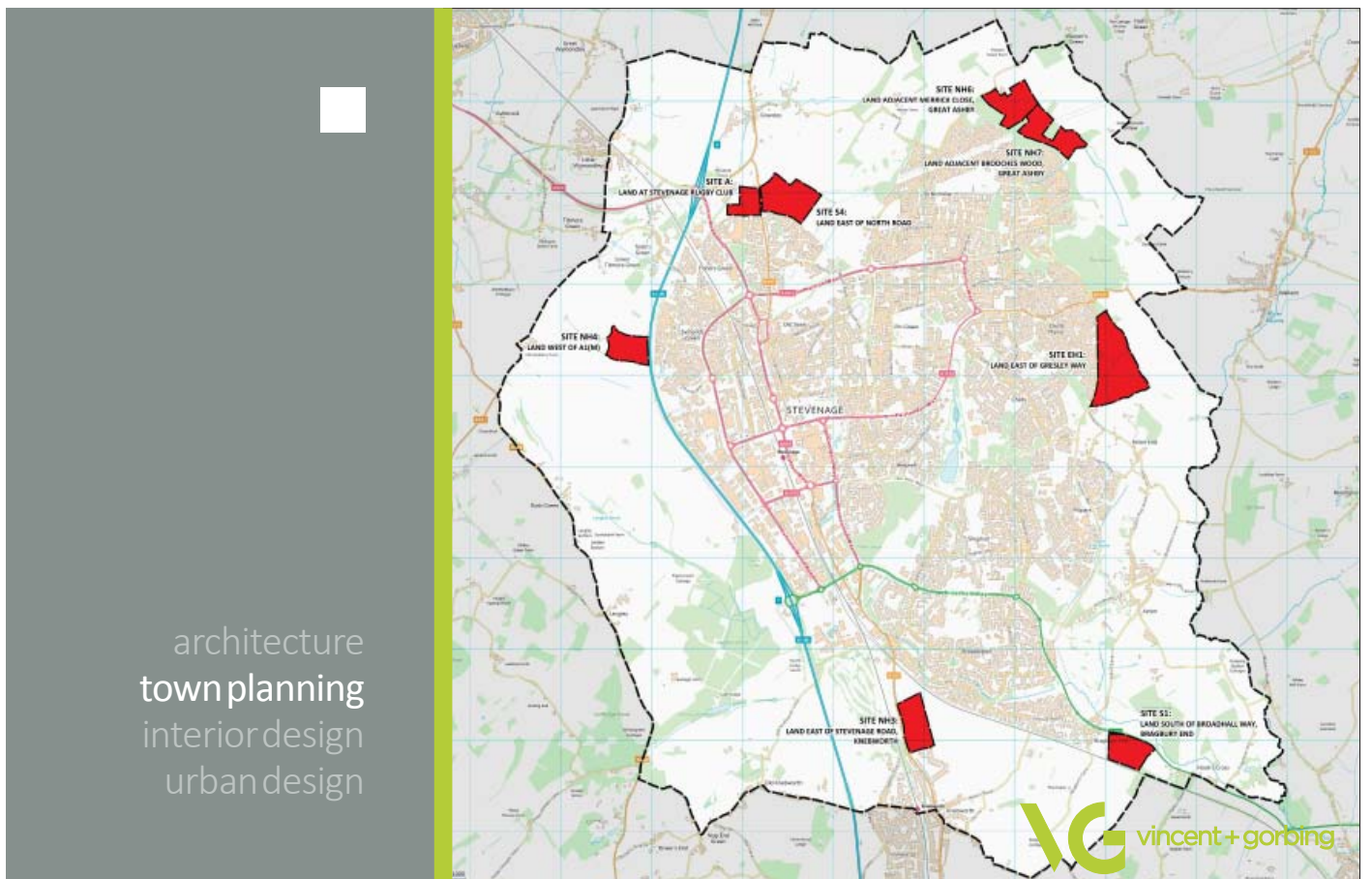


# Stevenage/North Hertfordshire Secondary School Site search

on behalf of Hertfordshire County Council

July 2016

prepared by Vincent and Gorbing



architecture  
town planning  
interior design  
urban design

## STEVENAGE/NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE SECONDARY SCHOOL SITE SEARCH

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) has established a need to provide additional secondary school places within the Stevenage Education Planning Area (EPA).
- 1.2 The previous school place planning strategy for the Stevenage area was formulated in the context of the Government's "Building School's for the Future" (BSF) programme and was designed to provide significant capital investment into rebuilding or remodelling the secondary schools in the Town.
- 1.3 This strategy included the relocation of one school to a site north of Great Ashby, which would have provided an 8 Forms of Entry (FE) secondary school.
- 1.4 The BSF programme was abolished in 2010 and the school place planning strategy became financially unviable. Two schools did however benefit and consequently both The Nobel School and Marriotts School were rebuilt and expanded to 8FE.
- 1.5 Separately from the above strategy, Barnwell School, which currently offers 9FE, has received HCC capital funding to expand its buildings to offer 10FE.
- 1.6 HCC have subsequently produced a report entitled 'Stevenage Secondary Education Need – June 2016' which sets out the forecast demand for school places. It demonstrates that with a 1FE expansion at Barnwell School the rising demand from the existing community can be accommodated.
- 1.7 The pupil yield from anticipated housing growth within Stevenage and from developments adjacent to the Stevenage administrative boundary, (in North Hertfordshire District Council and East Hertfordshire District Council) is likely to generate a growth of 15.7FE of secondary school provision to 2031. The peak demand within the plan period will be dependent on the phasing of

development within the emerging local/district plans. HCC have undertaken a town planning review of existing schools within Stevenage to ascertain any potential growth, this has identified the potential for a further 2.5FE growth in existing schools within Stevenage, subject to additional feasibility work around highways, which is supported by the respective schools. This 2.5fe growth could accommodate some of the projected need arising from potential housing growth.

- 1.8 Consequently, there would be a requirement for an additional 13.2FE of secondary school places within the plan period.
- 1.9 HCC has already established that land at the former Barnwell School East, which is in the ownership of HCC, could deliver 5FE of secondary accommodation and this is proposed to be allocated for such a development by Stevenage Borough Council, accordingly, a further 8.2FE of secondary school provision is therefore required.
- 1.10 As a result of the established anticipated demand, an 8FE school site is required to meet the housing growth on the periphery of Stevenage, with the potential capability of being expanded to 9FE should a greater need be established, during the plan period.
- 1.11 The Stevenage Secondary Educational Need report (June 2016) and the Planning Appraisals of existing secondary schools, undertaken by HCC are at Appendix 1.
- 1.12 HCC has commissioned Vincent and Gorbing to undertake a comparative site search to identify a suitable secondary school site to meet the 8FE future requirement. The comparative site search will to be used by HCC in representations to support a potential site allocation within an emerging Local Plan (Stevenage/North Hertfordshire/East Hertfordshire).

- 1.13 There are two stages to the comparative site search process. The first stage is to search for potentially suitable sites. The second stage is to undertake a comparison of selected potentially suitable sites.
- 1.14 Section 2.0 summarises the methodology and assumptions used in undertaking the first stage of the study, including the area of search, size of site, and shape and characteristics of site. It also identifies the sources of potential sites, and the considerations which have been taken into account in identifying and assessing the sites.
- 1.15 Section 3.0 summarises the outcome and results of the site search and assessments.
- 1.16 Section 4.0 reviews the short listed sites and provides a comparison assessment of the remaining sites to ascertain the preferred site.
- 1.17 Section 5.0 contains the main summary and conclusions.

## **2.0 STUDY METHODOLOGY**

2.1 This section summarises the methodology and assumptions used in undertaking the study. The study was based on the initial brief prepared by the client and the approved workplan, as subsequently modified and amplified in conjunction with the client.

### **AREA OF SEARCH**

2.2 An area of search was agreed with Hertfordshire County Council at the start of the study, based on the area of need for a new secondary school, following a review of the broad locations for new housing development proposed by the emerging Local Plans for the three neighbouring Local Authorities in the period to 2031.

2.3 At present there is an anticipated housing growth of 7,600 dwellings within the administrative boundary of Stevenage between 2011 – 2031. Taking account of existing completions and planning permissions granted, a residual 5,429 dwellings needs to be delivered within the plan period. In addition, approximately 1,857 dwellings within North Hertfordshire, adjacent to the Stevenage administrative boundary and circa 600 dwellings within East Hertfordshire, again adjacent to the Stevenage administrative boundary are proposed. This is a cumulative residual housing growth of 7,886 dwellings to be delivered by 2031.

2.4 The area of search was therefore centred on the Stevenage, being the largest and most sustainable settlement, with areas of proposed Green Belt release for housing incorporated. Land to the north of Knebworth was also included due to the sustainability of that settlement, its size and the proposed growth adjacent to it.



### **Study area boundary**

- 2.5 A study area, or area of search, was identified and defined in conjunction with the client and comprised two areas:
- Urban Search Area – the preferred, or most sustainable, location for a secondary school within the existing urban area.
  - Non-Urban Search Area – the wider area of search beyond the Urban Search Area, which is a sub-optimal location but may help to meet needs identified if urban locations are not available/suitable.
- 2.6 The boundaries of the search area were defined to relate to strong features wherever possible e.g. main roads and railway lines, A1(M), and the edge of the built up area.
- 2.7 The study area is shown on drawing 5139/100.

### **Site location and referencing**

- 2.8 For ease of undertaking the study and reviewing potential sites the areas of search were divided into administrative sectors and a referencing system adopted so that sites could be given individual reference numbers. Sites were identified by means of locational reference letters and numerical reference numbers, as follows:
- PF = Playing Fields/Playing Space
  - AL = Allotments
  - HCC = Hertfordshire County Council Freehold Land
  - OL = Open Land
  - CP = Commercial Properties (available for sale)
  - EH = Within the East Hertfordshire administrative boundary

- NH = Within the North Hertfordshire administrative boundary
- S = Within the Stevenage administrative boundary.
- A-Z = Shortlisted sites within the Urban Area.

## **SIZE OF SITE**

### **Within the Urban area:**

- 2.9 Within the urban area it is technically feasible to split provision to provide the main school buildings and associated necessary facilities on one site with the playing fields on another site.
- 2.10 BB103 sets out the requirements that would be needed to provide the main school buildings and associated necessary facilities in such circumstances. In addition to the building floor space the following facilities would be required as a minimum to enable the school to function effectively:
- Hard informal and social area, including outdoor play area
  - Hard outdoor PE space ideally in the form of a multi-use games area
  - Soft informal and social area
  - Soft outdoor PE area
- 2.11 This combination of requirements, including built floor space generates a minimum BB103 guideline of 2.1ha for a 6FE secondary school and 2.6ha for an 8FE secondary school with the necessary requirement for detached playing fields elsewhere.
- 2.12 As the County Council is searching for an 8FE secondary school site the size threshold that must be reached on a site in the urban area is 2.6ha. Any sites below this size are discounted. Any sites at this size or above are considered for further investigation.

**Outside the Urban area:**

- 2.13 Outside the urban area the objective is to establish a site area that could provide all the secondary school site requirements on one site.
- 2.14 Preferably potential sites should be of sufficient size to comply with the County Council's BB103 based Space Standards for new 6-8FE secondary schools for unrestrained school sites in non-urban locations.
- 2.15 An initial site search for a new secondary school in Stevenage was set out in a Vincent and Gorbings report "Stevenage Secondary Schools" (Feb 2007).
- 2.16 That report states that following BB98 the search for an 8FE school site should be around 10ha. A planning judgement was made that it might be prudent to search for 12ha sites given potential physical and site constraints.
- 2.17 The Great Ashby site identified at North Stevenage (Option A as it was described in the report) was identified as 12.22ha (which comprised a 4.16ha building zone and 8.06ha playing field area).
- 2.18 As further technical and environmental investigations proceeded to support the planning application the site area grew to be 16.54ha, due to environmental constraints, to support an 8FE school site. The site area was unchallenged during the planning determination process and planning permission was granted on this basis.
- 2.19 Further to the earlier Stevenage work, Vincent and Gorbings were then commissioned to undertake a site search for south-west (S-W) Hertfordshire, also for the provision of a site for an 8FE school.
- 2.20 This search began with a review of the site area methodology was considered and discussed with HCC. It was agreed given the Great Ashby experience (which resulted in a 4.32ha increase from 12.22ha up to 16.54ha) it would be prudent to search for sites of 12ha minimum and 15ha

maximum to meet the need for an 8FE school. This is set out in the methodology for the S-W Herts Site Search (July 2010).

- 2.21 This range of 12-15ha site area was unchallenged by Three Rivers District Council and remained unchallenged by third parties during the course of an Examination in Public into the Three Rivers District Council Site Allocations DPD. Two school sites were identified on this basis and are now approved allocations in that document.
- 2.22 The main difference between this site search and the previous site searches is the application of BB103 which would seek to secure a minimum site area of 8.7ha up to a maximum of 10.92ha.
- 2.23 It still remains a prudent and pragmatic approach to allow for a contingency to manage abnormal site constraints to avoid the need for a growing site area as experienced at Great Ashby. Adding the 4.32ha abnormal area (experienced at Great Ashby) onto the BB103 site areas gives a site area requirement of 13.02ha to 15.24ha. It does not seem an unreasonable approach to use 12ha as a minimum site area. It is also recognised that this 12ha minimum could be reduced once detailed site feasibility is underway. It would be necessary to do that to ensure that minimum impact on the openness of the Green Belt is a primary planning objective.
- 2.24 The search criteria is therefore a minimum build area of 4ha and a minimum overall site search area of 12-15ha.

#### **SITE SHAPE AND CHARACTERISTICS**

- 2.25 Preferably the site should have the following characteristics:
- Shape of site – ideally square or rectangular
  - Topography – ideally level or nearly level (to avoid need for significant terracing)

- Site features – ideally clear site free of significant site features and constraints e.g. trees, streams, existing buildings, public footpaths, overhead power lines etc
- Access – preferably served by A or B road or other main road, and should avoid narrow country lanes and residential roads, and dual carriageways.

### **IDENTIFICATION OF SITES**

2.26 Potential secondary school sites were identified within the study area based on the following sources of information:

- Sites identified by Lambert Smith Hampton (LSH) for the County Council following a search for buildings and land potentially available, including undeveloped land.
- Land owned by Hertfordshire County Council.
- Sites identified by Stevenage, North Hertfordshire and East Hertfordshire Council's in their Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessments.
- Other sites identified by V&G following a review of Planning and Environmental Constraints (see below), a review of OS base plans and aerial photographs, and our local knowledge.

2.27 These are shown on drawings 5139/005 – 5139/008.

### **Planning and environmental constraints and designations**

2.28 In identifying potential other sites, and assessing sites identified by LSH, land owned by the County, and SHLAA sites, planning and environmental constraints and designations (and a number of other considerations) within

the study area and just outside were identified and plotted. These are shown on drawing 5139/001- 5139/004 and include:

- Green Belt
- Golf courses
- Public open space / parks / playing fields and recreation grounds
- Private sports grounds
- Areas of woodland
- Cemeteries
- Allotments
- Registered Common Land
- Local Nature Reserves
- Conservation Areas
- Landscape Conservation Areas/Landscape Conservation Improvement Areas.
- Areas of Archaeological Interest
- Scheduled Ancient Monuments
- Public Rights of Way
- Land liable to flooding

#### **URBAN AREA SITE SEARCH**

2.29 A site search was initiated within the urban areas which was completed by May 2016.

2.30 It is recognised that an available brownfield site within any of these urban areas would, in town planning terms, be more sequentially preferable than building in the Green Belt.

2.31 A plan was then prepared showing the Green Belt boundary around Stevenage and outlying settlements. A mapping exercise inside the urban areas was then undertaken to identify:

- Open undeveloped areas of land as these may offer opportunities for school buildings with the potential requirement for detached playing fields elsewhere
- Employment zones where land or buildings may be available and which may offer opportunities for new school buildings with the potential requirement for detached playing fields elsewhere
- Land in HCC ownership since that is in the Council's control and could if available and surplus to use be brought forward in an expedient timeframe for development
- Commercially available land or buildings on the market which may accommodate school buildings with the potential requirement for detached playing fields elsewhere
- Land or buildings that are known to be coming on the market which may accommodate school buildings with the potential requirement for detached playing fields elsewhere

2.32 For each of the above categories site sizes were identified to determine whether any land or buildings are available to meet the 2.6ha site area. All of these sites (regardless of size) were then mapped onto the study area.

2.33 Within the urban area, woodland areas, areas of land in the flood zones and golf courses are eliminated from the site search since the environmental impact of the removal of woodland or development in flood zones are, at

the outset, considered to be higher than land that does not hold this status. Development of a golf course would result in the loss of a recreational facility that would require replacement elsewhere. Should there be no other suitable 8FE secondary school sites then these areas of land would need to be reviewed again but at this stage it is appropriate to judge them sequentially less suitable.

- 2.34 Using playing fields for a new secondary school would bring added difficulties as the area of any existing playing field lost to a school building zone would need to be replaced elsewhere. Replacement provision elsewhere would require building in the Green Belt (unless a suitable urban site could be found) and it would be necessary to demonstrate that the replacement playing fields were as accessible to their existing users as the existing playing fields. Furthermore, recent case law has established that new playing fields are also considered to be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Re-provision would necessitate two sites to be entered into the delivery of a new secondary school which could add complexities resulting in timescale impacts.

#### **OUTSIDE URBAN AREA SITE SEARCH**

- 2.35 An initial search for sites outside the urban area of Stevenage was undertaken in 2007 which resulted in the identification of 6 sites. These sites were reviewed and the site search was refreshed to review this list of 6 sites and to identify any further areas of land that might be suitable.
- 2.36 In town planning terms it is considered that building in the Green Belt around Stevenage or to the north of Knebworth is more sequentially preferable than building in the Green Belt adjacent to the settlements of Graveley or Little Wymondley for the following reasons:



- Stevenage is one of the main foci for development both within the District and with neighbouring Authorities focusing some of their growth on the edge of the settlement.
- Stevenage provides access to a wide range of facilities, services, employment and sustainable modes of travel (including a railway station) which can provide linked trips for travel to school
- The spatial distribution of pupils at a point in time when the schools will be full (Children's Services report Stevenage Secondary Education Need – June 2016) identifies that development within Stevenage can be accommodated within the existing schools, and through the provision of an additional secondary school within the southern half of the settlement. Additional demand comes from proposed developments to the north and east of Stevenage and around Knebworth abutting the administrative boundary. Accordingly, it is considered both sustainable and appropriate to locate a school where the main demand for pupil places is likely to arise.
- Knebworth is a large village targeted for some growth in the emerging local plan. It benefits from a wide range of facilities and sustainable modes of travel (including a railway station) which can provide linked trips for travel to school. The northern half of the settlement has been targeted due to the good connections with Stevenage and the added benefits of the larger settlement in close proximity.

2.37 A plan was then prepared showing the Green Belt boundary around the settlement of Stevenage. A mapping exercise outside the urban area was then undertaken to identify:

- Woodland areas

- Golf courses
- Environment Agency flood zones 2 and 3
- Adopted Local Plan designations (Scheduled ancient monuments, conservation areas, areas of archaeological interest, landscape development and landscape conservation areas) which provides an early indication of potential policy constraints
- Public footpaths, byways and bridleways
- Land in the ownership of the County Council
- Playing fields

2.38 Outside the urban area, woodland areas, areas of land in the flood zones and golf courses are eliminated from the site search since the environmental impact of the removal of woodland or development in flood zones are, at the outset, considered to be higher than land that does not hold this status. Development of a golf course would result in the loss of a recreational facility that would require replacement elsewhere. Should there be no other suitable potential 8FE secondary school sites then these areas of land would need to be reviewed again but at this stage it is appropriate to judge them sequentially less suitable.

2.39 Following the constraints mapping sites were then identified in the study area for further consideration. The potential sites listed at the end of section 3 of this report are confirmed as the sites that were taken forward for comparative site analysis.

#### **ASSESSMENT OF SITES**

2.40 All the identified potential sites were assessed to establish which site (or sites) might be the most appropriate to accommodate a new secondary school.

2.41 A series of steps or sieves were undertaken to identify potentially suitable sites for further considerations. The following sections detail the stages which were undertaken and the results, but in summary the assessment process involved the following stages:

**Stage 1: Full List of Sites.**

- A full list of urban sites were identified from the commercially available property search and land in the ownership of HCC or any other potentially suitable site. This list was rationalised using the following criteria:
  - Size of site
  - Existing school sites
  - Scheduled Ancient Monuments
  - Land liable to flooding
  - Registered Common Land

Sites of less than 2.6ha were rejected, as were sites which are currently used as schools (including independent schools and related playing fields). Sites which are designated Scheduled Ancient Monuments, registered Common Land, or liable to flooding were also rejected. All remaining sites were added to the 'Long List'.

**Stage 2: Long List of Sites.**

- The identified sites, both within and adjacent to the urban area (or the 'Long List' of sites) were assessed according to their type and existing use, and a number of planning and environmental constraints and designations. The criteria were as follows:
  - Site constraints:

- Planning and environmental constraints and designations which may apply to the sites, over and above those identified earlier in the previous stage. These are as follows:
  - Current use of site:
    - Existing public open space / park / recreation ground / public playing fields
    - Allotments
    - Private sports grounds
    - Areas of woodland / significant trees
  - Planning and environmental constraints and designations:
    - Green Belt
    - Local Nature Reserve
    - Conservation Area
    - Area of Archaeological Interest
  - Other considerations:
    - Public Rights of Way
    - Site shape and features
    - Multiple ownership / occupation
- The schedule identifies the constraints by means of a red amber green system, as follows:
  - Green – constraint not applicable to site

- Amber / yellow – constraint affects part of site, or immediately adjoins site. In respect of land ownership, it may be in multiple ownership due to land composition.
  - Red – all, or majority, of site affected by constraint
- Conclusion – overall conclusion
- Sites which were areas of woodland and/or contained significant trees and Local Nature Reserves were rejected as were a number of other sites for other reasons including: sites were in multiple ownership / occupation, which would mean that the site would be unlikely to be available in at least the near future, preliminary access considerations, and practical considerations including site shape and features, for example long narrow sites or awkwardly shaped sites which would be difficult to accommodate a school. In a number of cases a combination of constraints and considerations resulted in sites being rejected rather than an individual constraint or consideration.
- Based on this assessment a number of conclusions were able to be drawn on the relative merits of the sites and a number of sites were rejected. The remaining sites were added to a 'Short List'.

**Stage 3: Short List of Sites.**

- The final stage was a more detailed assessment of the 'Short Listed' sites, including undertaking a high level accessibility appraisal from specialist transportation consultants, to establish which site (or sites) might be best suited to accommodate a new secondary school. The commission allowed for undertaking 5 detailed assessments of potential sites, but it transpired that the study identified a total of 7 potential sites which merited further consideration.

- A site assessment proforma was completed for each of the short listed sites, the proforma addresses matters pertaining to the following and considers each of the sites in more detail:
  - Site Details
  - Accessibility
  - Environmental Impact
  - Existing Planning Constraints
  - Highways/Access Appraisal – Summary
  - Site Development Potential
  - Advantages/Disadvantages
  - Summary and Recommendation.
  - Conclusions
  - Further Work required should the site be progressed.
- Each proforma is accompanied by the following drawings:
  - Site Location Plan
  - Site Identification Plan
  - Aerial Photograph
  - Development Principles
- The need for a new school arises as a result of proposed housing allocations within the emerging Local/District plans of the three neighbouring Authorities. Accordingly, consideration needs to be given to the potential for a secondary school within these areas, to meet the

identified need arising. For those proposed housing allocations that could accommodate a school, by virtue of the allocation size, but have not made the Short List, it is proposed to assess the suitability of those sites for school accommodation, but not undertake a high level highways appraisal, as the wider development would need to ensure appropriate access was delivered if the site were to be allocated.

- A comparison assessment of the Short Listed sites will then be undertaken to narrow the number of sites considered, having regard to the area of identified need, suitability, availability and deliverability.

### **3.0 SITE IDENTIFICATION : OUTCOMES/RESULTS**

3.1 This section summarises the process of identifying and reviewing potential sites for a new 8FE Secondary school, including the various stages or sieves which this process went through.

#### **FULL LIST OF SITES**

3.2 A full list of all potential sites within the study area was assembled based on the sources identified earlier at section 2.0 (ie LSH sites, HCC land, SHLAA sites and other sites identified by V&G).

3.3 In total 146 potential sites were identified and were plotted on drawing 5139/005 – 5139/008. The sites are listed in Appendix 2 and are listed by location and reference letter/number.

3.4 The full list of sites was then reviewed against a set of constraints considered to be fundamental to their ability to accommodate a new 8FE secondary school. This sieve exercise reduced the number of potential sites from 146 to 21 sites, to produce a 'long list' of sites for further consideration. The full list of sites attached at Appendix 2 set out a summary of why particular sites were rejected or carried forward.

#### **LONG LIST OF SITES**

3.5 A long list of 21 sites was produced, this included the following sites:

- A – Stevenage Rugby Club and Land to the north (8.36ha)
- B – Longfield Fire & Rescue Centre (2.87ha)
- C – Former Lonsdale School (3.48ha)
- D – Hertfordshire Development Centre & Recycling Centre (4.07ha)
- E – Great Ashby Linear Park (9.40ha)



- F – Fishers/Symonds Green Landscape Buffer (11.59ha)
- G – Fairlands Valley Park North (38.90ha)
- H – Fairlands Valley Park South (21.08ha)
- EH1 - Land to the east of Gresley Way and south of Stevenage Road (36.12ha)
- EH2 - Land to the west of Bragbury Lane, south of the railway line, Knebworth (18.14ha)
- NH1 - Land to the north of Swangley's Lane and east of Old Lane, Knebworth (15.68ha)
- NH2 - Land west of Watton Road, south of the railway line, Knebworth (15.68ha)
- NH3 - Land east of Stevenage Road, Knebworth (16.01ha)
- NH4 - Land to the west of the A1(M), Stevenage West (13.21ha)
- NH5 - Land to north and west of Back Lane (16.79ha)
- NH6 - Land north of Great Ashby, adjacent Merrick Close (16.24ha)
- NH7 - Land north of Great Ashby, adjacent Brooches Wood (16.26ha)
- S1 - Land south of Broadhall Way, Bragbury End. (13.75ha)
- S2 - Land north of Broadhall Way, Bragbury End. (13.92ha)
- S3 - Land south of Stevenage Road, Fishers Green, west of the A1(M) (12.59ha)
- S4 – Land east of North Road (21.81ha)

- 3.6 For each site an initial review, based on planning and environmental constraints, plus practical considerations, was undertaken.
- 3.7 Based on this review a number of conclusions were able to be drawn, a number of sites rejected and others identified which merited further consideration.
- 3.8 Full details of the review can be found at Appendix 4, which indicates which sites were rejected and the reasons for rejection and those sites which merited being taken forward for further consideration. As a result of this assessment the number of sites was reduced from 21 potential secondary school sites to 7 which were considered to merit further consideration.
- 3.9 The rejected sites are as follows:
- B – Longfield Fire & Rescue Centre
  - C – Former Lonsdale School
  - D – Hertfordshire Development Centre & Recycling Centre
  - E – Great Ashby Linear Park
  - F – Fishers/Symonds Green Landscape Buffer
  - G – Fairlands Valley Park North
  - H – Fairlands Valley Park South
  - EH2 - Land to the west of Bragbury Lane, south of the railway line, Knebworth
  - NH1 - Land to the north of Swangley's Lane and east of Old Lane, Knebworth
  - NH2 - Land west of Watton Road, south of the railway line, Knebworth

- NH5 - Land to north and west of Back Lane
- S2 - Land north of Broadhall Way, Bragbury End.
- S3 - Land south of Stevenage Road, Fishers Green, west of the A1(M)

3.10 In addition, land to the west of Stevenage (NH4) is to be considered as a potential site location due to the size of the proposed allocation, this will be consider in planning terms only, as new infrastructure will be required to deliver the overall site.

#### **SHORT LIST OF SITES**

3.11 The review of the long list of sites resulted in 7 potential sites being identified which were considered to merit further, more detailed, consideration, including commissioning high level transportation and access studies from specialist consultants. With 1 potential site allocation requiring more detailed planning consideration.

3.12 The sites short listed for more detailed consideration for possibly accommodating a new secondary school are as follows:

- A - Stevenage Rugby Club and Land to the north.
- EH1 - Land to the east of Gresley Way and south of Stevenage Road
- NH3 - Land east of Stevenage Road, Knebworth
- NH6 - Land north of Great Ashby, adjacent Merrick Close
- NH7 - Land north of Great Ashby, adjacent Brooches Wood.
- S1 - Land south of Broadhall Way, Bragbury End
- S4 - Land east of North Road.

- 3.13 See drawing 5139/101 for the location of the short listed sites, including their locations relative to the urban area.
- 3.14 A site assessment proforma has then been completed for each of the short listed sites.
- 3.15 Apart from NH6 - Land north of Great Ashby, adjacent Merrick Close, where a Transport Assessment has been undertaken by Pell Frischmann in January 2015 (Appendix 8), each report is accompanied by a High Level Accessibility Appraisal, including drawings, prepared by Stomor Civil Engineering Consultants.
- 3.16 In respect of NH6 – Land north of Great Ashby, adjacent Merrick Close, Stomor Civil Engineering Consultants have undertaken a High Level Accessibility Appraisal, in addition to the Transport Assessment, to enable a comparison against the other shortlisted sites to be drawn based on a consistent assessment of the locations.
- 3.17 In respect of NH4 – Land West of Stevenage, which is considered as a site allocation, a site assessment proforma has been completed, but does not address any highway matters.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

- 3.18 With the exception of Site A, all the sites fall in the Green Belt. In normal circumstances, and as part of any planning application, a case of 'very special circumstances' would need to be made to justify development within the Green Belt. Such a case would normally be based on demonstrable educational need and a site search demonstrating that there are no other more sequentially suitable sites available for the development.
- 3.19 Undertaking a site search, such as this, would assist in supporting such an application, but in this instance is designed to support potential allocations in emerging Local/District Plans to ensure that established educational need

from existing and proposed housing can be accommodated, during the next plan period.

3.20 A site comparison assessment is undertaken at Section 4.0.

3.21 Below is a summary of the proforma findings:

A - Stevenage Rugby Club and Land to the North

- Located within the urban area, the site could be reasonably developed as an 8FE school site with associated playing fields, however the rugby club facility would need to be replaced elsewhere, thus resulting in the need to locate and acquire a second site and potentially fund the replacement facilities.
- The traffic on North Road is heavy, albeit moving, obstructions through on street parking/ dropping off could hinder these traffic flows significantly, such that robust onsite parking and drop off facilities are likely to be required.
- Opting for an urban site is more preferable to a non-urban site.
- An appropriate layout and design is likely to be achievable given the sites location, however, it is unlikely that this site would be deliverable due to the cost implications of re-locating the rugby club, without which the scheme is likely to obtain a statutory objection from Sport England.
- Without replacement rugby club facilities it is unlikely that the club would release their land.
- The rugby club/leisure centre part of the site is proposed as a housing allocation within the emerging Stevenage Local Plan.

EH1 - Land to the east of Gresley Way and south of Stevenage Road

- The site could be reasonably developed as an 8FE school site with a suitable access arrangement and scope for an offsite park and stride, with an underpass already in situ.
- The site is being actively promoted via the emerging District Plan, therefore it is reasonable to assume that the site is available for development.
- An appropriate layout and design is likely to be achievable and with a robust landscaping scheme, impact on the wider landscape character area could be mitigated against. There is likely to be some levelling required and tree removal to facilitate an access arrangement, but with careful design and consideration, this is not considered to be insurmountable.
- The site is proposed as a site allocation within the emerging East Hertfordshire District Plan.

NH3 - Land east of Stevenage Road, Knebworth

- The site is of a sufficient size to accommodate an 8FE school with associated playing fields and is adjacent to the built form of Knebworth. There is scope to provide a suitable access arrangement.
- An appropriate layout and design is likely to be achievable and with a robust landscaping scheme, impact on the wider landscape character area could be mitigated against. There is likely to be some levelling required to facilitate an access, but with careful design and consideration, this is not considered to be insurmountable. With the siting of the built form adjacent to the existing settlement boundary, the playing fields would ensure that the openness between the two settlements is not prejudiced and therefore the function of the Green Belt largely retained.

NH6 - Land north of Great Ashby, adjacent Merrick Close

- The site could be reasonably developed as an 8FE school site with a suitable access arrangement, albeit loss of the open space is not desirable. The use of the site as a secondary school has previously been established with the grant of planning permission in 2010, albeit this has now lapsed.
- The site is being actively promoted via the emerging District Plan, therefore it is reasonable to assume that the site is available for development.
- An appropriate layout and design is likely to be achievable and with a robust landscaping scheme, impact on the wider landscape character area could be mitigated against. There is likely to be some levelling required and tree removal to facilitate an access arrangement, but with careful design and consideration, this is not considered to be insurmountable.
- The site is proposed as a site allocation within the emerging North Hertfordshire Local Plan.

NH7 - Land north of Great Ashby, adjacent Brooches Wood

- The site could be reasonably developed as an 8FE school site with a suitable access arrangement, albeit loss of the open space is not desirable. The site would also be somewhat segregated due to its layout with the buildings separated from the playing fields, this would prevent natural surveillance of the playing field and would therefore be less favourable than other sites.
- The site is being actively promoted via the emerging District Plan, therefore it is reasonable to assume that the site is partially available for development.

- An appropriate layout and design is likely to be achievable and with a robust landscaping scheme, impact on the wider landscape character area could be mitigated against. There is likely to be some levelling required and tree removal to facilitate an access arrangement, but with careful design and consideration, this is not considered to be insurmountable.
- The north western part of the site is proposed as a site allocation within the emerging North Hertfordshire Local Plan.

S1 - Land south of Broadhall Way, Bragbury End.

- The site could be reasonably developed as an 8FE school site with associated playing fields, an access could be delivered, albeit the impact on highway safety and flow would need to be carefully considered.
- The site is being actively promoted via the emerging Local Plan, therefore it is reasonable to assume that the site is available for development.
- An appropriate layout and design is likely to be achievable and with a robust landscaping scheme, impact on the wider landscape character could be mitigated against. With careful design and consideration the site could potentially be delivered without impacting on the wider area.
- The site is proposed as a site allocation within the emerging Stevenage Local Plan.

S4 - Land east of North Road

- The site is of a sufficient size to accommodate an 8FE school with associated playing fields and is adjacent to the built form of Stevenage. There is scope to provide a suitable access arrangement, but is likely to require the introduction of a right hand turn lane to avoid impacting upon highway safety.



- An appropriate layout and design is likely to be achievable and with a robust landscaping scheme, impact on the wider landscape character area could be mitigated against. There is likely to be some levelling required to facilitate an access, but with careful design and consideration, this is not considered to be insurmountable.
- With the siting of the built form adjacent to the existing settlement boundary, the playing fields would ensure that any development would be read in association with the existing built form.
- The site is proposed as a site allocation within the emerging Stevenage Local Plan.

3.22 For further details see the Site Proformas attached at Appendices 5 – 11.

#### **SITE ALLOCATION CONSIDERATION**

3.23 Consideration has also been given to NH4 – Land West of Stevenage. This wider area has a lengthy planning history and in the current Stevenage Local Plan, part of the site was safeguarded land for residential development.

- Without the wider development, this site has no reasonable prospect of delivering a school of any size as the access could not be readily delivered to meet the needs of school traffic from within the Stevenage administrative area.
- Should development in this area be progressed, there is the opportunity to deliver a secondary school to meet the needs of the complete Stevenage West development (Stevenage and North Herts sections).
- NH4 offers a reasonably central location within the wider development area, such that it would be readily accessible.
- Given potential noise issues associated with proximity to the A1(M) and the location of the area of archaeological significance, the location of

the playing fields is best placed towards the eastern boundary and a build zone towards the west, offering access from the southern boundary. This would result in a reduction in travel distance if the school would benefit the existing population of Stevenage, along with the wider development.

- The site is being promoted as part of the emerging Stevenage and North Hertfordshire Local Plans, it can therefore be assumed to be available.
- The southern section of the site located within the Stevenage administrative boundary is proposed as a site allocation within the emerging Stevenage Local Plan.

3.24 The part of the wider site located within the Stevenage administrative boundary, is now proposed as a housing site allocation within the emerging Stevenage Local Plan. To the north of the Stevenage administrative boundary, in this area, additional land has been promoted through the emerging North Herts Local Plan. At this time North Herts District Council are not proposing to allocate this land, as they consider it to be undeliverable within the plan period, but do propose to include it within the emerging plan as safeguarded land.

3.25 The proposed Stevenage Local Plan policy in respect of this site requires that any proposal demonstrates that development can be expanded beyond the Borough boundary in the future and into North Herts.

3.26 Whilst it would not be considered sustainable at this time to incorporate an 8FE school to the west of the A1(M), should the wider development come forward (both Stevenage and North Herts sections), NH4 offers a realistic and sustainable option for school provision in this area.

3.27 The Site Proforma and associated plans can be found at Appendix 12.

## **4.0 SHORT LIST SITES – COMPARISON ASSESSMENT**

### **EDUCATIONAL NEED**

- 4.1 As part of the wider assessment of educational need within and adjacent to Stevenage, Hertfordshire County Council have assessed existing schools within the School Planning Area to ascertain existing capacity and growth potential, whilst also identifying redundant school sites that could be regenerated to provide for further capacity within the urban area.
- 4.2 This assessment has resulted in clarification being achieved that demonstrates that existing school capacity and planned school expansion will ensure that the needs of the existing community are met.
- 4.3 Having regard to the proposed future growth adjacent to the Stevenage administrative boundary, a need for a further 8-9FE secondary school has been identified.
- 4.4 The spread of existing secondary schools within Stevenage is reflective of the neighbourhoods within the original New Town and the creation of a new 5FE secondary school in the eastern part of the town (Barnwell East) will facilitate growth resulting from both existing and proposed development, within the central, eastern and southern parts of the town.
- 4.5 However, in recent years the largest area of growth both within the Stevenage administrative boundary and adjacent to it are to the north, within the St Nicholas and Great Ashby neighbourhoods, with over 9FE of children living in this area north of Martin's Way (Plan of area can be found at Appendix 1). There are currently no secondary schools located in this area, with the nearest school being Nobel School. The catchment area for the Nobel School currently contains circa 15FE of reception aged children. Nobel School has a current capacity of 8FE, with no scope for any further expansion.

- 4.6 It is evident that even without further growth in the northern part of the town, Nobel School will be oversubscribed in the future, as current reception aged children reach secondary age. The immediate growth potential to the north of the town, both within and adjacent to the administrative boundary will place a further 6FE pressure on this capacity.
- 4.7 Balancing the concentration of existing secondary school place demand within the St Nicholas/Great Ashby area, the proposed significant growth to the north and the lack of any secondary provision within this immediate locality, it is considered that the provision of a new 8FE secondary school in this northern part of the town would provide for the most appropriate pattern of secondary provision to meet existing and proposed local demand.

#### **SITE COMPARISON**

- 4.8 When considering the ability to deliver a new site, it is always sequentially more preferable to deliver a site that is within the urban area and where possible, offers the most sustainable solution to development.
- 4.9 In addition to the below assessment, a comparative summary of the identified highways matters is provided at Appendix 13.

#### **Site A: Stevenage Rugby Club and Land to the North**

- 4.10 In this instance, only one short listed site was located within the urban area. Site A is both within the urban area and can be classed as previously developed land due to its existing buildings and uses. The site further benefits from being coupled with the agricultural land to the north, thus enabling both the school and playing fields to be accommodated on one site within the urban area, which is rare.
- 4.11 That said, the rugby club and other alternative leisure uses currently in occupation and active on the site will result in substantial difficulties when trying to deliver a school in this location.

- 4.12 The loss of existing playing fields will result in a 'holding' objection from Sport England, unless the existing provision can be accommodated on the site alongside the school, or alternative provision is made to ensure the ongoing provision of rugby pitches elsewhere.
- 4.13 The extent of use of the existing rugby club facilities, if accommodated alongside a school, would render the playing pitches out of action for use by the school during most of August – May, during weekends and many evenings, due to club training and home games.
- 4.14 It is highly likely therefore that the rugby club and a secondary school would not be suitable bedfellows and as such an alternative site would need to be proposed for the rugby club to mitigate against the loss of the club site to a secondary school. Both sites would need to come forward in tandem.
- 4.15 If matters pertaining to the rugby club use could be mitigated against, the site could reasonably accommodate a school on the southern part of the site, with the playing fields extending to the north onto the existing agricultural land. Access could be obtained via existing access points, but would need to mitigate any impact on the traffic flows on North Road. The adjacent highway network is heavily trafficked and as such it is not considered that an 8FE secondary school could be accommodated without detrimentally affecting the free flow of the highway.
- 4.16 In respect of meeting the identified educational need, whilst located within the northern part of the town, the site is not readily accessible from the Great Ashby/St Nicholas area, with no surfaced footpaths from east to west and therefore access would be predominantly by car via either the more rural roads (Rectory Lane/Weston Road) or via the A602/A1072, neither route is direct. There are no direct bus routes, a change would be required in the town centre to move between the area of identified need and this site.

4.17 On the basis of ease of delivery alongside, access issues and meeting the identified need, Site A scores as follows:

Planning Constraints	Access Issues	Ability to accommodate an 8FE school and playing fields	Proximity to Need/ Accessibility

1	Highly Constrained
2	Constrained
3	Least Constrained

EH1 - Land to the east of Gresley Way and south of Stevenage Road

4.18 This site is located on the edge of the settlement to the east of Stevenage, it has been identified within the emerging East Hertfordshire District Plan as a potential housing site allocation. The site is currently located within the Green Belt.

4.19 The site is largely hidden from Gresley Way by a well-established tree belt which would need to be partially removed to deliver a suitable access into the site for either a school or a future residential development.

4.20 The site does in part undulate, but does contain some plateaus such that, whilst some levelling would be required, it would be possible to accommodate a school and associated playing fields.

4.21 There is an underpass located adjacent to the south western corner of the site, providing access between the site and Chells Park. Chells Park and its associated pavilion could provide for a suitable park and stride location to meet the needs of the school. Accordingly, the siting of a school in the

southern part of the overall site would be most preferable, with the playing fields extending to the rear and north of the built form.

4.22 Traffic on Gresley Way is sufficiently low that an access could be delivered in this location without hindering traffic flows. There is also a bus route passing the site that could facilitate sustainable movements for both students and staff.

4.23 In terms of meeting the identified educational need, the site is located to the east of Stevenage and is accessible via a good road network to the Great Ashby/St Nicholas area, but is more akin to the identified area of need to be met by the proposed Barnwell East school. As such the use of this site as a further secondary school would result in an overlap of catchment areas with children from the northern part of the town continuing to lack local access to a secondary school.

4.24 On the basis of ease of delivery alongside, access issues and meeting the identified need, Site EH1 scores as follows:

Planning Constraints	Access Issues	Ability to accommodate an 8FE school and playing fields	Proximity to Need/ Accessibility

1	Highly Constrained
2	Constrained
3	Least Constrained

NH3 - Land east of Stevenage Road, Knebworth

- 4.25 The site is located on the northern edge of Knebworth towards the Roebuck area of Stevenage. It is located within the Green Belt.
- 4.26 The site is an open field with views across it and limited vegetation hindering the vista. The site is intersected by an electricity pylon and associated cabling that runs from the north west corner to the south east corner of the site.
- 4.27 The site is reasonably flat such that development could occur at any point across the site, however, given the Green Belt location, it is most preferable to site the built form adjacent to the existing built form of Knebworth, which would also benefit being the widest area of the site adjacent to the road not hindered by the electricity cables. This siting would enable the playing fields to extend to the north of the site, thus retaining the open form of the Green Belt and the separation between Knebworth and Stevenage.
- 4.28 Access is best located from the B197 and could be accommodated at any point along this boundary. The adjacent road network requires some capacity assessment to ensure an 8FE school could be accommodated. There are bus links from Stevenage, however, the pedestrian linkages will require some upgrading to facilitate pedestrian movements. Park and Stride could be provided at the Tesco's or Toby Carvery to the north, subject to agreement and capacity.
- 4.29 In terms of meeting the identified educational need, Knebworth is located at the furthest point away from Great Ashby/St Nicholas within the identified search area, such that a school in this location is highly unlikely to be accessible to the area of demand and would not therefore meet that identified need.



4.30 On the basis of ease of delivery alongside, access issues and meeting the identified need, Site NH3 scores as follows:

Planning Constraints	Access Issues	Ability to accommodate an 8FE school and playing fields	Proximity to Need/ Accessibility

1	Highly Constrained
2	Constrained
3	Least Constrained

NH6 - Land north of Great Ashby, adjacent Merrick Close

4.31 The site is located to the north of Stevenage adjacent to Great Ashby, it has been identified within the emerging North Hertfordshire Local Plan as a potential housing site allocation. The site is located within the Green Belt.

4.32 The site is largely hidden from views from the residential area to the south, it is currently accessed via a rural road to the north and the adjacent Tilekiln Farm.

4.33 Access could not be facilitated via Back Lane to the north, as it would not be of a suitable width to accommodate the traffic generation of an 8FE school, whilst also significantly extending the travel distance from the residential area to the school.

4.34 It is therefore recommended that consideration be given to the formation of an access from the south of the site, from Mendip Way across the existing open space area and into the site. This would require the removal of some trees on the site boundary.

- 4.35 Access to the south would facilitate development in the southern part of the site, as close to the existing residential development as possible. The remainder of the playing fields can then extend to the north. This results in a minimum impact on the wider Green Belt and countryside, whilst facilitating accessibility to the south.
- 4.36 The site benefits from good pedestrian and cycle connectivity from the adjacent residential area and there is a reasonable bus service locally to benefit sustainable means of travel to the site.
- 4.37 Development of the site is likely to require some footpath diversions.
- 4.38 Given that planning permission was granted in 2010 for the development of a secondary school at this site, it is considered that there is a reasonable prospect of that being obtained again.
- 4.39 Having regard to the identified educational need, the site is located directly adjacent to the Great Ashby neighbourhood and as such would be well placed to meet the identified need, whilst not exacerbating travel distances.
- 4.40 On the basis of ease of delivery alongside, access issues and meeting the identified need, Site NH6 scores as follows:

Planning Constraints	Access Issues	Ability to accommodate an 8FE school and playing fields	Proximity to Need/ Accessibility

1	Highly Constrained
2	Constrained
3	Least Constrained

NH7 - Land north of Great Ashby, adjacent Brooches Wood

- 4.41 The site is located to the northeast of Great Ashby, the northern part of the site has been identified within the emerging North Hertfordshire Local Plan as a potential housing site allocation. The site is located within the Green Belt.
- 4.42 The site is largely hidden from views from the residential area adjacent by Brooches Wood. Views are primarily from the single footpath traversing the site and adjacent agricultural fields. There is no direct access to the site from nearby roads.
- 4.43 Due to the restricted access to the site that is available at present, a new access arrangement would need to be created, it is recommended that consideration be given to the formation of an access to the south west of the site, from Mendip Way across the existing open space area and into the site. This would require the removal of trees on the site boundary.
- 4.44 Access in this location would be of a similar form and arrangement to that proposed for site NH6 and previously approved. It would offer good connectivity to the residential area of Great Ashby, which in turn benefits from pedestrian and cycle connectivity and a reasonable bus service to provide sustainable means of transport to the site.
- 4.45 The form of the site and the location of the proposed access dictates the potential site layout. The site is segregated by Nice Acre Spring, which results in two distinct parcels, with a connection corridor, accordingly, the northern parcel, adjacent to the access would be most preferable for the built form and the playing fields situated to the south. In terms of functionality, the segregation of the built form from the playing fields is not the most desirable layout for a proposed school site.
- 4.46 Development of the site is likely to require some footpath diversions.

4.47 Having regard to the identified educational need, the site is located directly adjacent to the Great Ashby neighbourhood and as such would be well placed to meet the identified need, whilst not exacerbating travel distances.

4.48 On the basis of ease of delivery alongside, access issues and meeting the identified need, Site NH7 scores as follows:

Planning Constraints	Access Issues	Ability to accommodate an 8FE school and playing fields	Proximity to Need/ Accessibility

1	Highly Constrained
2	Constrained
3	Least Constrained

S1 - Land south of Broadhall Way, Bragbury End.

4.49 The site is located at the southernmost part of Stevenage adjacent to the A602, the site has been identified within the emerging Stevenage Local Plan as a potential housing site allocation. The site is located within the Green Belt.

4.50 The site is visible from both the A602 and the adjacent railway line to the south, as the boundary treatment is not overly dense. Access to the site is currently via a field access point from the A602.

4.51 The access arrangements can only continue from the A602 which appears to have sufficient capacity to accommodate an 8FE school, but is likely to require highway improvements to ensure the continued free flow of this A road.

- 4.52 There is reasonable access to public transport, with an hourly service running past the site towards the town centre and good pedestrian and cycle links from the north.
- 4.53 Consideration could also be given to the use of the two public houses, located on either side of the site, for use as park and stride locations to serve the site.
- 4.54 Given the Green Belt nature of the site, it is most preferable to site the built form adjacent to the existing built form to the west of the site and allow the playing fields to extend to the east, thus retaining a green edge to the site.
- 4.55 Having regard to the identified educational need, the site is located at one of the furthest points away from Great Ashby/St Nicholas, such that it would not be well situated to meet the identified need.
- 4.56 On the basis of ease of delivery alongside, access issues and meeting the identified need, Site S1 scores as follows:

Planning Constraints	Access Issues	Ability to accommodate an 8FE school and playing fields	Proximity to Need/ Accessibility

1	Highly Constrained
2	Constrained
3	Least Constrained

S4 - Land east of North Road

- 4.57 The site is located to the north of Stevenage, opposite Site A and east of North Road, the site has been identified within the emerging Stevenage

Local Plan as a potential housing site allocation. The site is located within the Green Belt.

- 4.58 The site is visible from North Road and adjacent footpaths and abuts an existing residential estate. Access is currently available from the south west corner of the site.
- 4.59 Layout of the site would need to look to minimise the impact on the wider area, accordingly, the built form should look to be accommodated towards the south and western boundaries of the site, with playing fields extending to the north and east. Careful consideration would need to be given to the impact on the residential properties to the south.
- 4.60 Access arrangements could continue from North however consideration would need to be given to a right hand turn lane into the site, prevention of parking on adjacent roads and pedestrian crossing points. The adjacent highway network is heavily trafficked and as such it is not considered that an 8FE secondary school could be accommodated without detrimentally affecting the free flow of the highway.
- 4.61 In respect of meeting the identified educational need, whilst located within the northern part of the town, the site is not readily accessible from the Great Ashby/St Nicholas area, with no surfaced footpaths from east to west and therefore access would be predominantly by car via either the more rural roads (Rectory Lane/Weston Road) or via the A602/A1072, neither route is direct. Whilst the site is well served by bus routes, there are no direct bus routes, a change would be required in the town centre to move between the area of identified need and this site.
- 4.62 On the basis of ease of delivery alongside, access issues and meeting the identified need, Site S4 scores as follows:

Planning Constraints	Access Issues	Ability to accommodate an 8FE school and playing fields	Proximity to Need/ Accessibility

1	Highly Constrained
2	Constrained
3	Least Constrained

Conclusions

4.63 Having considered each of the sites in turn, having regard to the ability to deliver an 8FE school, planning constraints, highway matters and accessibility, along with the ability to meet the identified need educational need, the sites score as follows against each other:

	Planning Constraints	Access Issues	Ability to accommodate an 8FE school and playing fields	Proximity to Need/ Accessibility	Total
Site A	1	1	3	2	7
Site EH1	3	3	3	2	11
Site NH3	3	2	2	1	8
Site NH6	3	2	3	3	11
Site NH7	3	2	2	3	10
Site S1	3	2	3	1	9
Site S4	3	1	3	1	8

- 4.64 As can be seen from this comparison, sites EH1 and NH6 score most favourably, with NH7 following closely behind.
- 4.65 Both EH1 and NH6 have been identified in emerging Local/District Plans as potential sites for housing development, thus being released from the Green Belt. The principle of releasing the site from the Green Belt for a school development is not therefore considered to be problematic, as the impact of a school development is potentially less invasive than housing development.
- 4.66 When faced with two sites that fair equally in an assessment, consideration should revert to the purpose of the site search. In this instance, a site is sought to accommodate an 8FE secondary school to meet an identified need primarily associated with housing growth to the north of Stevenage. HCC have confirmed that the demonstrable educational need is within the Great Ashby/St Nicholas area and as such, a site that could sustainably meet this identified need is sequentially most preferable.
- 4.67 Having regard to this key principle, given the location of site NH6, over EH1, it is considered that site NH6 would most sustainably meet the identified need and as such would be the most sequentially preferable site to accommodate an 8FE secondary school.



## **5.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

- 5.1 In total 146 potential school sites were identified and assessed as part of this study. A number of the sites were rejected early on for various reasons, including inadequate size, and fundamental constraints and designations (such as land being liable to flooding, or existing school sites). The remaining sites were assessed according to a number of considerations including existing use, planning and environmental constraints and designations. A number of sites were rejected and others were taken forward for further consideration to identify those potential sites which had the greatest potential and were most suitable for accommodating a new 8FE secondary school.
- 5.2 This assessment resulted in a short list of 7 potential sites being identified which merited more detailed assessment, including a high level transport and access appraisal, to establish which site (or sites) might be the most appropriate to accommodate a new secondary school. Detailed assessments of the short listed sites, including plans and highways appraisals can be found at Appendix 5 – 11, with further discussion in section 4 above.
- 5.3 A comparison of sites was undertaken and resulted in two sites, NH6 and EH1 scoring most favourably, however, site NH6, due to its location, would be best placed to meet the identified educational need within the Great Ashby and St Nicholas area.
- 5.4 In order to deliver this site, it is considered that some further assessment would be required pertaining to access, considering adjacent road capacity/upgrades identified in the Transport Assessment and the potential need for parking restrictions, pedestrian access; a tree survey; and an ecology survey.

- 5.5 Regard will also need to be given to the need to potentially re-provide the Stevenage ransom strip around the periphery of the site.
- 5.6 However, planning permission has been previously granted for the use of this site as a secondary school and whilst time has lapsed, the planning issues remain the same and as such the site can be considered to be deliverable within the plan period.
- 5.7 As part of the site search consideration has also been given to the potential for a secondary school within the West of Stevenage urban expansion area. NH4 is considered to be a well sited location for a secondary school within this area, however, due to the location of the site on the west of the A1(M), connectivity to Stevenage is poor and will only be improved as part of the wider residential development. The site would not therefore be suitable to meet the current identified need, however, should the North Herts section of the urban expansion come forward, which is not proposed as part of the emerging Local Plan at present, it would be appropriate to consider the need to provide for secondary education in a central location of the overall site.
- 5.8 If the overall development area is to come forward, it is recommended that any allocation provides for suitable educational provision, of which site NH4 may be considered appropriate.

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