



1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Hearing Statement has been prepared by Vincent and Gorbing on behalf of Hertfordshire County Council (Hertfordshire Property) (HCC) owners of the land North East of Austen Way, St Albans. HCC also owns land at Beaumont School to the North West of this site.
- 1.2 This site was put forward as part of the withdrawn 2020-2036 Local Plan Publication Draft 2018, where it formed part of the East of St Albans Broad Location. It has continued to be identified within the Regulation 18 and Regulation 19 consultations of the current St Albans City and District Local Plan (DLP), but promoted as a separate medium sized site, which HCC support.
- 1.3 HCC has previously undertaken technical surveys and feasibility work to understand the site constraints, which has informed the draft layout that was shared as part of the Regulation 19 Representations (see Appendix 4 Representations Report) made on behalf of HCC Property. HCC Property previously sought pre-application advice from St Albans City and District Council (SADC) in 2021, with the two main issues raised being its Green Belt status and that it was part of a Broad Location. Both these points are overcome by the current draft allocation.
- 1.4 The remainder of this Statement addresses the specific questions raised by the Inspector (document SADC/ED84) in respect of Matter 7 Residential Site Allocations (Policy M18 Land North East of Austen Way Q1 – Q4).

2.0 RESPONSES TO INSPECTORS' QUESTIONS ARISING REGARDING POLICY M18

Inspectors Questions

- Q1. What is the justification for the proposed alteration to the Green Belt boundary? Is the proposed boundary alteration consistent with paragraph 148 e) and f) of the Framework, which state that Plans should be able to demonstrate that boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the Plan period, and, define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent?**
- 2.1 The wider justification for allocating land within the Green Belt, the exceptional circumstances for this, and the proposed alterations to the Green Belt boundary have been set out by SADC in their evidence including:
- Stage 2 Green Belt Report 2023 (**GB 02.02**)
 - the Green Belt and Exceptional Circumstances Paper (**GB 01.01**)
 - Local Plan Site Selection Proforma Sheet (**LPSS 02.06**) and
 - Composite List of Alterations to the Green Belt boundary (**SADC ED33** Initial Question 12 Final)
- 2.2 The Stage 2 Green Belt Review considered this site as part of the larger Strategic Sub Area (GB36 (SA-SS1), which was noted as being enclosed by residential development at East of St Albans. The wider parcel was considered to contribute significantly to purposes 3 and 5 of the Green Belt purposes, however, it was concluded that reducing the parcel would have a limited impact on its overall role.
- 2.3 In particular, considering the appropriateness of releasing this site from the Green Belt, it is relevant to note that the site immediately adjoins the settlement boundary to the south and adjoins built development to the south and west, with the land to the north and west also proposed to be removed from the Green Belt as part of BL4 within the DLP. The site is also in a sustainable location within close proximity to shops, community facilities (including the adjacent school) and public transport. Document **LPSS 02.06** provides distances from all local services.
- 2.4 In considering the proposed new Green Belt boundary at this location, and in particular considering the guidance set out at para.148 of the NPPF, the following can be said:
- e) demonstrate that the boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the plan period*
- 2.5 This question is partly for SADC to address to demonstrate that they have identified sufficient land within the locality to address housing need within this Local Plan and anticipate need beyond this. However considering the local context, the site is abutted on two sides by residential development and by playing fields to the north, which will continue to serve the school for as long as the scheme is in operation. The eastern boundary, which will remain the only boundary with the Green Belt forms the edge of a small but dense, woodland (partially Ancient Woodland), which would not be suitable for any other use requiring its removal from the Green Belt. The site was originally part of the BL4 allocation, which is still identified for release from the Green Belt. The boundaries of the site are therefore already identified as part of a larger release, or form land which has no alternative use that would require its release.

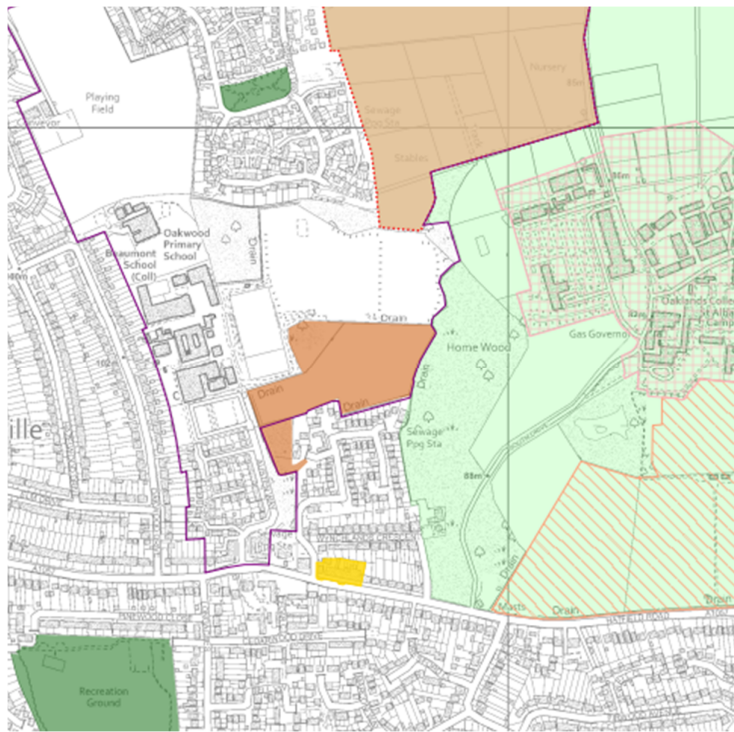


Figure 1: Draft Local Plan Proposals Map Extract showing Site M18

f) define boundaries clearly using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent

- 2.6 The southern and western boundaries of the site are currently adjoining built development. Land to the south is within the settlement boundary, and to the west and north is identified to be removed from the Green Belt. The eastern boundary will be the only remaining interface with the Green Belt, and this abuts woodland (partially Ancient) which is considered to comprise a physical, strong and defensible boundary that will endure beyond the end of the Local Plan period, thus meeting the requirements of para.148.

Q2 Do the exceptional circumstances exist to justify amending the Green Belt boundary in this location?

- 2.7 Answering this question refers back to the Council's position set out at document **GB 01.01**, which considers the exceptional circumstances that exist on a District wide level in allocating land within the Green Belt for the provision of housing. The Council has undertaken an extensive and rigorous search for Previously Developed Land within existing built up areas and beyond. The tightly drawn Green Belt boundaries that form the settlement edge to all the urban areas within this District means that it is not possible for the Council to meet its housing need without the allocation of land within the Green Belt. Presently, SADC has a very poor rate of housing land supply and delivery, partly due to the constraints of the Green Belt.
- 2.8 In considering exceptional circumstances, the acute need for housing alone is sufficient to demonstrate exceptional circumstances, and this reason is appropriate to apply in the allocation of this site. In addition, it is also considered that the release of this small site, which is already abutting the settlement boundary and built development on two sides, makes a relatively small contribution to achieving the Green Belt purposes, and will conversely have small negative impact on achieving the Green Belt purposes if released.

- 2.9 For these reasons it is considered that exceptional circumstances exist as part of the wider growth strategy proposed as part of this DLP to justify amending the Green Belt boundary at this location.

Q3 How has the effect of development on the setting of the designated heritage assets been considered, having particular regard to the Grade II listed buildings in Kay Walk?

- 2.10 There are two listed buildings to the south of the site allocation at No.5 Kay Walk and The Lodge set within the curtilage of No.5. Their setting historically comprised the surrounding land that formed the estate associated with Oaklands to the east. The listed buildings are now sited on the edge of a 1990s housing estate, which has significantly compromised their setting.
- 2.11 Whilst the Site would have originally formed part of the setting of the heritage assets, they are now physically and visually separated by the intervening woodland. However, this woodland continues to form part of their remaining setting and SADC previously advised (as part of the pre-application engagement) that any proposals should look to minimise the impact on this woodland.
- 2.12 The illustrative housing layout that was submitted to SADC as part of the pre-application engagement and included in the Regulation 19 Representations Report Appendix 4 (extract below) has been developed with the setting of these heritage assets in mind. The layout seeks to maintain the existing woodland along the southern boundary, thus retaining the visual and physical separation. The proposals also intend to maintain the full extent of the small wooded areas to the west and north of the listed assets. Whilst the open space will be lost to development, there is no intervisibility between this and the heritage assets, therefore its loss to the setting and significance of the heritage assets is considered to have a neutral impact.
- 2.13 Whilst no fixed layout has been developed and approved, the maintenance of the woodland and the requirement to ensure appropriate setbacks of development, which form part of the allocation criteria, will ensure the setting and significance of the listed assets is protected.



Figure 2:
Illustrative
Layout
previously
submitted as
part of the
Regulation 19
Representations
Report

Q4 Is Policy M18 justified, effective and consistent with the national planning policy? If not, what modifications are required to make the Plan sound?

- 2.14 It is considered that Policy M18 is justified, effective and consistent with national planning policy. No modifications are required to make this policy, and the DLP sound.

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