

**OBJECTIONS TO THE CORE STRATEGY/STRATEGIC LOCAL PLAN PRE-SUBMISSION DOCUMENT FOR CONSIDERATION AT ST ALBANS CITY AND DISTRICT FULL COUNCIL - 28 NOVEMBER 2012**



**Statement about the Action Group**

No Oaklands Housing Action Group is comprised of residents of Sandpit Lane, Barnfield Road and the surrounding areas who have formed a resident's action group to object to the way the plan has been formulated and the inclusion of Oaklands green belt site as a site for housing development. We are not politically motivated but welcome the support of all Councillors. Housing development on the site will have a negative impact on a wide area, not only on those in the immediate vicinity. An ipetition set up to alert residents and seek support now has over 500 responses against any development on this greenbelt site. A separate street petition has obtained 732 signatures and has been formally presented to the Council.

<http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/no-oaklands-development>

**Overview of Objections to the Soundness, Legality and Sustainability of the Strategic Local Plan – Detailed Arguments are Expressed Later in the Document and are Frequently Interchangeable.**

**Soundness**

1. Oaklands is and always has been part of the Metropolitan Green Belt. The presentation of the SLP attempts to promote and retain some sites/areas of greenbelt at the expense of others. All three strategic sites for housing allocation are in the South of the district whilst other equally suitable sites in the North have been ignored.
2. The Consultation process has not been open, adequate or transparent enough.  
\*Oaklands was not identified in the 2009 Strategic Housing Land Allocation Assessment as a site for development.  
\*Oaklands was not identified as a strategic site in the 2010 Core Strategy Document.
3. \*The evidence base for sustainability does not support the inclusion of Oaklands for housing development (Local Development Framework).
4. The plan ignores much of the advice given in the PINS LDF Advisory Visit on the St Albans Core Strategy

**Current Legal Status**

1. In its advice to local authorities the Department of State for Communities and Local Government confirms that policies in the Local Plan should not be considered out of date simply because they were adopted prior to the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework on 27 March 2012. The principles outlined in the National

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Planning Policy Framework on the green belt , page 19, Section 9, paras 79- 90 apply equally to Oaklands as other areas council seeks to protect.

2. The definition of Oaklands in the draft pre-submission document as a Mixed Use Broad Location conflicts with the sites Green Belt status.
3. Under the current legal status of St Albans District Local Plan Review 1994, Oaklands is contained within the MPG. In the Hertfordshire County Structure Plan, housing development is an inappropriate use within the Green Belt and is unacceptable in terms of Policy 5 of the Hertfordshire County Structure Plan and Policy 1 of the local plan review 1994. The SLP also conflicts with The District Local Plan Review, Inspectors Report 10 June 1993, page 11, Para 2.7

### Sustainability

In the foreword to the National Planning Framework sustainable is defined as, “Sustainable means ensuring that better lives for ourselves does not mean worse lives for future generations.” Housing development on the Oaklands site and the ensuing degradation of the environment and demands on resources will have a severe impact not only on local residents but on St Albans in general.

1. Our natural resources and environment are finite. SADC Council commissioned an environmental report to look at the environmental capacity of the City:

Environmental Capacity of St Albans City and District: Defining a Sustainable Level of Development April 2012.

**The report concluded that, “ It would be unwise to permit further urban development in the District on undeveloped land. Any further loss of soil and vegetation will lead to loss of ecosystem services and will undermine our ability to build resilience to climate change as we seek to restore the landscape and build green infrastructure networks.”**

2. Our infrastructure is at breaking point. Funding for any additional infrastructure requirements to support housing development on Oaklands is non-existent. There is a 2.4 bn infrastructure deficit in Herts County Council budget.
3. Proposals to Introduce the Community Infrastructure Levy will not be in place until 2014. The Hertfordshire Infrastructure Summary Report (2009) identified a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) of £23,000 per dwelling, with £18,000 of that sum for strategic infrastructure. Neither Herts County Council nor SADC can demonstrate any agreed source of funding for new infrastructure. Adoption of the Community Infrastructure Levy in Hertfordshire will not take place until 2014. The current Section 106 Agreement has to be implemented at planning application stage and is much harder to enforce.
4. There is no sound Infrastructure Development Plan in place, proposals without funding are meaningless.
5. The Strategic Local Plan is full of contradictions in its aims and objectives. For example, page 49, 5.5 - 8 Proactive Management of the Green Belt contrasted with, page 106 New Development. There is little joined up thinking about the reality of the way people actually live. The SLP has high aspirational aims, but other than land

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sale, has no effective solutions for protecting the heritage and environment that already exists. St Albans, at heart, has been an historic market town surrounded by green belt. Current and past development policies, which continually bolt housing onto neighbourhoods with little care for existing infrastructure or environment, are destroying the very characteristics that make people want to live here. We are rapidly becoming a dormitory town for London.

6. There is very little large scale local employment and most traffic is in/out commuting to London or larger towns in the area such as Stevenage and Welwyn.
7. Jersey Farm had been taken out of the green belt in the 1970's and 1500 houses had been built. This part of St Albans has already given up its fair share of greenbelt.

### **Detailed Commentary– Soundness and Sustainability**

1. Oaklands is and always has been part of the Metropolitan Green Belt. The plan as presented attempts to promote and retain some sites/areas of green belt, at the expense of others. All three strategic sites are in the South of the district.

Oaklands was not identified as a strategic site in any of the critical public documentation before release of the pre-submission document. The published 2010 Core Strategy Document identified housing allocation proposals across the district; though the BRE and Harperbury sites were included Oaklands was not. However, it is apparent from planning documentation as far back as 2006/7 that a number of sites, including Oaklands have been put forward for strategic housing allocation under a variety of planning processes.

2. **The Consultation process has not been open, adequate or transparent enough**

The short space of time between the publication of the pre-submission SLP and its adoption at Cabinet on 18 October has made responding in a timely manner difficult. Discussions at Council appear to conflict with information that is publicly available, for example, Cabinet of 5th April 2011 (see 'Agendas and Minutes' on SADC website Item No 6) said that a case for 350 houses on the Oaklands site had not been made and asked that the site be withdrawn for reconsideration of a lower number and not concentrated on one area of the site. It is therefore clear that this proposal has been known about and discussed, but this information was not readily available to the public.

The Planning Policy Advisory Panel at which Councillors were able to exercise voting powers last discussed the Draft SLP in October 2011. Six meetings were cancelled and its final meeting was in March 2012. A proposal to close down the PPAP and form an advisory panel only, was put to Council. On 12 September 2012 concern was expressed at full Council that:

“The recent inaction of the Conservative Administration in progressing the Core Strategy will now be compounded by lack of transparency and public accountability in the Planning Portfolio Holder's proposals for the Planning Policy Advisory Group (PPAG). The public will be prevented from knowing what is being discussed, or expressing their views.”

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Consultation with the public has been confusing and lacking clear detail and information.

**A number of consultation exercises have taken place with input from the online Limehouse planning portal, written, email and a small number of public surgeries.**

However, the majority of this process has taken place through discussions with stakeholders, landowners, businesses, planning agents and developers and not involved residents. The community panel was small and questions too generalised. Resident and Stakeholder Workshops in July 2010 discussed the concept of mixed use broad locations with respect to Harperbury but not Oaklands Smallford Campus. None of the public surgeries were held in venues appropriate to this area and the site was not included in the final consultation document. The following documents were used through the process:

- a) Joint Issues and Options Consultation, May 2006
- b) Emerging Core Strategy Issues and Options Consultation 2007
- c) Emerging Core Strategy - Shaping our Community July 2009
- d) Core Strategy Consultation on the Strategy for Locating Future Development in the District, December 2010.

**From the beginning of this process decision making has been site not policy led.**

- a) \*The 2006 document states "This site may be designated as a Major Developed Site in the Green Belt. Oaklands College and the District Council have agreed a planning framework document that proposes that the new College 'hub' should be located on the Smallford Campus site, to replace the existing College development. Most of the College's facilities would be concentrated at the hub, which would have an eventual floor space of up to 30,000 square metres. The planning framework document also proposes about 80-100 homes on the Smallford Campus site."
- b) In its 2007 consultation document, the Council identified 8 specific Areas of Search in the Green Belt. To address the District's long term growth needs. Each area could potentially accommodate large scale development of 400 homes and/or employment uses, plus associated transport and community infrastructure. The Oaklands campus is within the general Area of Search No.5

Area of Search No. 1 - South west of St Albans	Area of Search No. 5 - East of St Albans
Area of Search No. 2 - South east of St Albans	Area of Search No. 6 - Smallford
Area of Search No. 3 - West of London Colney	Area of Search No. 7 - North of St Albans
Area of Search No. 4 - South of London Colney	Area of Search No. 8 - North of Harpenden

There were 790 separate respondents to the 2007 consultation document. These were from stakeholders, landowners, planning agents and developers as well as statutory consultees/stakeholders. Thirty two per cent of the individual comments were submitted electronically using the Limehouse software on the Council's website. The response from members of the Council's Community Panel was extremely low.

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Questions in the consultation document generated a low response, except those on the eight areas of search for possible major housing or employment growth. There was a strong view from respondents that there should be no further development in the Green Belt.

### **A Summary of Key Issues rRaised in Responses to Green Belt development:**

1. **\*A great need to address current and future infrastructure requirements, particularly given planned scale of growth. Residents were concerned over new development being proposed, without associated improvements to local transport and community/infrastructure.**
2. Respondents were strongly opposed to further housing or employment development in the Green Belt and supported maintenance of the existing settlement hierarchy, primarily to protect the Green Belt.
3. **\*The Council's sustainability consultants and statutory consultees pointed out important omissions in the document. For example, reference to strategic flood risk assessments; education and healthcare; water treatment and supply**
4. **\*Concern was expressed about Section 106 agreements and infrastructure delivery as well as traffic congestion.**
5. **\*There were some disagreements over the technical aspects of calculating housing land supply.**
6. **\*A Strategic Housing Market Assessment should be undertaken to determine the type of housing needed, including affordable housing.**
7. Strong objections were made to the eight areas of search for possible major housing or employment growth, particularly in respect of Areas of Search 1 (South West of St Albans), 2 (South East of St Albans), 7 (North of St Albans) and 8 (North of Harpenden).
8. **\*There was less opposition in principle to minor adjustments to the Green Belt to accommodate growth (perhaps because possible sites were a Site Allocations Development Plan Document matter, so were not mentioned in the Core Strategy consultation document).**
9. **\*Concern was expressed over the possible imbalance of future development, as most of the Areas of Search were in the south of the District.**
10. There was support for additional employment development in existing employment areas or on new sites in urban areas. In contrast, there was strong objection to employment development in the Green Belt and the majority of respondents felt the Council should not rely on employment sites being provided outside the District.
11. It was agreed that poor quality/vacant employment sites should be converted to residential use.
- 12.

It was decided, following a review of comments received:

**That the Council would no longer pursue possible development on Areas of Search 2, (south west part), 4, 6 and the north western part of Area 8. It would proceed only on Areas 1 and 5 (for housing) and the north eastern part of Area 2 (for employment/hotel) before 2026. Define Area 7 as safeguarded land for long term needs, probably post 2026. Give further consideration before the pre -submission stage as to whether Area 3 and the south eastern part of Area 8 should be proposed, probably as safeguarded land for long term needs.**

**The above issues are fundamental to the way the planning process has evolved during the preparation of the SLP.**

c) **The consultation on the Emerging Core Strategy (July 2009)** was based on a level of housing growth set out for St Albans District in the East of England Plan. This was for 360 additional homes per annum, which would equate to 6,120 net additional homes over the period of the Core Strategy (2011-28).

It consisted of a controlled closed consultation with a Limehouse version of the full documentation and questionnaire which allowed users who had registered as part of an early consultation to access their accounts and use specialist planning based software. The 871 members of the Community Panel were each sent the questionnaire and summary document in the post.

The Limehouse returns included 47 responses from organisations, including Planning Agents and consultancies, other companies, public sector and voluntary sector organisations (town council, Woodland Trust, Enterprise Agency). The remaining 198 responses were from individuals who had previously been involved in consultation events and whose records were held by Limehouse.

Of the 47 responses from organisations, 28 were received from one planning agent on behalf of 28 individuals and companies. When interpreting the results for Limehouse and for the whole sample, it is important to bear this in mind as it may have introduced a significant bias.

#### **Consultation on Emerging Core Strategy 2009 – Table of Responses**

	Total No of Responses
Distributed	495
Community Panel	234 (27% response)
Online ORS	247
Online Limehouse	245

The community panel had a 27% response rate from a panel of 855.

**The survey does not reflect the views of residents in Marshalswick North and surrounding area. Nor does it adequately represent the views of St Albans residents:**

During 2009 the following proposal was put forward by Oaklands:

“Funding from the Learning and Skills Council is no longer available to build the proposed new hub at Oaklands College Smallford Campus. This representation seeks **1000 - 1200** proposed homes on Oaklands land to be brought forward to 2011. This would allow the college hub development to be brought forward without delay. A master plan has been devised which includes: housing including 35% affordable housing; educational links including a University Technical College; green links including green spaces and parks with public access, technical studies and timescale. Benefits include: college hub development; University Technical college for 14-19 year olds; primary and secondary school provision; sports facilities; parks and green spaces; community access and facilities including provision

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for teenagers/ children, public rights of way, community centre, college facilities available at the weekend, arts cinema, martial arts, allotments; landscape and woodland; improved.”

**Meanwhile, in Appendix C, Working Note for the Emerging Core Strategy, Section 2 Assessment of Potential Sites, 2.19, the site is identified as : Area of Search 5: South of Sandpit Lane/North of Oaklands College**

A site description is then applied as follows:

Oaklands College Smallford Campus, land south of Sandpit Lane – “The land in question is farmland located south of Sandpit Lane, west of North Drive, north of the Oaklands College buildings and east of Verulam School Playing Fields. There is potential for 800-1,000 homes. The development could also provide local shopping facilities, an expanded Oakwood Primary School, together with significant countryside enhancement and increased public access in adjoining land owned by the College.”

**A lack of clarity and transparency is evident.**

**In The Core Strategy - Consultation on the Strategy for Locating Future Development in the District, December 2010:**

**Areas of Search have been removed and the document focuses on the provision of housing to be provided in the District from 2011-2028 on sites of less than 100 homes.**

The majority of these homes to be built on previously developed land within the urban areas. The document prioritises appropriate locations for housing within urban areas

The consultation identifies strategic housing locations of between 100 and 250 homes with locations expected to provide a 40% affordable housing contribution and medium sized family homes. New housing would be located as much as possible in urban areas. **See Table 1 below.**

**Proposals for the larger Green Belt sites are limited to a generalised strategy diagram shown in Table 2 below.**

A key reason given for proposing the strategic housing locations below is the provision of infrastructure and community benefits, and a recognition that local infrastructure issues would need to be addressed and appropriate infrastructure developed alongside. The proposal is that development should be concentrated in existing settlements in the following order:

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**Distribution of Strategic Housing Locations as shown in, Core Strategy -Consultation on the Strategy for Locating Future Development in the District, December 2010 - Table 1**

	Estimated homes	Main benefits of housing development
<b>1. Urban</b>		
A) London Road/Alma Road, St Albans	100	Would enhance a run-down part of the Conservation Area and help sustain local shops along London Road
B) Ridgeview, Barnet Road, London Colney	100	High potential for new housing to include green and renewable technologies
<b>2. Greenfield, excluded from the Green Belt</b>		
C) Spencer's Park, West of Cherrytree Lane, Hemel Hempstead	150	Would help deliver new community facilities on adjoining residential development in Dacorum

**Strategy For Where the Majority of Future Development Will Be Located, as shown in, Core Strategy -Consultation for Locating Future Development in the District, December 2010-Table 2**

Category	Settlements	Broad policy approach
Main urban settlements (excluded from Green Belt)	St Albans Harpenden London Colney	To preserve the Green Belt, higher density developments will be encouraged but will need to respect local character
Other settlements excluded from Green Belt	Bricket Wood Chiswell Green How Wood Park Street and Frogmore Redbourn Wheathampstead	The scale and density of development will generally be lower than in the main urban settlements, in order to retain their particular character
Green Belt settlements	Colney Heath Folly Fields Gustard Wood Kinsbourne Green Lea Valley Estate Sandridge Sleapshyde	Development will be limited to small scale infilling and redevelopment of previously developed land that reflects the character of the settlement
Rest of Green Belt		Standard Green Belt policy will apply



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### During July 2010, Shaping Our Community - Core Strategy Consultation Resident and Stakeholder Workshops, took place

The Oaklands site was not on the presentation although generalised statements were made about broad locations and the BRE site was discussed. The majority of the discussion took place at schools and Colleges.

At the public meetings in January and February 2011 none were held in either Marshalswick or Sandridge and as at that time Oaklands was not publicly documented as a site for housing allocation residents would not have known that such a major development was being considered.

3. The evidence base for sustainability does not support the inclusion of Oaklands for housing (Local development Framework). **The tables below compare the sustainability issues in St Albans & Oaklands & compare how they meet St Albans objectives and how the focus changes according to the site preferences.**

Sustainability Issues Relevant to St Albans -unpublished report to the council by TRL Limited, UPR IE/002/06,

*Air Quality	Traffic congestions on main routes continues to grow
*Biodiversity	Conditions of SSSIs below county and national average.
*Climatic Factors	St Albans keen to promote and increase renewable energy and energy efficiency.
*Cultural Heritage	The built heritage of St Albans is highly valued by its residents-maintaining local distinctiveness is critical heritage.
*Landscape & Townscape	St Albans District is surrounded by Metropolitan Green Belt
Material Assets	St Albans keen to promote sustainable construction methods.
*Water	Over abstraction in some areas. Some areas at risk of flooding.
*Housing	House prices are extremely high, need for affordable housing.
Crime	Crime reduction is a priority for the district as a whole.
*Accessibility	Public transport is oriented towards London rather than across the district as a whole
Recreation Sport & Leisure	Some deficits in the availability of and access to sports and recreation facilities particularly among hard to reach groups.
*Health Care & Education	High quality education and schools but not enough places and some children have to travel further distances.
* Economy and Employment	Low unemployment rate and high average salaries but a high proportion of commuting into London.

\*The starred items are considered important to the Oaklands site.

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Air Quality	Development on this site will worsen air quality because of additional traffic generated in a locality which suffers heavy congestion at peak periods.
Biodiversity	Loss of land will result in lack of biodiversity.
Climatic Factors	Additional demand on energy resources and water.
Cultural Heritage	Residents value the landscape and rural character of the Oaklands site which enhances quality of life and the environment.
Landscape & Townscape	Residents want to retain the historic Green Belt Status.
Water	St Albans is in a drought area. According to the Veolia Water Central Final Water Resources Management Plan 2010 Environmental Report, "Even with more efficient water systems, increase in population and housing will add to the existing pressure upon water resources within the Plan area. The key Colne Catchment Abstraction Management Strategies (CAMS), the whole of the catchment and the Main Rivers, including the Rivers Colne, Misbourne, Chess, Gade and Ver are classified as being over-abstracted. Any increase in abstraction in this area is also likely to affect the Lower Thames, which is also over-abstracted. No new consumptive licences will be granted.
Housing	<p><b>**There is a need for affordable housing in the district but the development of Oaklands City Centre Campus did not provide any affordable housing and the Council were unable to enforce the affordable housing target on the King Harry Lane site because of developers arguments about viability.</b></p> <p><b>**There is no recent, objective, independent survey of housing need.</b></p> <p><b>**There is an uneven distribution of strategic sites in the SLP with all 3 sites being in the South of the District and none in the North.</b></p>
Accessibility	There are reasonable bus links along Hatfield Road but there are few local shops, the nearest are Morrisons supermarket and the parade at the Quadrant, neither are walking distance.
Health Care & Education	**There is a 2.4 bn infrastructure deficit in Herts County Council budget. Proposals to Introduce the Community Infrastructure Levy will not be in place until 2014. St Albans schools, Health Services and general infrastructure are at capacity. There is no identifiable source of funding in the Infrastructure Development Schedule other than potential developer contributions or private sector provision.
Economy and Employment	No large scale local employment mostly in/out commuting.

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Table 1 Sustainability Appraisal Applied to SADC Objectives – 2009 Appendix C Note for  
Emerging Core Strategy

NOHAG Comment Numbers are not in original	Environmental Objectives	Social Objectives & Economic Objectives
<p><b>*Negative impact on the environment and loss of productive arable land.</b>  <b>(1) The nearest bus stops are at Beechwood Avenue Junction near the Quadrant or the Blackberry Jack on Jersey Farm. At least a 10 to 15 minute walk. Not practical for the elderly or young children.</b>  <b>*2 &amp;3) Development of this site and others in the locality will result in coalescence with Hatfield.</b>  <b>*Nearest large supermarket is Morrisons and nearest local parade is the Quadrant which will encourage more not less car use. Little local employment which again will add to in/out commuting and congestion, greenhouse gasses.</b>  <b>Local schools &amp; health services are at capacity.</b>  <b>*4) No identifiable funding for new Infrastructure.</b></p>	<p>The greenfield nature of this site means some soil sealing will occur which may have impacts on future drainage and flooding as well as a loss of other soil functions. The area contains ancient woodland and development may have adverse effects on biodiversity. (1) The site is relatively accessible to services, facilities and open space which should help reduce the need to travel and minimise increases in greenhouse gas emissions. (2)The site is within, but on the edge of, the Green Belt and therefore impacts of development should be relatively minor.</p>	<p>(3) This is a relatively accessible, sustainable location for housing, although access to local shops is not very good. (4) There is however the possibility that the scale of new development would require new facilities to be built as part of the development. The new development could include new public open space which would provide opportunities for leisure and recreation for the wider community.</p> <p>*No predicted economic effects</p>

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Appendix B: Assessment of Strategic Sites, Working Note, September 2010 (LDF Spatial Strategy Options)

Table 2 Sustainability Appraisal Applied to SADC Objectives

NOHAG Comment	Environmental Objectives	Social Objectives	Economic Objectives
<p><b>The focus has shifted from a generalised attempt to downplay the negative impact on the local environment and the loss of productive greenbelt land for housing purposes to a deliberate promotion of Oaklands. * <u>The Hatfield Road side of the site may represent the urban fringe but the Sandpit Lane side still retains its rural aspect. The site is an essential buffer to the gradual encroachment of development on surrounding greenfield sites between St Albans and Hatfield.</u></b></p> <p><b>* Emphasis is entirely on benefit to Oaklands College with an attempt to promote green infrastructure improvements as a benefit to the community. The advantage of having a city centre campus easily accessible to local students has been lost with no gain of affordable housing on that site. St Albans citizens will be funding educational facilities from a wider area. The Smallford campus is more easily accessible from Hatfield, Welwyn, &amp; Stevenage. No guarantees that any profit from land sale will prioritise facilities for students in St Albans but St Albans will pay the price in loss of quality of life, landscape, resources, environment, with no identifiable economic benefit for the City. Flood risks and drainage issues are associated with the site.</b></p>	<p>Site within the Greenbelt but in this general location the Greenbelt is not especially strong and not formed by any particularly distinguishable features. Land parcel is well related to St Albans and urban fringe in character. Removal from the Greenbelt would not impact upon the setting of St Albans. The greenfield nature of this site means some soil sealing will occur which may have impacts on future drainage and flooding as well as loss of other soil functions. The area contains ancient woodland and development may have adverse effects on biodiversity. The site is relatively accessible to services, facilities and open space which should help reduce the need to travel and minimise increases in greenhouse gas emissions. The landscape quality of the land is not particularly high, but benefits from established trees and hedgerows, with ancient woodland nearby. The site has been identified as having a high potential for delivering significant green infrastructure improvements. At the lower level of housing mineral sterilisation is not an issue. However, at the higher level of housing development at this site which is within a known area of sand and gravel deposits would limit their extraction potential in the future, given the very extensive reserves of known sand and gravel deposits in the County and very wide minerals belt within which further such reserves exist, this potential sterilisation issue is not considered to be significant.</p>	<p>This is a relatively accessible site; the scale of new development would require new facilities to be built as part of the development. A sustainable location for housing, although access to local shops is not very good. There is however the possibility that The new development could include new public open space which would provide opportunities for leisure and recreation for the wider community. Development of new homes would be able to fund the expansion and improvement of Oaklands Smallford Campus as an educational hub. The development could also provide local shopping facilities if development was at the higher scale indicated in scenario 3, an expanded Oakwood Primary School, together with significant countryside enhancement and increased public access in adjoining land owned by the College. Development of this site would probably be able to deliver 40% affordable housing. There are no local topographical issues related to the site but there may be an issue walking/cycling to City centre</p>	<p>The large number of new houses associated with this development is likely to help support the local economy.</p>

**4. The plan ignores some of the key advice given in the PINS the St Albans Core Strategy LDF Advisory Visit**

Inspector's Advice Note: David Vickery – 16 to 20 November 2009

In his advisory note the planning inspector offered guidance with respect to the Green Belt; the following is summarised from Paras 5 - 47:

(1) **Green Belt boundaries need to be reviewed** in order to provide strategic planning guidance.

(2) **This would require a Green Belt Study** setting out the criteria based on consistently applied methodology. The study should identify the numbers of houses presently needed, approximate locations and any exceptional circumstances that require this course of action. Locations should be sustainable and have as little effect as possible on the Green Belt. A Green Belt study could be used to show that it would be possible in principle to locate housing on present Green Belt land. It would also provide the criteria in a Strategic Local Plan Policy for land that would be removed from the Green Belt in later Development Plan Documents

3) **Green Belt release should be phased to the end of the plan period** so that the detail of the sites and their boundaries could be devolved down to a later Site Allocation Development Plan document. The Strategic Local Plan or Development Plan Document would also have to state what the mechanism or circumstances would be that would trigger the release of Green Belt land for housing.

4) **Clarity on how the site will be delivered is implied by an allocation of strategic sites.** Sites identified as strategic do not need to be resolved in a subsequent Development Plan Document and should be delivered by a master plan or strategic planning document.

5) **Expectation that detailed delivery matters such as availability and infrastructure requirements will have been resolved** in the development of a strategic site in the early years of a plan. Issues that impact on the rest of the Plan area (such as the scale and nature of development) will also need to have been resolved

6) **Policy for a strategic site (allocation or location) should cover the following:**

A clear objective/aim for what is intended to be achieved in the overall development;  
Identification of site constraints - those that are fixed, and those which need to be overcome

Different land uses/proposals and their scale, which the site has to accommodate - e.g. housing, employment, community facilities, etc.

What infrastructure - e.g. transport, education, social and community services is needed to make the development a viable, attractive, sustainable location;

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What of the above needs to be provided by when - (i.e. inter-related phasing of all elements) - who will fund it and deliver it.

**7) An Infrastructure Delivery Plan must ensure that infrastructure is seen to be in place at the right time to allow development to be implemented in the planned manner.**

**8) With New policies or proposals** the key principle alluded to by the inspector is that **the public should have had an opportunity to contribute to and comment upon all matters before they appear in the submission version.** Nothing should come as a surprise when the pre-submission document is submitted. Any new policies or proposals should be carefully considered as to whether additional consultation beyond that normally carried out at that stage is needed.

**9) Statements from developers that a site can fund the necessary infrastructure are meaningless assertions unless backed up by viability evidence.**

The National Planning Framework and its relevance to Oaklands are shown in the following two diagrams:

Diagram (1) - The Application of the NPPF to Green Belts in General

Diagram (2) - How the NPPF can be applied to Oaklands

**NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK - “The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.**

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### Diagram (1) - The Application of the NPPF to Green Belts in General

Para 81  
Local planning authorities should plan positively to **enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity;** or to improve damaged and derelict land.

Para 83  
**Local planning authorities with Green Belts in their area should establish Green Belt boundaries in their Local Plans which set the framework for Green Belt and settlement policy.** Once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of the Local Plan. At that time, authorities should consider the Green Belt boundaries having regard to their intended permanence in the long-term, so that they should be capable of enduring beyond the plan period.

**Fundamental Aims of the Green Belt**

1. To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.
2. To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another.
3. To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.
4. To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.
5. To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

Para 84  
When drawing up or reviewing Green Belt boundaries **local planning authorities should take account of the need to promote sustainable patterns of development.** They should consider the consequences for sustainable development of channelling development towards urban areas inside the Green Belt boundary, towards towns and villages inset within the Green Belt or towards locations beyond the outer Green Belt boundary.

Para 85  
**When defining boundaries, local planning authorities should:**

- ensure consistency with the Local Plan strategy for meeting identified requirements for sustainable development;
- not include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open;
- where necessary, identify in their plans areas of 'safeguarded land' between the urban area and the Green Belt, in order to meet longer-term development needs stretching well beyond the plan period;
- make clear that the safeguarded land is not allocated for development at the present time. Planning permission for the permanent development of safeguarded land should only be granted following a Local Plan review which proposes the development;
- satisfy themselves that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the development plan period; and
- **define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent.**

87. As with previous Green Belt policy, **inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.**

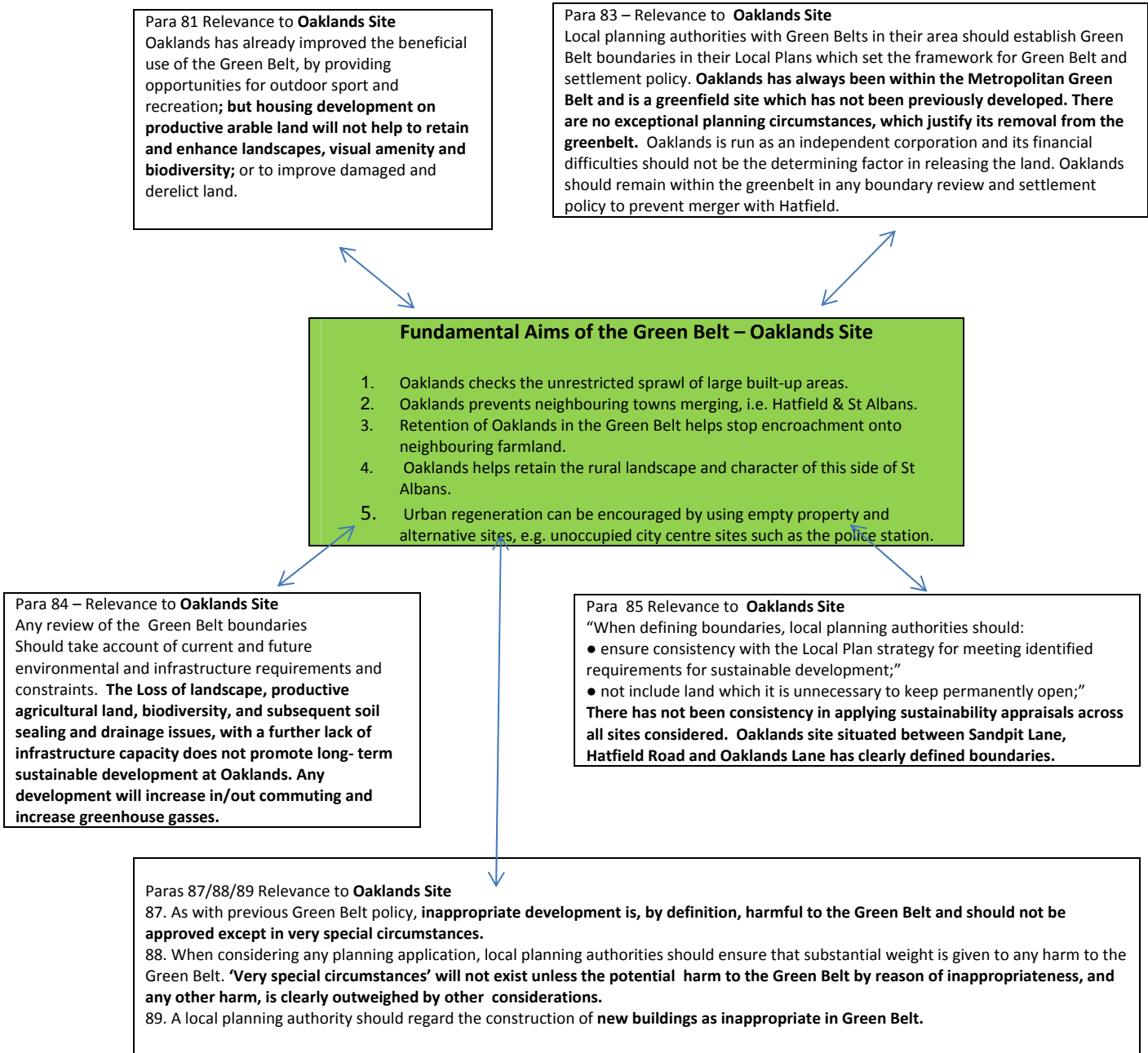
88. When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. **'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.**

89. A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in Green Belt.

**NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK - "The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.**

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Diagram (2) - How the National Planning Policy Framework can be applied to Oaklands



**There is at least one alternative site which is comparable to Oaklands and is shown below:**



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**Area of Search 8 (south east part) – North of Harpenden, Luton Road/Ambrose Lane**

This site consists of an agricultural field, bounded by Luton Road, Cooters End lane, Ambrose Lane and the rear of the properties in Bloomfield Road. About 300 homes could be accommodated.

<b>Positives</b>	<b>Negatives</b>
The site is well related to the existing built up area and the landscape quality is not high.	Traffic impact – the A1081 Luton Road is congested. Further consultation needed with Hertfordshire County Council and Hertfordshire Highways, but the principle of housing development is unlikely to be ruled out on traffic grounds.
Cooters End Lane and Ambrose Lane would form a new defensible long term Green Belt boundary and housing development would not reduce the Green Belt gap between Harpenden and Luton.	Local schools are full – further discussions needed with Hertfordshire County Council on possible ways of increasing capacity.
The site is in a sustainable location, close to bus routes and a local centre and within walking distance of schools and Harpenden town centre.	The site adjoins the Grade II Listed Cooters End Farm - the setting of this listed building will need to be protected.
Housing development would help to support local shops on Luton Road.	Space should be allowed for screen planting along Cooters End Lane.
This Area of Search is one of only two potential strategic housing sites in the north of the District and provides a rare opportunity to secure a significant amount of affordable housing in this part of the District.	
The likelihood of housing being built is high, given that there is one landowner who is working on possible development options for the land.	

**Distance to local facilities**

Approximate distance to primary school	Roundwood – 600m
Approximate distance to secondary school	RoundwoodPark – 600m
Approximate distance to bus routes	Luton Road– 50m
Approximate distance to publicly accessible amenity space	RothamstedPark – 1.2km
Approximate distance to convenience retail	Luton Road– 100m

**Conclusions: There are concerns about traffic and education issues, which need further investigation. However, this is a sustainable location for housing and the site is well related to the existing built up area. The landscape quality is not high and the gap between Harpenden and Luton would be retained. This site gives a rare opportunity for a large housing development (including affordable housing) in the north of the District.**

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**A comparison can be made with the following diagram of the Oaklands site:  
Oaklands Site**

<u>South of Sandpit Lane/North of Oaklands College buildings</u>	
Positives	Negatives
The site is well related to the built up area and development would not reduce the gap between St Albans, Smallford and Hatfield.	Access to some facilities, such as shops is not very good – but local shops could be provided in the new development.
The landscape quality of the land is not particularly high, but benefits from established trees and hedgerows, with ancient woodland nearby.	Traffic implications on Sandpit Lane– junction improvements likely to be required. Also, further consideration should be given to a possible eastern distributor road, linking Sandpit Lane to Hatfield Road and London Road (see paragraphs 13.19 and 13.20). The possible transport benefits of a distributor road need to be weighed against the environmental impact.
The development would fund the expansion of Oakwood Primary School. This may require a small part of the adjoining Verulam School Playing Fields. If so, Verulam School may need some land to replace its lost playing field area.	Space should be allowed within the site to retain existing trees and hedgerows and for new planting along Sandpit lane and the new Green belt boundary.
There are regular bus services along Sandpit Lane. It may be also be possible to introduce a new St Albans-Hatfield route via Sandpit Lane.	
Opportunity exists for large new areas of public open space and woodland planting to the east and south of the potential development – to help meet Watling Chase Community Forest objectives.	
Likelihood of housing being built is high, as there is one landowner (Oaklands College), who is working on possible development options for the land.	
<b>Distance to local facilities</b>	
Approximate distance to primary school	Oakwood – 100m
Approximate distance to secondary school	Beaumont – 50m
Approximate distance to bus stops	Sandpit Lane – 100m
Approximate distance to publicly accessible amenity space	Longacres recreation ground – 600m
Approximate distance to convenience retail	Hatfield Road– 500m
<p><b>Conclusions: There do not appear to be any major drawbacks to developing this land. This area is well related to the existing built up area, the landscape quality is not high and the gap between St Albans and nearby settlements would be maintained. Housing development could offer some advantages, including expansion of Oakwood Primary School, a local shopping centre and substantial woodland planting and public open space; possibly also a new St Albans-Hatfield bus route.</b></p>	

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### Conclusion

We believe that the Strategic Plan is unsound for a number of reasons.

1. Oaklands is part of the Metropolitan Green Belt. The presentation of the SLP attempts to promote and retain some sites/areas of green belt at the expense of others. All three strategic sites for housing allocation are in the South of the district whilst other equally suitable sites in the North have been ignored.
2. The Consultation process has not been open, adequate or transparent enough.
3. There is no sound Infrastructure Development Plan in place, proposals without funding are meaningless
4. From the beginning of this process decision making has been site not policy led.
5. The Planning Inspector identified the need to address current and future infrastructure requirements, given the planned scale of growth.
6. Residents are concerned over new development being proposed, without associated improvements to local transport and community/infrastructure.
7. The consultation process does not reflect the views of residents in Marshalswick North and surrounding area. Nor does it adequately represent the views of St Albans residents.
8. Green Belt boundaries need to be reviewed.
9. This would require a Green Belt Study.
10. Green Belt release should be phased to the end of the plan period
11. There needs to be an independent assessment of housing need in the Green Belt.

### Recommendations

1. An independent review of Green Belt boundaries and a Green Belt Study need to be undertaken.
2. There needs to be clarity on how sites will be delivered and this is implied by an allocation of strategic sites.
3. Detailed delivery matters such as availability and infrastructure requirements need resolving.
4. **Oaklands should retain its Green Belt green field status in any future policy review or boundary change to prevent urban sprawl and coalescence with Hatfield.**
5. **An alternative site should be considered.**
6. Green Belt release should be phased to the end of the plan period.
7. An independent assessment of housing need in the Green Belt should be undertaken.

**Gaynor Clarke**

**No Oaklands Housing Action Group**