

2TH JUNE 2025

Inspectors Matthew Birkinshaw BA(Hons) MSc MRTPI
and Thomas Bristow BA MSc MRTPI

Our reference: CORR/4

VIA EMAIL TO PROGRAMME OFFICER

Dear Sirs

Re: St Albans Local Plan Review

Thank you for inviting us to comment on the additional documentation in Documents SADC/ED74 through to SADC/ED74E. We set out our comments on what they cover and, more importantly, what they do not cover and should have covered.

Documents ED74A to ED74E provide records of meetings between council officers and officials from bodies operating in the Hertfordshire area (and Central Bedfordshire) to review and discuss matters of strategic importance while the draft Local Plan was being prepared. It is a deficiency in the council's approach that such discussions did not extend to the fringe north London boroughs (Barnet, Enfield) at least on matters such as housing need given the unique fast rail and strong commuting links between Harpenden, St Albans City and central London. The council is invited to clarify to you why it did not engage with these boroughs.

Notwithstanding this deficit in the council's approach, the various meetings still do not resolve two critical issues that we have made before.

Hemel Garden Communities

On the Hemel Garden Communities project, the meetings recorded in Documents ED74A to ED74E show that there is - and remains - no commitment for one body to underwrite the uncosted upgrades to the M1. Thus, it remains unclear if this project can be delivered or not. You may be aware that the Tandridge draft Local Plan was

found unsound on this point (as well as other matters)¹¹. In times of continued financial austerity in the public sector, the inspectors are invited to ask the council how this serious funding matter will be resolved.

Gypsy and traveller accommodation

On the matter of gypsy and travellers accommodation, the council is deliberately not planning to meet the requirements of its own GTAA² through the plan-making system. The GTAA directs it to plan for 80 households who meet the "planning definition" of gypsy or traveller, a further 19 pitches for undetermined households and seven plots for travelling showpeople. Its only provision is for between 30 and 40 gypsy and traveller pitches that will not be delivered until well into the 2030s. It has a very poor record of delivering windfall sites given. Moreover, as much of the district is in the Green Belt with some of the highest land values in the south east. Given the council's Public Sector Equality Duty and the well-recorded socio-economic conditions of this group and well publicised difficulties in finding sites to meet their unique needs, a Local Plan that does not positively plan for this group adequately represents a serious breach in the council's duty.

Turning to Documents ED74A to ED74E, Dacorum are recorded as raising concern at SADC's approach of providing such a large number of pitches on the HGC site as this represents an overconcentration in one area. More importantly, no other DtC body is recorded in Documents ED74A to ED74E as offering to take up the council's shortfall in gypsy and traveller pitches or travelling showperson plots.

You will draw your own conclusions as to whether this significant shortfall in provision that has not been addressed through negotiation with other DtC authorities recorded in Documents ED74A to ED74E is consistent with the council's Public Sector Equality Duty.

We raise a broader concern with the council's approach to DtC. While you have asked us to look at Documents ED74A to ED74E which relate to activity up until the

¹¹ Refer Inspector's report in particular, paragraphs 30 to 36 and Annex 1 which confirm the lack of funding and support from the DfT for the upgrade to junction 6 to the M25 and the A22/A264 Felbridge junction [swgb.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/tandridge-lp-inspectors-report.pdf](https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/Planning%20Policy/R19/GTAA%20Report.pdf)

² <https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/Planning%20Policy/R19/GTAA%20Report.pdf>

draft Local Plan was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for examination, the council was still conducting DtC activity up until February 2025.

You raised concerns about this in your list of questions to the council for the Stage 1 hearings. You will come to your own view on the legality of the council's approach to DtC but we suggest that the whole of the Local Plan may be defective if you come to the view that the council was trying to remedy errors/ shortcomings in its approach to DtC. The Court of Appeal judgment on this matter is clear - refer *Samuel Smith Old Brewery (Tadcaster) v Selby District Council (CA) (2016) PTSR*. Put simply, DtC activity must take place and be concluded during Local Plan preparation and not during the Examination-in-Public.

Yours faithfully



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For and on behalf of Studio LK Ltd.