

Stevenage Borough Local Plan

# Public Examination

Matter 12 Statement

January 2017



## Stevenage Borough Local Plan 2011 – 2031 - Public Examination

### Statement by Stevenage Borough Council (SBC)

#### Matter 12 – The natural and historic environment

##### NB: SBC responses set out in blue font

#### **1. Has the Plan had regard to heritage assets, including the statutory test set out in S66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990?**

- 1.1 The SBLP seeks to provide an appropriate balance in accordance with sections 66 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 between making provision for new homes and jobs and preserving the natural and historic environment (Policy SP2). Where harm can be avoided it has been; where some harm would arise the Council is satisfied that the benefits of the proposed development convincingly outweigh the considerable importance and weight which must be accorded to the preservation of designated heritage assets. Specific policies within the Plan aim to have special regard for the preservation of listed buildings, features of special architectural or historical interest that the buildings possess and the setting of listed buildings (Policy SP13).
- 1.2 Heritage assets have been considered fully throughout the plan-making process. Objective 7 of the SBLP Sustainability Appraisal (SA) framework recognises the need to protect and/or enhance heritage assets as a key part of the SBLP ([LP3](#), p41). All options for development have been tested against this framework.
- 1.3 The SA concludes that our strategic policy relating to the historic environment, Policy SP13, impacts positively on environmental and social aspects in particular.

#### **2. Are the policies in accordance with the advice in the Framework in relation to historic environment?**

- 2.1. The Local Plan sets out a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of heritage assets.
- 2.2. The Plan recognises that historic assets are largely protected by national policies and guidance, but it does set out two specific local policies:
  - Policy NH09 designates 15 Areas of Archaeological Significance (as identified by Hertfordshire County Council) and requires these to be fully considered in advance of development being approved.
  - Policy NH10 seeks to ensure regard is given to the Conservation Area Management Plan SPDs (CH5 to CH11). These seek to ensure that development within, or affecting, the town's conservation

areas preserves or enhances the character and appearance of the area and aligns with the Council's aspirations for these conservation areas.

- 2.3 The SBLP allocates some sites within, or adjacent to, historic assets for development. Heritage Impact Assessments have been carried out for all of these sites, to determine whether the site allocation would be appropriate; HO1/12: Marymead neighbourhood centre ([CH1](#)), HO3: North of Stevenage ([CH2](#)), HO1/14: Shephall Centre and adj. amenity land ([CH3](#)) and TC1 to TC13: Town centre ([CH4](#)). The assessments follow best practice guidance from Historic England<sup>1</sup>.
- 2.4 As a result of the North Stevenage assessment, the allocation site area was reduced, to remove a land parcel the assessment concluded would have an unacceptable impact on heritage assets if developed ([CH2](#), p13).
- 2.5 No substantial harm will occur to any heritage asset as a result of the SBLP. Any loss or harm likely to occur to a heritage asset as a result of these site allocations has been comprehensively assessed and appropriately weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, in accordance with NPPF para 134, and is considered to be justified. Mitigation measures have been identified and incorporated into specific site considerations relating to individual sites (SBLP, Table 3, p107).
- 2.6 The assessments also recognise that some development within these areas, such as the regeneration of the town centre ([CH4](#), p10), can have a positive impact on heritage assets and should be promoted (in line with NPPF, para 138).

### ***3. Should the Areas of Archaeological significance in Policy NH9 include Norton Green?***

- 3.1. In designating Areas of Archaeological Significance, we have received professional advice and knowledge from HCC, who provide a specialist information and advice service on archaeology, historic buildings and historic landscapes.
- 3.2. The areas designated under Policy NH9 are taken directly from maps provided to us by HCC, produced using data held by the Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER), which provides a computerised record of Hertfordshire's historic environment.
- 3.3. There is no evidence to suggest an additional allocation to include Norton Green would be justified.

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<sup>1</sup> Historic England Advice Note. The Historic Environment and Site Allocations in Local Plans (Consultation Draft, June 2015); The Historic Environment in Local Plans. Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning 1 (Historic England, March 2015).

**4. There is a significant amount of local objection to the development of land referred to locally as 'Forster Country'. Has an assessment of the impact of development promoted through the Plan on the landscape character in this part of the Borough been considered? If so what were the findings?**

- 4.1. In terms of landscape, the Stevenage Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study ([E9](#)) was commissioned by Stevenage and North Hertfordshire, to help inform decisions about the future extent and directions of residential and employment growth around Stevenage. Although this study was completed a number of years ago (2006), the situation has not changed since this time, and the conclusions are still valid.
- 4.2. This study concludes that the North Stevenage site would have moderate sensitivity to residential development. It recommends that residential development could be accommodated without unacceptable adverse impact on the landscape.
- 4.3. Our reviews of the Green Belt: Part 1 ([GB3](#)), Part 2 ([GB2](#)) and the additional parcels addendum ([GB1](#)), also consider the landscape character of the parcels being assessed in terms of their fulfilment of Green Belt purposes. The Part 2 study concludes that the North Stevenage land parcels are well contained by strong boundaries, with opportunities to substantiate these through increased planting. It recommends that the land parcels could be released within the Local Plan period, and that the sites could accommodate development without significant erosion of Green Belt purposes in this location (Table ES1).

**5. Are the policies in the Plan relating to Green Infrastructure justified and effective?**

- 5.1. The Local Plan sets out a positive strategy for protecting and enhancing green infrastructure and the natural environment (Policy SP12).
- 5.2. The SBLP sets out a number of detailed policies to fulfil this objective:
  - Policy NH1 protects Principal Open Spaces across the town, including parks, amenity spaces and woodlands.
  - Policy NH2 identifies and protects local Wildlife Sites (as identified by the Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust (HMWT)).
  - Policies NH3 and NH4 designate a network of Green Corridors and Green Links.
  - Trees and woodlands are protected under Policy NH5.
  - Policy NH6 offers general protection for other unallocated open spaces.
  - Open space standards for new development are set out within Policy NH7.
  - The North Stevenage Country Park allocation (Policy NH8) seeks to protect this existing open space from future development.
- 5.3. The majority of these green infrastructure allocations are directly informed by the Open Space Strategy ([E6a](#) & [E6b](#)), which provides an up-to-date (2016) evidence base on open spaces and green infrastructure.

The designated Wildlife Sites are identified by the HMWT on an annual basis and were subject to a recent comprehensive review ([E7](#)).

- 5.4. In addition to this, the Stevenage Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study ([E9a,b&c](#)) was commissioned by Stevenage and North Hertfordshire, to help inform decisions about the future extent and directions of residential and employment growth around Stevenage. Although this study was completed a number of years ago (2006), the landscape situation has not changed since this time, and the conclusions are still valid.
- 5.5. In terms of liaison with the Hertfordshire Local Nature Partnership (LNP), a statement of accordance was submitted by SBC outlining how the SBLP addresses the LNP's guiding principles for planning for biodiversity and the natural environment in Hertfordshire ([E1](#)). The LNP response to this statement welcomed the approach taken and confirmed that the SBLP is in accordance with all six principles and provides a firm basis for delivery of biodiversity through the planning process ([SC1](#), p80). The LNP suggested minor changes to the statement itself, but no changes to the SBLP.
- 5.6. The Appropriate Assessment Screening Opinion ([E4](#)) did not identify the need for a more detailed assessment of the SBLP to be undertaken. Natural England have made no objection to this approach.