

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL (30057)

WRITTEN STATEMENT

Issue: 2: Whether the SALDD addresses the necessary changes to the Green Belt boundary in an appropriate fashion

Q2.5 Whether it would be necessary and appropriate to remove the indicative build area of the proposed school sites from the Green Belt, bearing in mind the matters referred to under Issue 4 and those recently referred to by the Council

Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) considers that it is both necessary and appropriate to remove the indicative build area of the proposed school sites from the Green Belt for the following reasons:

1. Removing the build area will add certainty to education delivery for education providers (whether they be Free Schools or otherwise) by ensuring that sufficient land in the Site Allocations LDD is properly allocated to deliver secondary education places to meet the needs of the community.
2. Removing the build area will give certainty to the local community about the future use of the site and what is planned for the area.
3. Identifying the site as an allocation for education use recognises the requirement for built development of some form on the site. To retain the site in the Green Belt would conflict with this requirement since the thrust of Green Belt policy is a presumption against built development. HCC considers that the retention of the site in the Green Belt and the allocation for education purposes is a policy conflict and not in accordance with the requirement to produce clear policies on what will or will not be permitted and where (NPPF paragraph 154) or the requirement to allocate sites to promote development (NPPF paragraph 157 bullet 4). As such it is not consistent with national policy and is therefore unsound.
4. The retention of the build area within the Green Belt whilst allocated for education use is not planning positively for infrastructure required in the area and is thus not in accordance with NPPF paragraph 14 and paragraph 157. As such is it not consistent with national policy and is therefore unsound.
5. If the sites as allocated are considered sustainable (which they must be to accord with NPPF policy) they should be capable of being developed without delay NPPF (paragraph 15). If the site build areas remain in the Green Belt there is no certainty that they can be delivered without delay since a VSC case (Very Special Circumstances) would need to be proven at the point of the planning application in order to challenge the Green Belt presumption against development.
6. HCC considers that the robust site search process (set out in representations by Vincent and Gorbong on behalf of the County Council to the emerging Site Allocations LDD, the Statement of Common Ground, and the response to Issue 4) demonstrates that there are no other

preferable sites, and that there is a robust education needs requirement (first established in 2010) which has not wavered in subsequent annual updates as set out in HCC's education needs statement for secondary school places. As such there is certainty as to the need for the site allocation and the need for implementation of the requirement. Under these circumstances HCC considers it reasonable to require the Site Allocations LDD to identify sites which both promote development and are capable of being delivered without delay.

7. TRDC argues (letter to the Inspector 31 July) that one of reasons for not taking school sites out of the Green Belt is due to the closure of secondary school sites in the District in the past and uncertainty over education planning. As set out in the Statement of Common Ground, most of the school sites cited above were closed were between 20- 30 years ago as a result of a cyclical change in the long –term demographic and a reduction in the birth rate leading to a significantly reduced demand for school places; the forecasts are now showing a cyclical change in the long term demographic with an increase in the birth rate (this is reflected at a national level); this increase is reflected in a significant demand for places across the Education Planning Areas in south west Hertfordshire; the forecast has shown an increasing demand for the places over the last 4 years which is sustained until 2023/24. HCC considers that the demand for places in Three Rivers is sufficiently well established to justify the allocation of 2 potential school sites and the removal of the built up areas from the Green Belt.
8. TRDC argues (letter to Inspector 31 July) that one of the reasons for not taking school sites out of the Green Belt is that should the sites be surplus to requirements they will come under pressure for housing sites. As set out in the Statement of Common Ground and set out in 1 and 2 above there is a requirement to create certainty and to ensure the requirement of NPPF (paragraph 72) is met. Furthermore a specific policy is proposed (see 9 below) which will cover this potential threat.
9. TRDC argues (letter to Inspector 31 July) that the build areas may not be required in their entirety. As set out in the statement of Common Ground HCC considers that In the interests of long–term planning HCC consider that the allocation of a 4ha build zone continues to remain a prudent approach to spatial planning since space standards may change during the plan period and could revert to previous guidelines by a successive Government and the delivery mechanisms for constructing new schools could also change. Likewise it is acknowledged that free school providers currently promoting applications may not require the whole site.

In order to provide for all eventualities, to ensure the full need can be met, and to protect the site against other uses coming forward, HCC proposes the following additional Policy to the Site Allocations LDD at section 6:

The Council will support and encourage planning applications for secondary schools on the allocated sites S(b) and S(d) to fulfil the educational requirement for a 6-8fe school. Planning applications for secondary schools that propose a reduced requirement, and therefore do not fulfil the 6-8 fe educational requirement, will need to submit a masterplan (containing a site

layout that shows a future building arrangement) for the site which effectively demonstrates how the site can be future proofed to enable the full site capacity to be utilised if necessary in the future. No other uses on the site (other than for education) will be granted planning consent.

The proposed policy wording above refers to the proposed secondary school site allocations and could equally be applied to any sites which may subsequently be allocated for primary schools. Without the removal of the build areas from the Green Belt and the above policy to ensure a positive plan for all eventualities, HCC considers that TRDC approach is not consistent with national policy and is therefore unsound.

Ruth Gray/Vincent and Gorbng on behalf of HCC

23 September 2013