

Hearing Position statement

Matter 5: Employment Land

St Albans Local Plan Examination

AIM/ Cemex consortium

December 2019

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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 been 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 5: employment land.

2.0 Inspectors' issues and questions in relation to matter 5: Employment Land

- 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 provision for housing and employment land.

Question 19: How has the Functional Economic Market Area (FEMA) been defined and is it appropriate?

- 2.2 The Council's Strategic and Detailed Local Plan Technical Report: Economic Development and Employment Land Evidence (July 2016) (the "EDELE") sets out to identify a FEMA and only selects one of eight criteria in the planning practice guidance, namely, travel to work areas (TTWA), as the only criteria it considers is relevant. It excludes other equally relevant considerations, such as, the extent of any LEP, housing market areas, and other factors. The national guidance previously considered TTWA as a very blunt tool to use in crafting policies which are intended to encourage employment. We hold this to remain true even if no longer explicit in the guidance. Notwithstanding, the FEMA and other strong evidence has been pushed aside by the Council as the policy direction is to locate almost all new employment land to the west of the District in the Hemel Hempstead urban extension referred to as the Employment Broad Location.
- 2.3 Later studies, namely the South West Hertfordshire Economic Study (2016, prepared by Regeneris) and (2019, prepared by Hatch Regeneris) are, as the titles indicate, focussed on South West Hertfordshire, rather than central or eastern Hertfordshire and are commissioned by Dacorum and St Albans Councils to support choices that have already been made at the time of commissioning. The potential of a FEMA that includes the central and eastern area is therefore overlooked entirely. However, evidence in the earlier assessments prepared by the Hertfordshire LEP demonstrate such an approach would be more robust for the Local Plan.
- 2.4 We do not consider the proposed approach to be appropriate. For example, the Hertfordshire LEP identifies clearly the A1(M) corridor as a Growth Area supported by a body of evidence. We consider that since later evidence focusses in the South West of the County that the potential of a FEMA that includes the east of St Albans' District is ignored when in fact it should be embraced as a more robust strategy.

Question 20: What is the overall need for employment land that has been identified? What is the evidence for this? What is the situation regarding existing commitments and the residual need for additional land allocations? What is the past trend in take up rates for employment land?

- 2.5 The Local Plan was initially a housing led plan. Need for employment land was initially not clearly identified or quantified. The evidence appears to now be 'back-filled' to suit the Council's preferred strategy of delivering almost all its employment land to the west of the District. In the current publicly available evidence, we have not seen any assessment of residual need for additional land allocations.

Question 24: Does the plan allocate sufficient land to meet the identified minimum need in policy S5?

- 2.6 Forecasting employment floorspace requirements was attempted by the EDELE before carrying the selected strategy through to later evidence base reports focussing on South West Hertfordshire. The EDELE acknowledged this forecasting as challenging and inherent with considerable uncertainty. Despite this, the narrative chose to ignore evidence in the Hertfordshire LEP Strategic Economic Plan and market evidence submitted by the Roehyde Consortium (prepared by CBRE and commissioned by Goodman) in favour of unreliable forecasting models. This is directly contrary to paragraph 80 of the NPPF (2019) which intends that “Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development.”, or paragraph 82 where “Planning policies and decisions should recognise and address the specific locational requirements of different sectors. This includes making provision for clusters or networks of knowledge and data-driven, creative or high technology industries; and for storage and distribution operations at a variety of scales and in suitably accessible locations” where biosciences, pharmaceutical, advanced engineering emerging clusters are identified in the Hertfordshire LEP Strategic Economic Plan for the A1(M) Growth Area;

Question 25: Does the land allocated provide sufficient choice and flexibility?

- 2.7 As we have detailed elsewhere in representations made previously at various stages of consultation, sufficient choice and flexibility is not provided by placing almost all employment floorspace to the west of the District. Delivery of employment floorspace in St Albans is dependent on delivery of infrastructure related to a neighbouring authority. This strategy is extremely inflexible should any delay emerge in the delivery of the proposed neighbouring strategy that is outside the control of the council.

Question 26: What are the inter-relationships with other authorities in terms of employment land provision and how have these been taken into account?

- 2.8 As described above and in previous representations, while there is a cross boundary strategy to deliver employment land with Dacorum Council to the west of St Albans, it is less clear how the council has sought to explore the real potential for delivering additional employment land in the east of the District, adjacent to Hatfield in Welwyn Hatfield Council.

3.0 Main modifications sought

- 3.1 To reassess the basis of the FEMA in accordance with paragraphs 80 and 82 of the NPPF. To feed this into consideration of an alternative strategy that pursues a growth agenda in two growth areas of the A(1) M as well as the currently proposed 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.