

Hearing Position statement

Matter 4: The Green Belt

St Albans Local Plan Examination

AIM/ Cemex consortium

December 2019

Contents

1. Introduction
2. Inspectors' issues and questions in relation to matter 1: Legal compliance
3. Main modifications sought

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The position set out in this statement is made on behalf of our clients, A1M Securities Limited and Cemex UK Properties Limited (the “Roehyde Consortium”) in respect of Land at Roehyde and further to representation made in respect of the land to date.

The hearing procedure

- 1.2 The appointed Inspectors’ role is to consider whether the draft Local Plan submitted by St Albans and City District Council (SACDC), (“the Council”) is sound and whether the requirements of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) and associated regulations have meet met.

Purpose of this hearing position statement

- 1.3 The purpose of this statement is to make short but focussed comments, further to representations made over a period of several years in respect of Land at Roehyde, having regard to the Inspectors’ matters, issues and questions detailed in documentation dated 17 October 2019.
- 1.4 The statement sets out why we, on behalf of the Roehyde Consortium, consider the plan is unsound. We go on to make suggestions for Main Modifications that we consider would make the plan sound. The comments in this statement relate to Matter 4: the Green Belt.

2.0 Inspectors' issues and questions in relation to matter 4: The Green Belt

- 2.1 Main issue: Whether the plan has been positively prepared and whether it is justified, effective and consistent with national planning policy in relation to the overall approach to the Green Belt

Question 2: What is the basis of the Green Belt Review? What methodology has been applied and is it soundly based? Is the Council's approach to the Green Belt set out in its response to the Inspector's Initial Question 16 and letter of the 2 July 2019 (Green Belt topic paper) robust and in line with national guidance?

- 2.2 We commented on the Local Plan consultation (February 2016) how we consider the approach to the release of the Green Belt is underpinned by an erroneous assessment of land parcel GB34 in the November 2013 Green Belt Boundary Review and must be rectified as part of the Local Plan adoption.
- 2.3 Figure 8.1 of the Green Belt Review shows land considered to contribute least towards Green Belt purposes. We identify on this diagram the location of the Roehyde site in blue within sub-area SA-BA1 in figure 1 below.

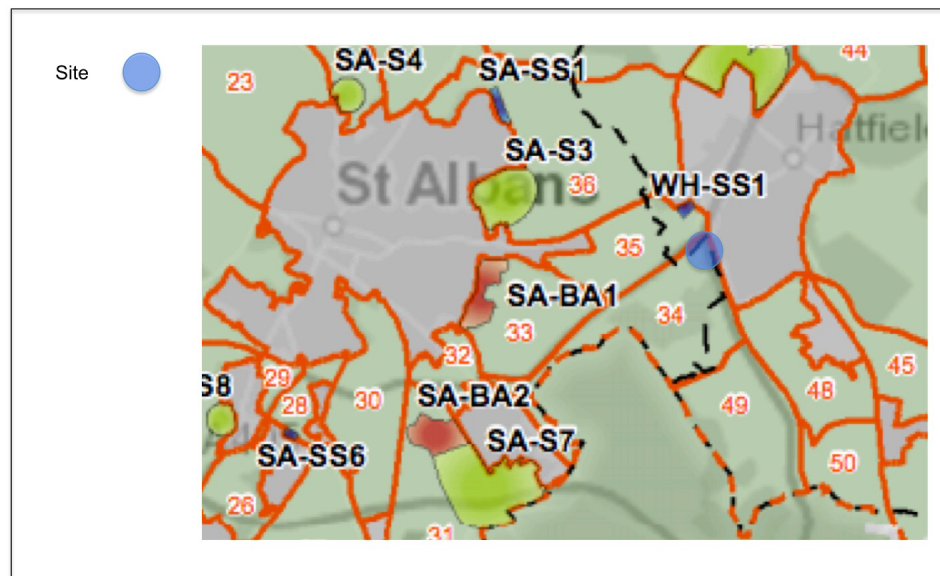


Figure 1: Extract of Figure 8.1 of the Green Belt Review 2013 Annex 1 identifying the site at Roehyde

- 2.4 The review identifies the site within land parcel GB34 (Land between Hatfield and London Colney), as shown below in figure 2.

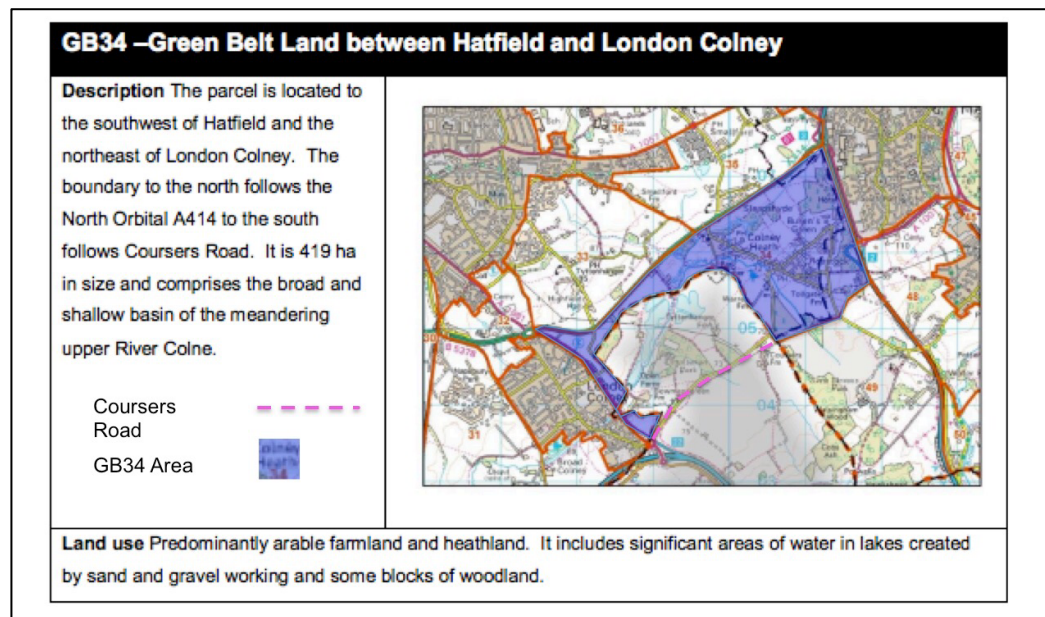


Figure 2: Annotated extract of Green Belt Review 2013 Annex 1

- 2.5 Land parcel GB34 has been assessed incorrectly, where the description of GB34 states that the southern boundary of this parcel "follows Coursers Road". We assist visual understanding by highlighting the boundary of GB34 above in blue in Figure 2. With reference to Figure 2, the southern boundary is not defined by Coursers Road, contrary to the description. We annotate for clarity on the image by a dotted pink line. The south boundary is actually defined by a defensible local field pattern and, in fact, comprises the District boundary to Hertsmere Borough immediately south. The assessment implies that Tyttenhanger Park is within GB34 when, in fact, it is located outside GB34 and in Hertsmere Borough.
- 2.6 The review considers land parcel GB34 to contribute significantly to two of the five NPPF Green Belt purposes in paragraph 134, namely; (b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another (previously described as "to maintain the existing settlement pattern"), and; (c) protecting the countryside from encroachment. It considers the parcel does not contribute sufficiently to the other three Green Belt purposes. The assessment to safeguard the countryside describes typical rural and countryside characteristics for the southern area, as "linear built development" and an "urban influence of the A1 (M) to the north". As we demonstrate in figure 1 and 2, the "south area" is, in fact, outside GB34. The assessment to maintain existing settlement patterns identifies a gap between Hatfield and Colney Heath, and since Roehyde is adjacent to Hatfield and linked under the A1(M) an allocation for strategic development would not compromise separation between settlements.
- 2.7 The assessment to "maintain existing settlement patterns" identifies the area to the north in GB34 as more built up and narrow, with a gap between Hatfield and Colney Heath recorded as 1.7km. However, this description misses the fact that the site is adjacent to Hatfield and therefore would maintain the existing settlement pattern and would not significantly compromise the separation between settlements. Appropriate landscaping would help to further offset any adverse effects

- 2.8 Notwithstanding the inaccurate assessment of GB34, the integrity of the two NPPF Green Belt purposes that contribute significantly, therefore, can still be maintained by careful release of the Roehyde site from its designation.
- 2.9 To release the site from the Green Belt provides an opportunity to strengthen the remaining land parcel whilst contributing towards the objectives of the Local Plan. For these reasons we consider on closer scrutiny of accurate facts that exceptional circumstances exist to release the promoted site from the Green Belt for a pharmaceutical, bioscience, engineering and logistics park.
- 2.10 Exceptional circumstances do exist to release the site from the Green Belt and the basis of the Green Belt review is flawed with incorrect assumptions, unsound methodology and incorrect conclusions which must be addressed.

Question 2: How have the conclusions of the Green Belt Review informed the Local Plan? Do decisions on Green Belt releases reflect the need to promote sustainable patterns of development, and prioritise sites which are previously developed and/or well served by public transport? Where is this evident?

- 2.11 In our view and for the reasons set out above, the GBR has inaccurately informed the Local Plan. The Green Belt parcel GB34 would be scored differently had the assessment been undertaken with the correct understanding of the extent of the boundary of the parcel. The effect carries through into the conclusions of the GBR and decisions about which sites to release from the Green Belt have therefore unquestionably been affected.

Question 11: Did the Council consider the designation of safeguarded land in the Plan, and should this be identified?

- 2.12 From our review of the draft Local Plan and evidence base, an explicit consideration and dialogue of whether to include safeguarded land in the plan has not been reported. For the council to meet the requirement of promoting sustainable development through its Local Plan, in the event that employment land at the proposed Employment Broad Locations at Hemel Hempstead does not come forward due to circumstances beyond the control of the Council in neighbouring Dacorum BC, land at Roehyde should be safeguarded for future development, if it is not allocated in the current Local Plan.

3.0 Main modifications sought

- 3.1 To reassess Green Belt land parcel GB34 accurately and consider whether, as we contend, that the new conclusions affect the potential release from the Green Belt and meet the exceptional circumstances for doing so. To feed this into consideration of an alternative strategy that pursues a growth agenda in two growth areas of the A1(M) and the M1/M25 growth areas and what role the delivery of Land at Roehyde for a pharmaceutical, bioscience, engineering and logistics park has within that.
- 3.2 Should the outcome of the assessment of the alternative strategy proposed by the Roehyde Consortium prove positive, to undertake the following main modifications in respect of economic strategy:
- **Key Diagram** – Add an additional ‘Employment Broad Location’ covering the land at Roehyde in the east of the District, located in the A1(M) growth area;
 - **Policy S2** – Amend text to add that exceptional circumstances exist to release land from the Green Belt for development at Roehyde;
 - **Policy S5** – Amend text to add a further ‘Employment Broad Location’ covering the land at Roehyde;
 - **Policy S6** – Introduce a new policy sub-clause to add a second ‘Employment Broad Location’ covering the land at Roehyde for 25 Hectares of mixed industrial and research facilities linked to the nearby University of Hertfordshire, that delivers a pharmaceutical, bioscience, engineering and logistics park;
 - **Policy L9** – Include reference to land at Roehyde for 25 Hectares of mixed industrial and research facilities;
 - **Policy L11** – Include reference to land at Roehyde for 25 Hectares of mixed industrial and research facilities;
 - **Proposals Map** – Add new designation to land at Roehyde that reflects allocation under policies S5, S6, L9 and L11.