

St Albans Local Plan Examination in Public

Stage 2 Hearing Sessions

Matters 1 to 5

Statement on behalf of The Crown Estate

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

- i. Hearing Statements are submitted by David Lock Associates Ltd on behalf of The Crown Estate (hereinafter referred to as TCE), promoter of land at **East Hemel Hempstead (EHH)**.
- ii. Whilst The Crown Estate's history dates to 1760, its present-day business was established through an Act of Parliament, the Crown Estate Act 1961, to operate as an independent and commercial business. TCE is a significant national landowner with a diverse portfolio that includes urban centres and development opportunities, one of the largest rural landholdings in the country (including land within and surrounding HGC), substantial areas of London's West End and Windsor Great Park. TCE also manages the seabed and much of the coastline around England, Wales and Northern Ireland, playing a major role in the UK's world-leading offshore wind sector.
- iii. TCE pursues three strategic objectives:
 - it is a leader in supporting the UK towards a net zero carbon and energy secure future;
 - it helps to create thriving, mixed tenure communities across the UK, aimed at meeting generational needs; and
 - it takes a leading role in stewarding the UK's natural environment and biodiversity.
- iv. TCE is the owner and promoter of EHH(North), EHH (Central) and EHH (South), which are draft allocations ('Broad Locations') for mixed use development under Site Policies H2, H3 and H4 of the *St Albans Local Plan Regulation 19 Version September 2024*¹.
- v. The sites at EHH form part of the wider Hemel Garden Communities (HGC) programme area, awarded Garden Town Status by the government in 2019 and straddling the St Albans City and District Council (SADC) and Dacorum Borough Council (DBC) administrative areas (see **HGC01.01** evidence paper for details). HGC is allocated with and referenced throughout the draft local plans for each Council's administrative area.
- vi. TCE have signed a Statement of Common Ground with SADC [**SADC/ED12** dated November 2024] in respect of EHH and this remains an accurate reflection of the current position between the parties.

¹ For reference, TCE is also the owner and promoter of land at North West Hemel, subject to a draft allocation for development made under *Site Policy Hm01 (North Hemel Hempstead Growth Area)* within the *Dacorum Local Plan to 2041 Pre-Submission Version September 2024*.

TCE DELIVERY STATEMENT**Outline Planning Application for EHH**

- vii. TCE is at a very advanced stage of preparing an Outline Planning Application for its land at EHH (the planning application site boundary includes SADC site allocations H2, H3 and H4 within a single Outline Application).
- viii. Since November 2024 TCE has continued to engage positively with Officers on policy matters pertaining to the draft allocations to ensure that the emerging proposals for EHH can meet policy requirements as part of pre-application activity.
- ix. A PPA between TCE and SADC, DBC and HCC was signed in August 2024 in order to secure officer resource and agree a programme of pre-application engagement and inputs. Subsequent PPAs for stages of pre-application activity were signed in Aug 2024, Oct 2024, March 2025 and July 2025, the latest covering the current period up to submission of the Outline Application.
- x. Since August 2024, PPA workshops involving the Core Officer Teams from both Councils, the County Council and HGC have been held on the following topics:
 - EIA Scoping
 - Vision and Masterplanning
 - Green and Blue Infrastructure
 - Structure of the Application
 - Movement and Transport
 - Masterplan Development and Employment Area
 - Character, Housing and Density
 - Local Centres
 - Nickey Line
 - Parameter Plans and Development Specification
 - A Guide to the Application
- xi. In addition, numerous technical meetings with statutory consultees and specialist Council officers have been held. In addition to agreement on the scope of assessment for EIA/Transport Assessment purposes, a summary commentary of matters progressed and agreed is provided below:
 - *Transport*: Meetings held with both HCC and National Highways. Matters at or close to agreement include: trip generation and distribution; modelling approach; on-site layout of transport infrastructure; key off-site sustainable transport interventions; key areas where traffic capacity enhancements are required; principles of the bus strategy; principles of Monitor and Manage Strategy;
 - *Landscape GI and Ecology*: meetings held with officers at both LPAs and Natural England. In principle agreements include: LVIA methodology, landscape approach and principles, drainage strategy principles, location of SANG; site wide approach to delivery of public open space delivery, allotment strategy and distribution, use of District Level Licensing for ecology mitigation; approach to BNG;
 - *Water Resources, Flood Risk and Drainage*: meetings held with both LPAs, LLFA, EA. In principle agreements include: approach to infiltration and overland flow routes,

design of attenuation ponds in valleys, catchment characteristics, principles of SuDs on plot and along street corridors,

- *Education, Health and Service Provision*: meetings held with both LPAs, HCC, Integrated Care Board and NHS. In principle agreements include: overall quantum and location of primary and secondary school site requirements; approach to on-site health facilities and specification for medical centre; provision of elderly/extra care; overall scale and mix of uses within local centres;
 - *Heritage and Archaeology*: meetings held with both LPAs, LLFA, EA. Programme of trial trenching agreed and currently underway.
- xii. Other technical meetings including matters relating to noise, air quality, utilities, sustainability and energy, Public Rights of Way have also been undertaken. Outputs from these meetings have fed into the Outline Application material and cost plans.

Independent Design Review

- xiii. Two Design Reviews have taken place for East Hemel, undertaken by the Design South East Quality Review Panel and involving Officers from both Councils, the County Council and HGC. The emerging proposals were positively received by the Panel on both occasions:
- the first (Dec 2024) considered the vision and key principles governing design, and the Panel concluded that:
"It is encouraging to see the amount of work that has been done at this early stage in the design process. We commend the vision for the site, which sets out guiding principles and puts innovation and future thinking at the forefront of the design. This project is an opportunity to serve as an exemplary project for high-quality, sustainable development on a large scale, and we are encouraged to see such bold aspirations coming forward", and
 - the second (March 2025) concluded that:
"The response to the recommendations in the previous report is well structured, and strong efforts have been made to justify design decisions and strengthen the core design principles, which has enabled the panel to be confident with the direction of travel of the masterplan".
- xiv. The DRPs confirmed the Panel were *"comfortable with the key moves across the masterplan"* and agreed that three key structuring themes identified - *movement framework, local centres and topography* – should shape *"more detailed design stages of the masterplan to ensure alignment with the wider HGC vision"*.
- xv. The detailed recommendations of the DRP informed further masterplanning work during 2025 which is now reflected in the Parameter Plans, Illustrative Masterplan and Design and Access Statement in the final stages of preparation for submission in support of the Outline Application.

Proposed Commercial Development

- xvi. TCE has been working with Herts IQ since 2024 to ensure that they are supportive of the emerging proposals for East Hemel Central (H3) and to ensure that the range of jobs to be provided across the employment area aligns with wider Herts IQ objectives.

Public Engagement

- xvii. Extensive public and local stakeholder engagement has taken place for East Hemel, including design workshops, study tours, drop-in public exhibitions, and Member Briefings for Councillors at both authorities.
- xviii. Three of the four stages of TCE’s Engagement Programme set out below have been completed (the fourth stage to take place just prior to the submission of the Outline Application), with a total of c.1,400 participants and c.260 formal feedback responses.

Oct - Dec '24	Dec - Mar '25	Apr - Jul '25	Aug - Oct '25
Stage 1 Scoping Issues & Opportunities Stakeholder Workshop Community Drop-ins	Stage 2 Emerging Masterplan Cambridge Study Tour Site Visit Community Design Workshop Community Drop-ins	Stage 3 Detailed Masterplan Review Briefing Workshops Community Drop-ins	Stage 4 Pre-Submission Preview Community Drop-in

- xix. This feedback has provided valuable local knowledge and insight which has shaped the emerging proposals and enabled in-depth engagement and enabled constructive dialogue with key local groups and individuals likely to be involved over the life of the development.
- xx. The outline application material for East Hemel is currently being finalised for submission in Q4 2025.

Proposed Development at NWH

- xxi. A Vision document for NWH has been prepared by TCE for land in its ownership within Policy Hm01 as part of TCE’s Reg 19 Representation to DBC. This sets out a broad level spatial and land use framework for the site, informed by preliminary landscape, highway and ecology discussions and informed by the HGC Framework Plan and evidence studies prepared by HGC.

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- xxii. TCE intends to commence the preparation of an Outline Planning Application for this land following the adoption of the Dacorum Local Plan (assumed by the Council to be early 2026), supported through a Planning Performance Agreement with the Council and with Hertfordshire County Council.
- xxiii. TCE anticipates the submission of an Outline Planning Application for NWH in mid-2027.

Cherry Tree Lane Community Garden and Westwick Row

- xxiv. TCE is already demonstrating its commitment to support for the wider HGC Programme through progressing two early demonstration projects:
- Planning consent was granted in November 2024 for Cherry Tree Lane Community Garden; the creation of a publicly-accessible garden on TCE land immediately to the west of site H2, designed and run by a local Charitable Trust (the Sunnyside Trust) one of the potential stewardship bodies for TCE's land at HGC;
 - As part of TCE's commitment to introducing innovative models of housing design and delivery, TCE has partnered with TOWN to prepare a full planning permission for residential development of a new participative community of c 75 homes on land at Westwick Row. The scheme will deliver different tenures; is shaped by its future residents and local people through meaningful processes of engagement, coproduction; and is underpinned by a community-led stewardship model. This will be a demonstrator project for development at EHH in its delivery of best practice, operational and embodied carbon targets. The project also represents an important opportunity to test innovative new models of housing, sustainability and delivery that can influence the wider TCE offer at HGC.

MATTER 1 – LEGAL COMPLIANCE

Issue 1 – Sustainability Appraisal

Issue 2 – Strategic Flood Risk Assessment

Issue 3 – Public Sector Equality Duty

- 1.1 It is anticipated that questions relating to these issues will be addressed by the Planning Authority.

MATTER 2 – HOUSING GROWTH AND THE SPATIAL STRATEGY**Issue 1– Housing Requirement**

Following discussions at the Stage 1 hearing sessions, the Council accepted that the annual housing requirement should be applied across the full plan period from April 2024 to March 2041. It was also accepted that a recalibration of the stepped housing requirement was needed to reflect the most up-to-date position on predicted housing delivery and the forward trajectory.

Q1 How should the minimum housing requirement be reflected in the Plan to address these soundness matters? Is there a need for the housing requirement to feature in Policies SP1 and SP3?

To assist with the examination hearing sessions, it would be useful for the Council to produce a new housing requirement figure and trajectory to replace Table 3.2.

- 2.1 We have no specific comments to make on SADC's 's approach to the minimum housing requirement.
- 2.2 In relation to the housing trajectory assumptions for the HGC Broad Locations H2 and H4, TCE can confirm that the position as set out in HOU 01.01 SADC Housing Land Supply Paper – Housing Trajectory Addendum (November 2024) which assumes delivery of a minimum of 3,175 dwellings from H2 and H4 within the plan period to 2041 remains achievable, and aligns with the anticipated start dates and delivery trajectory assumed in the draft outline planning application material, accompanying technical assessments and EIA currently being finalised for EHH .

Issue 2– Site Selection Methodology

- 2.3 It is anticipated that questions relating to this issue will be addressed by SADC.

MATTER 3 – THE GREEN BELT

Issue 1 – Green Belt Review

- 3.1 It is anticipated that questions relating to this issue will be addressed by SADC.
- 3.2 TCE provided responses on SADC's approach to the proposed changes to Green Belt boundaries in respect of the HGC site allocations within the SA Local Plan through the Reg 18 and Reg 19 stages of the Plan.
- 3.3 We understand this matter is to be addressed in the Joint Hearing Session addressing strategic policy matters relating to the HGC allocations. As such our position has been provided separately in our Hearing Statement for Matter 6 Issue 2.

MATTER 4 – TYPE AND MIX OF HOUSING**Issue 1 – Housing Mix and Density**

Q1 *Is Policy HOU1 justified by appropriate, available evidence?*

Q2 *Is the Plan sufficiently flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances and needs over the plan period?*

Q3 *How is it intended that Policy HOU1 interacts with criterion b) of Policy HOU2 in terms of dwelling size?*

Q4 *Is Policy DES3 consistent with paragraphs 128 and 146 of the Framework insofar as making an efficient use of land is concerned?*

4.1 It is anticipated that questions relating to this issue will be primarily addressed by SADC. However, we offer the following commentary for clarity.

4.2 In relation to Question 4, we note that DES3 (Efficient use of land) requires "*achieving at least the density of the existing site context or 40 net dwellings per ha, whichever is higher*".

4.3 We also note that criterion (j) of Policy LG1, criterion Pillar 2 (f) of Policy LG3 and criterion (h) of Policy LG4 all set out a similar policy requirement, albeit this references "*a minimum overall net density of 40 dwellings per hectare*" (our emphasis)

4.4 We support the principle of seeking to make efficient use of land through achieving appropriate densities relative to the site's context. However, given the variety of urban form, character and setting for proposed development sites within the local plan area, we question whether fixing a single minimum density across the district is appropriate.

4.5 Whilst emerging proposals for sites H2 and H4 (EHH) will result in overall net residential densities exceeding 40 dph, this is within the specific context and design drivers for HGC which include seeking ambitious mode share targets and a significant level of elderly and extra care housing provision. Further, the scale of development is such that through effective masterplanning, it has been possible to achieve an overall net density of 40 dwellings within the site whilst still creating a variety of built form which responds appropriately to its semi-rural edges, existing properties and heritage assets.

4.6 DES3 effectively requires a minimum density of 40 new dph for all new development sites within the district. This may present a challenge for policy compliance for some sites, particularly those with sensitive heritage or landscape settings, and may result in development forms which are considered inappropriate in terms of their design response.

Issue 2– Affordable and Specialist Housing**Issue 3– Accessible and Adaptable Housing**

- 4.7 It is anticipated that questions relating to these issues will be addressed by SADC.

Issue 4– Self Build and Custom Housebuilding

Q1 *What is the anticipated need for Self and Custom Build over the Plan period? Does Policy HOU5 provide an appropriate basis for meeting that need?*

Q2 *Are the requirements of Policy HOU5 justified, and will they be effective?*

- 4.8 It is anticipated that questions relating to these issues will be primarily addressed by SADC.
- 4.9 However, TCE wishes to question an element of the specific policy provisions within Policy HOU5.
- 4.10 At 3% of 4,000 units, the quantum of Self and Custom Build (SCB) Homes across the site allocations at EHH equates to 120 plots; a not insubstantial number.
- 4.11 We do not object to the requirement to provide for self and custom build housing as part of strategic sites, provided that the level of provision reflects that evidenced through the Register and that should this change through the plan period, a flexible approach to securing levels of provision through the delivery period would be sought.
- 4.12 However, we query the soundness of the wording of criterion 3 of HOU5 as currently drafted. As set out in para 4.19 of the Plan, Self and Custom Build (SCB) homes "*help to diversify the housing market and increase consumer choice*". Whilst this provision forms part of the specialist housing offer sought in policy - and as such has to be evidenced against local needs - it does not form part of the affordable housing requirements set out in policy.
- 4.13 We therefore suggest that it is neither justified or appropriate for Policy HOU5 criterion (d) to require that after the 12 month period of being available and marketed, that SCB plots either remain on the open market for SCB indefinitely or are offered to SADC or to a Registered Provider (for an indefinite period and unconfirmed use), and only after this has happened can plots be returned to the developer for sale on the open market. As drafted this policy is not in line with best practice and does not offer a clear 'cascade' mechanism on which to base planning applications/s106 agreements.

4.14 We suggest the following amendment to criterion (d) of policy HOU5 would address this concern:

(d) *Expects that where a plot has been made available and marketed appropriately for at least 12 months but has not sold, the plot **will revert to** ~~must either remain on the open market for Self-build or Custom Housebuilding or be offered to the Council or a Registered Provider before being built out by the developer for market housing.~~*

4.15 If considered appropriate, an additional sentence could be added after 'at least 12 months' to include the ability to agree alternative timescales with the planning authority (useful for strategic and/or phased sites), to read:

(d) *Expects that where a plot has been made available and marketed appropriately for at least 12 months **(or an alternative timescale agreed with the Council subject to specific site delivery timescales)** but has not sold, the plot **will revert to** ~~must either remain on the open market for Self-build or Custom Housebuilding or be offered to the Council or a Registered Provider before being built out by the developer for market housing.~~*

4.16 Alternatively, and to aid consistency in respect of the co-ordinated delivery of HGC, the wording of criterion 3b of Policy H4 in the *Submission Version Dacorum Local Plan* could be adopted, which states that:

"Developers will be required to enter into a section 106 agreement covering:

- i. Timescales and phasing of serviced plots delivery;*
- ii. Appropriate marketing of these plots to self and custom builders; and*
- iii. Length of time after which unsold plots will be returned to the developer".*

Issue 5 – Accommodation for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople

Q1 Does the Plan adequately set out the accommodation requirements for gypsies, travellers and travelling showpeople over the plan period?

Q2 Will the accommodation requirements be met through the allocations and policies in the Plan? If so, how? Should sites identified by the Council as contributing towards identified needs be allocated in the Plan?

Q3 Will there be a 5-year supply of deliverable pitches against the requirement?

4.17 It is anticipated that questions relating to this issue will be addressed by SADC.

Q4 *What is the justification for the inclusion of pitches on sites at Hemel Garden Communities (South and Central)? When and how are these sites going to be delivered? Are they justified and effective?*

- 4.18 It is anticipated that these issues will be addressed primarily by SADC. However, we offer the following commentary for clarity.
- 4.19 TCE intends to meet policy requirements in terms of providing land as required within EHH Central (H3) and EHH South (H4) for G&T provision - each site to accommodate between 15-20 pitches.
- 4.20 The draft Outline Planning Application material seeks to provide for these requirements through:
- Within EHH (Central) – a zone identified within the planning application boundary and on the Land Use Parameter Plan located in the north of the commercial development area and accessible to local facilities and schools within the northern residential neighbourhood (EHH North);
 - Within EHH (South) – G&T provision to be made within the residential development area defined on the Land Use Parameter Plan. The precise location is not specified at OPA stage but is likely to be defined at Key Phase (post outline) taking into account stakeholder engagement, the layout of residential development and other land uses, and accessibility to supporting facilities such as schools.
- 4.21 The sequencing of development at EH is not proposed to be fixed at outline application stage but through a key phase approach to delivery. However, it is anticipated that G&T pitch provision at EHH Central (H3) would be able to come forward earlier in the plan period than G&T pitches at EHH South (H4), but that land to accommodate the full pitch requirement can be made available within the plan period.
- 4.22 We agree that it would be helpful to understand the LPA's preferred or anticipated delivery mechanisms, noting that:
- (i) the policy requires EHH *"to provide"* new sites at EH (HOU6 criterion d), but only requires SADC to *"consider proposals for new accommodation"* elsewhere; and
 - (ii) the process for the transfer of land, provision of built facilities and ongoing management of sites once established is not explicit in policy, and would benefit from some signposting (perhaps in supporting text) to clarify how provision is managed currently and anticipated to be secured for allocated sites.

Q5 *What is the justification for Policy HOU6(b) and (c) and are they sufficiently clear enough to be effective?*

Q6 *What effect will the provision of new pitches have on the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC from allocations in the Plan and how will any adverse impacts on the integrity of the site be avoided and/or mitigated?*

Q7 *How would decision-makers be expected to respond to windfall development proposals?*

4.23 It is anticipated that the above questions relating to this issue will be addressed by SADC.

MATTER 5 – ECONOMY AND EMPLOYMENT**Issue 1– Employment Land requirement and Allocated Employment Sites²**

- Q1** *Is the Plan’s economic strategy based on proportionate and up-to-date evidence?*
- Q2** *Noting the Council’s hearing statement for Matter 1, Issue 1, Question 5, should the Plan establish requirements for office, industrial and warehousing provision over the Plan period?*
- Q3** *Is the Plan positively prepared in respect of setting a strategy and identifying land to meet assessed employment needs?*
- Q4** *How did the Council identify land to allocate for employment uses? Was the site selection process robust, justified and proportionate?*
- Q5** *How will the allocated sites at East Hemel Hempstead (Central) and the Radlett Strategic Rail Freight Interchange assist Dacorum and potentially other South West Hertfordshire authorities in meeting some of their employment needs? Is the policy effective?*

- 5.1 It is anticipated that these questions will be addressed by the Planning Authority. However, we offer the following short commentary for clarity.
- 5.2 We note detailed matters relating to EHH Central are to be addressed in the Joint Hearing Session (Matter 6) addressing strategic policy matters relating to the HGC allocations. As such a commentary has been provided separately in our Hearing Statement for Matter 6 Issue 2.
- 5.3 However, as an overarching point, TCE wishes to support the allocation of EHH Central (H3) for a range of employment uses, and has worked with SADC and key stakeholders including Herts IQ to ensure that the mix of land uses proposed in policy is suitable, deliverable and will help achieve the wider aims of HGC as well as helping to meet the employment needs of Hemel Hempstead and the wider area.

² Excluding EHH (Central) – Please refer to Matter 6, Issue 9