

# Dacorum Borough Council HEMEL GATEWAY OPTIONS REPORT



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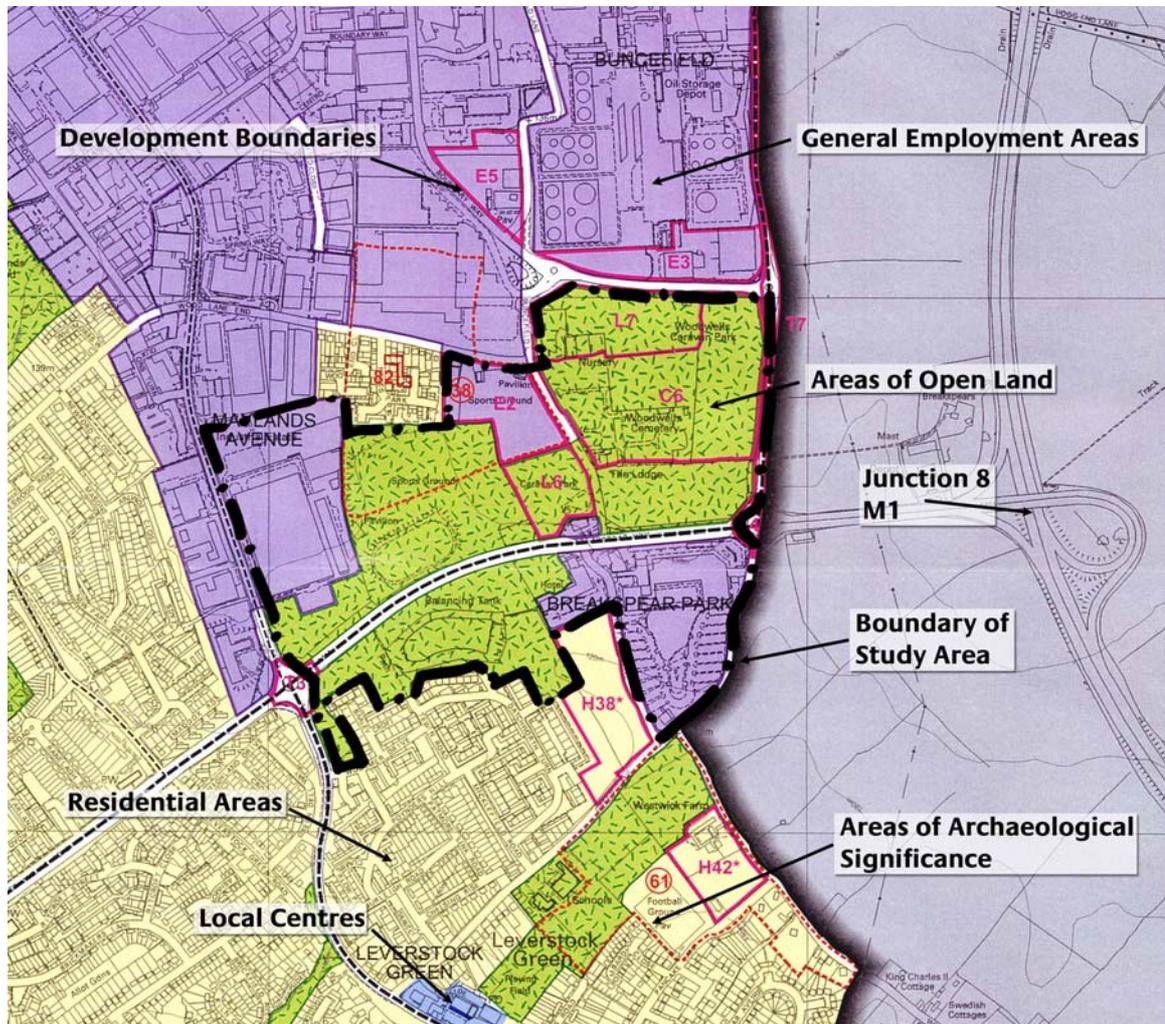


# 1 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- 1.1 The broad aim of the this study, which is part of the wider SW Herts Employment Space Study, is to assess the long-term potential of the Hemel Gateway site, looking forward to 2021. The Hemel Gateway study is the starting point for more detailed consideration of the Gateway site and its relationship to the wider North East Hemel employment area. It is not intended to provide all the answers, but to highlight the questions which need to be addressed in preparation for the review of the LDD and to indicate, in very broad terms, how future development in the area might be cast.
- 1.2 A brief for the Gateway study was provided by the Council and was expanded on at a meeting with council officers on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2004. The brief shows that the Gateway site includes more than just the open space adjacent to A414. The site includes Bkspear Park, the employment site E2 designated in the Local Plan and adjoining Maylands Avenue employment area. The map on the next page shows the boundaries of the study area. The area is larger than that set out in the brief. This reflects our site assessment which indicated that all of the land bounded by Buncefield Lane, Breakspear Way, Boundary Way and Green Lane could play an important role in a gateway scheme. The extended study area was agreed with the Council.
- 1.3 The key questions/issues set out in the brief were:
- Key 'entry point' to Hemel Hempstead from the M1
  - Does it project the right image for the town?
  - Park & Ride site to be accommodated in this area in the long-term, although no specific site is allocated. Could possible sites be identified?
  - Potential for development of existing open land?
  - Should consideration be given to the relocation of the caravan site to Bunkers Park (as discussed at the Inquiry) and the re-designation of the land for employment uses?
  - There are currently problems letting office space at the former BP building at Breakspear Park. Should this land remain designated for employment use?
- 1.4 The brief set out a range of more detailed questions for this study. Additionally, we were asked to investigate whether the gateway site might be a suitable alternative location for the 'key employment site' currently designated at Three Cherry Trees Lane.



## Site Boundaries and Local Plan Designations





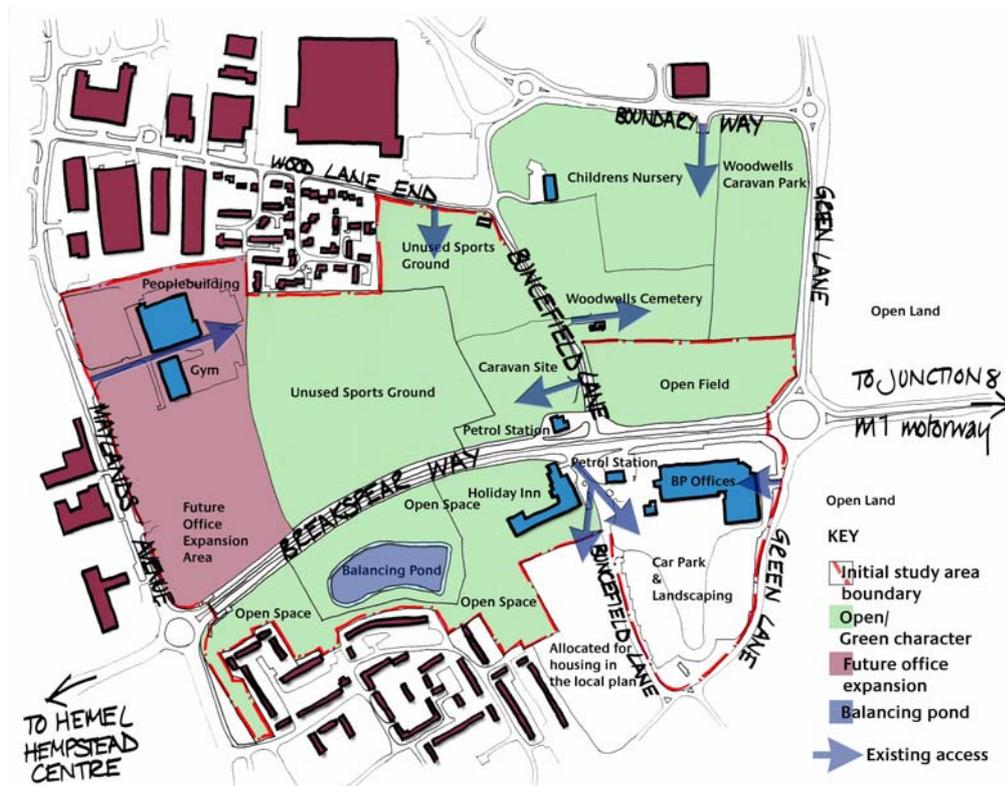
## 2 THE SITE - CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

### Site Description

- 2.1 The Gateway site lies to the south of the North East Hemel Employment Area which is a substantial employment area - the 4<sup>th</sup> largest in south east England.
- 2.2 The site is located to the north and south of a very busy dual carriageway (Breakspear Way), which connects Hemel Hempstead to the M1 and to St Albans. The site's boundaries are Wood Lane End to the north, Green Lane to the east, and the residential area of Leverstock Green to the south and Leverstock Green/Maylands Avenue to the west. To the south of the site lies the residential area of Leverstock Green.
- 2.3 It has been noted that Green Lane is prone to flooding.
- 2.4 Much of the Gateway site, to the north of Breakspear Way, is green in character, with hedgerows and trees defining the site boundaries, particularly along Breakspear Way. There are a number of trees with TPOs along the northern boundary of the site, which help provide screening for the isolated pocket of residential development to the north.

The illustration below shows the main site characteristics.

### Site Characteristics



## Movement and Access

- 2.5 On Maylands Avenue and Breakspear Way, traffic and congestion are dominant, and movement is predominantly vehicular, mixing large lorry traffic with workers' private cars. This not a very friendly area for pedestrians.
- 2.6 Buncefield Lane runs north-south, midway through the site and has a country lane character with hedges and trees running along a narrow tenuous lane. It is classified as a 'green lane' in the Local Plan. This limits its future vehicular capacity and its potential, without changing its character considerably, as a route for vehicle access.
- 2.7 Other than Buncefield Lane, sites to the north of Breakspear Way have no direct access to this busy road.
- 2.8 There are a number of sites to the south of Breakspear Way that have access directly to Breakspear Way. Breakspear Park has an access directly off the busy eastern roundabout, and the Holiday Inn has access onto Breakspear Way.

## Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

### 2.9 Strengths

- Close proximity to junction 8 of the M1 (where work is scheduled to begin this year to widen the M1 from three to four lanes);
- Prominent development opportunity sites from Breakspear Way (links Hemel Hempstead to St. Albans and the M1)
- Attractive character of 'Buncefield Lane' (to be retained)
- Part of the 'Gateway' development (Peoplebuilding and Esporta development) is already in place, compact built form and prominent location

### 2.10 Weaknesses

- Existing road capacity issues: congestion and accident blackspots along Breakspear Way and Maylands Avenue.

### 2.11 Opportunities

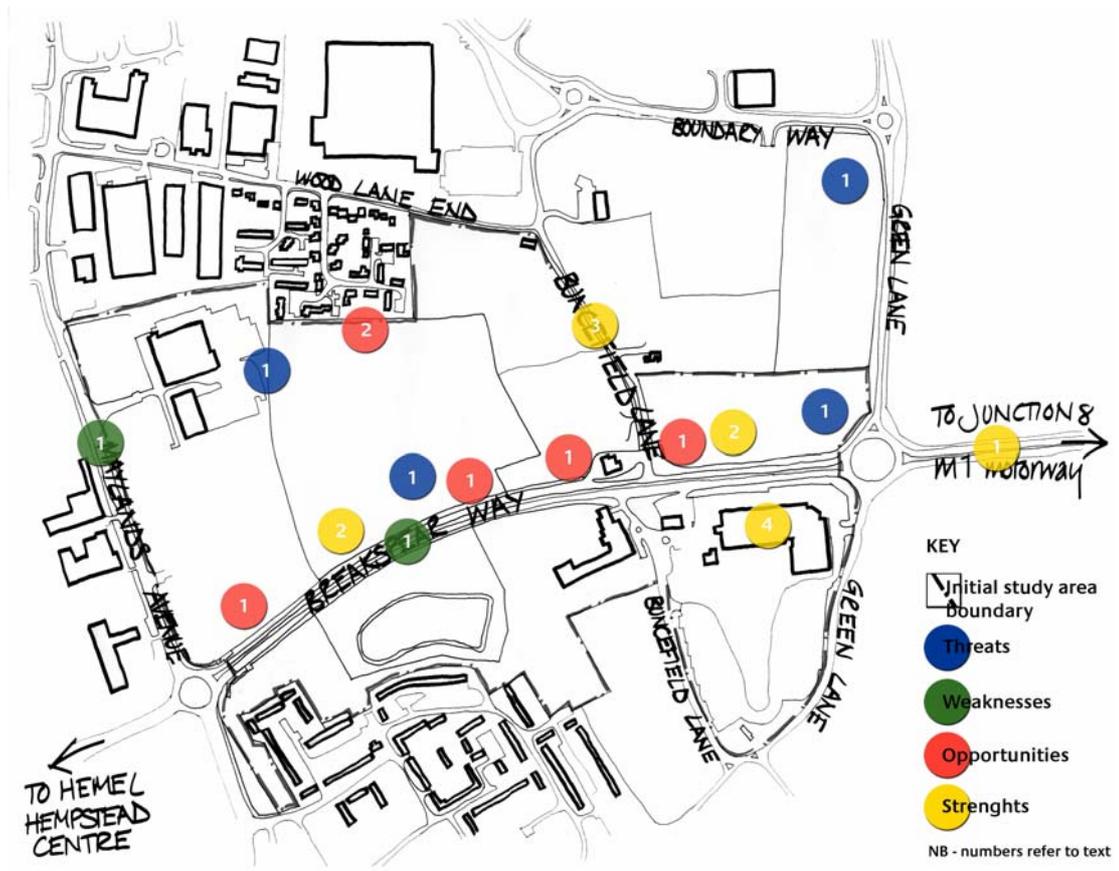
- Attract major investment by creating a 'new image' for Hemel Hempstead through high quality, well designed buildings along Breakspear Way
- Improve landscape screening to existing residential area.

### 2.12 Threats

- Site access: real threat to the possibility of future development if access cannot be granted from major roads in the area. Essential that Hertfordfordshire County Council Highways Department comment on proposed development.

### 2.13 The SWOT analysis is presented graphically in the following illustration.

### Strengths, Opportunities, Weaknesses and Threats



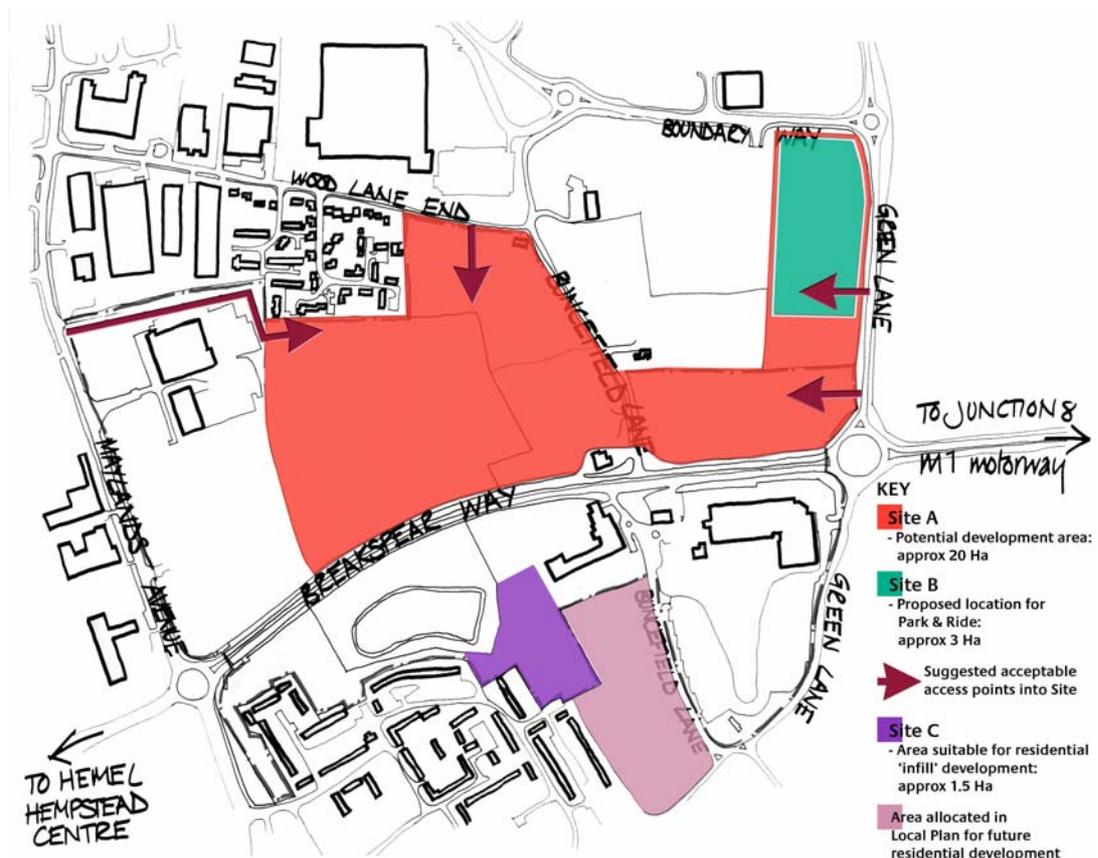


### 3 THE GATEWAY SITE AS A POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY

#### Potential Development Area

3.1 The potential area for a 'Hemel Gateway' development is smaller than the study area set out in the brief. There are a number of sites that we have discounted. We have concluded that the potential for new employment development south of Breakspear Way, at least in the short term, is very limited and effectively should be discounted. Our analysis of the land to the north and south of Breakspear Way is illustrated in the following plan.

#### Potential Development Area



#### Area North of Breakspear Way

3.2 The potential development area is approximately 20 ha and is divided in two by Buncefield Lane (site A on the plan).

### *Access*

- 3.3 We have tried to contact the Highways Engineering Department at Hertfordshire County Council for a steer on access and traffic flow issues, but have received no comments to date. Given the nature of Breakspear Way and the proximity of the two roundabouts to the south east and south west of the Gateway site, we have assumed that no site access will be granted directly from Breakspear Way. Access will need to be secured from either or both the east and the west - through the Peoplebuilding access, Wood Lane End and from Green Lane north. We assume that access will not be possible from Buncefield Lane because of its protected green lane designation.
- 3.4 We also note that any redevelopment of the Gateway site is likely to require additional highways infrastructure, the costs of which will have to be borne by the development. We have made no attempt to estimate what these costs might be nor to assess their possible impact on the development economics of the site.

### *Peoplebuilding*

- 3.5 Lucas Aerospace/Peoplebuilding extension - We have excluded this area from the potential Gateway development since it has already been granted outline planning permission for 4 office buildings, suggesting future development of a similar scale, style and massing to the Peoplebuilding. These four buildings are all to be served by the access along Maylands Avenue. The buildings closest to Breakspear Way will form part of the Gateway in design terms and siting, scale, materials and landscape would all be important to create an overall 'image' for the Gateway.

### *Woodwells Caravan Park*

- 3.6 We have included part of the land (approx 3.7 ha) currently occupied by Woodwells Caravan Park (used for the storage of caravans) within the potential development area. It is advantageous that the site is in council ownership. There is potential to provide site access to the land from Green Lane.
- 3.7 We have assumed that the other touring caravan site, north of the petrol station, is included in the development area. The current use as a caravan park would not be an ideal neighbour for a high profile business development.

### *Park and Ride Facility*

- 3.8 The brief asked us to consider whether a Park and Ride facility can be accommodated within the Hemel Gateway site. We agreed with the Council to 'test' a facility for approximately 500 cars - whether 500 is an appropriate figure would require further investigation. We assumed an 'at grade' facility and did not consider the implications/practicality of accommodating the vehicles in some form of 'multi storey' car park. Our assessment purely involved a desk based analysis of the size of site required and an initial qualitative review of the suitability of alternative locations for the facility.
- 3.9 Such a park and ride facility would need to have good access from the main road network and remove vehicles from the network at the earliest opportunity. The immediately obvious option for the facility would be in the south east corner of the Gateway site (opposite Breakspear Park). But this would not support the

development of a high profile Gateway development - it would be an undistinguished land use in this location and would take up the part of the site which would give most impact to a Gateway development.

- 3.10 We have then looked for an alternative location and have identified land at the north eastern part of the site (site B on the plan) with a new site access assumed off Green Lane north.
- 3.11 The remaining site (site A), of approximately 18 ha, could be available for employment uses.

### *Site Access*

- 3.12 New and upgraded access to Site A will be necessary. The type and size of development will affect traffic generation and in turn the size of access junctions required.

### *Housing on Wood Lane End*

- 3.13 The established residential area adjoining Wood Lane End will need protection from development of the Gateway site. In addition to suitable boundary treatment, potential noise and light pollution would need to be dealt with and any 24 hour employment operations located away from the housing.

## **South of Breakspear Way**

### *Breakspear Park*

- 3.14 The Breakspear Park office campus is a high quality head quarters style office building which is visually prominent and has excellent highway access, being close to the M1 junction 8. The building was purpose-built for BP approximately 15 years ago as the main centre for its UK operations. The building is now owned by Legal and General and BP are in the process of vacating, although they will remain in part of the building. In addition, approximately 90,000 square feet of the building is occupied by the consultancy firm, Hewitt Bacon & Woodrow. The owners intend to re-let the remaining floorspace and parts of the building are to be refurbished to facilitate this. The building will therefore remain in its existing use for the foreseeable future and is not available for redevelopment.

### *Balancing Pond and adjacent land*

- 3.15 The balancing pond is currently in use and so, for this exercise, we have assumed the area is not available for development. Further information is required to assess its use and explore the potential for the pond to be relocated. However, we note that there are areas prone to flooding (around Green Lane south) and further information would be required to assess flooding problems in the area and the need/preferred location for any balancing pond.

### *Holiday Inn*

- 3.16 For this exercise we have assumed continued use of the site as a hotel.

### *Site C*

- 3.17 This site is surrounded by the existing residential area of Leverstock Green and the land allocated in the Local Plan for future residential development. It appears that access to this site would have to be from the existing residential road network. We have concluded that this site (of approximately 1.54Ha) might well be suitable for residential use rather than employment. (This, of course, requires more detailed consideration including further investigation of possible flooding problems).

### *Remainder*

- 3.18 The remaining land between Breakspear Way and Leverstock Green has problems with potential access and is too small for employment use if all of the other sites south of Breakspear Way are discounted.

### *Longer Term*

- 3.19 In the longer term, some or all of the land south of Breakspear Way could come into the equation as part of a Hemel Gateway employment site if the following happened:
- Breakspear Park became vacant and redevelopment was an option.
  - The balancing pond became redundant.
  - The Holiday Inn site became vacant (this would then make Site C also suitable for employment).
  - Site access was resolved (ideally from Breakspear Way and not from the adjacent residential areas).
- 3.20 But this seems an unlikely set of events and we have not given the potential for development south of Breakspear Way further detailed consideration.

## 4 POTENTIAL GATEWAY SITE

### Suitability as a Gateway Site

- 4.1 The area north of Breakspear Way is in a prominent location with excellent access to the M1 from junction 8 and is on the main route into Hemel Hempstead. By creating a new image at this key entry point to the town, the site could improve the public perception of Hemel Hempstead and celebrate its employment success. The area, as it is at present, does not achieve this.
- 4.2 The character of the site is predominantly green and undeveloped and whilst not unattractive, it is not an area of particular landscape merit. It acts as informal open space which is not directly related to nearby residential areas. For the site to succeed as a Gateway to Hemel Hempstead, it should capitalise on its position on the main road into the town from the M1. It should be prominent and give a sense of arrival.
- 4.3 If a Gateway is to be created it is important to recognise what is on offer in the area to make this Gateway unique and attract investors and occupiers. Large swathes of land maintained as buffer strips between the road and gateway development will not achieve this.
- 4.4 Access to the M1 is indeed a strength, but without supporting facilities and sustainable public transport, the area may loose out to more desirable locations elsewhere.

### Character of a Gateway Development

- 4.5 The character of any Gateway development will matter - to give impact and raise the image of Hemel as a quality employment area.
- 4.6 The Peoplebuilding and gym are contemporary in design and provide a step towards a new image for the employment area. The 'Hemel Gateway' character could develop from this style.
- 4.7 Initial thoughts are that development along Breakspear Way should be a minimum of 4 storeys to create a true 'Gateway' feel. (Note that the BP building is up to 5 storeys).
- 4.8 Proposed development should be sited close to Breakspear Way, with the car parking and service yards to the rear, strengthening the sense of 'Gateway' arrival. No landscape buffer/screening should be used between the road and the buildings: this merely hides the buildings and weakens the gateway concept. (Tree planting and landscaping within the site would be part of a quality development).
- 4.9 Buildings should be close together along the length of Breakspear Way (12 m is suggested as a possible minimum distance).



## 5 CONTEXT FOR DEVELOPMENT OF HEMEL GATEWAY SITE

### Implications of the SW Herts Employment Space Study

- 5.1 The SW Herts Employment Space Study concluded that there is sufficient land identified in the sub region to accommodate the growth aspirations set out in the Regional Spatial Strategy RSS14. Indeed, if Spencers Park in Dacorum and remaining commitments at Leavesden Park in Three Rivers both come forward for office development in the planning period to 2021, the study forecasts a significant surplus of land for office development in the sub region, There is therefore no need in the short to medium term for additional employment land to be identified.
- 5.2 However, as identified in the Employment Space Study, the Spencer's Park Key Employment Site on Three Cherry Trees Lane suffers from a number of disadvantages as a location for a prestige science/technology park. One option that the Council could consider would be to relocate such a development to the Hemel Gateway site adjacent to the recently developed Peoplebuilding and the Breakspear Park office complex on Breakspear Way.

### Planning Policy

- 5.3 Planning policy for Hertfordshire has an established objective of supporting the development of business clusters. The current regional guidance for the area, RPG9 established the principle of business clusters in Policy RE9 which states that '*high value added activities should be actively encouraged, including the grouped location of such activities in business clusters where this is economically beneficial and environmentally acceptable*'. It states that clusters involve a geographic concentration of interconnected companies, suppliers, service providers and associated research or other institutions.
- 5.4 This policy is to be carried forward in the emerging RSS14, which, in Policy E3 requires local development documents to identify sites for industry and commerce in locations that meet the needs of the region's significant clusters. Policy E4 also refers to sites in Hertfordshire supporting 'key clusters', although the supporting text to this policy states that these are locations that support the continued growth of mature and emerging clusters and sectors and makes specific reference to the support for regeneration in Stevenage and Lea Valley. The key focus for development in the new RSS is in Milton Keynes, the Thames Gateway and the Stansted/M11 corridor. It is also pertinent to note that Roger Tym and Partners, in preparing their report<sup>1</sup>, found no evidence of clusters in the economy.
- 5.5 In combination with the RSS, the Regional Economic Strategy for the Eastern Region, which encompasses Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk, sets a number of broad goals, which the RSS is intended to implement. Of relevance in connection with the potential STA in Hemel Hempstead is Goal 3 of the RES. This sets the objective of '*global leadership in developing and realising innovation in science, technology and research*'. The RES has identified four key

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Tym and Partners, South West Hertfordshire Employment Space Study, January 2005

sectors that are of growing importance in delivering the vision for the region. These are biosciences, automotive technology, high tech manufacturing and food and agriculture. In addition to these sectors, it also identifies financial/business services and creative and cultural industries (although this includes the wider tourism functions rather than just arts and media).

- 5.6 The Structure Plan (adopted 1998) allocates Spencers Park as a Key Employment Site in Policy 15. Key Employment Sites have been identified to play a major long-term role in the County's economy. In particular, Policy 15 states that the land at Three Cherry Trees Lane (Spencers Park), together with Park Plaza at Waltham Cross, have been identified as sites where priority will be given to specialised technology activities or other activities that are in the national or regional interest. The plan does not define what this means.
- 5.7 The Dacorum Borough Local Plan, adopted in April 2004, allocates the site for specialised technology activities (STA) following a broad allocation in the Structure Plan. The Local Plan describes STAs as firms that meet at least two of four criteria. The first criterion is that a firm should be within a 'high technology' sector, meaning that it should be classified as falling within certain categories of the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) including pharmaceuticals, office machinery, computing, aerospace, precision engineering, telecommunications and radio/television activities. The second criterion is that the firm should have at least 15% of staff involved in R&D of technical support/consultancy functions. Thirdly at least 15% of the staff on site should be qualified scientists, engineers or IT specialists, and the fourth criterion is that the firm should have established linkages with a research facility. Broadly speaking, an STA would be characterised as a science and technology park.

## 6 GATEWAY SITE AS A SCIENCE PARK

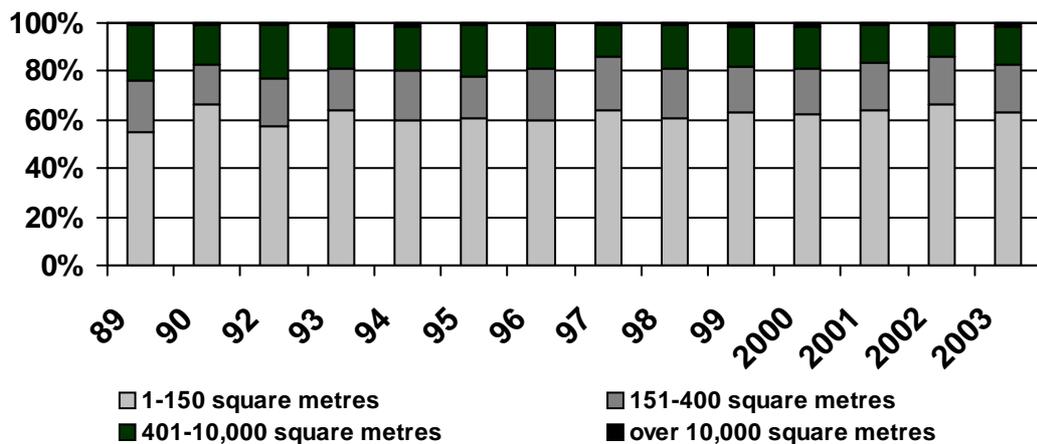
### Characteristics of a Science Park

- 6.1 The UK Science Park Association (UKSPA) describes a science park as a cluster of knowledge based businesses where support and advice are supplied to assist in the growth of companies on the park. In most instances, a science park is associated with a centre of technology and science such as a university or research institute. In terms of support, science parks generally offer additional facilities to those found on a standard business park. These can include business support facilities such as meeting rooms, reception functions and clerical support. Parks also provide technological support such as high quality IT/laboratory facilities; scientific equipment and more advanced services include technology transfer, advice on intellectual property or access to loan/venture capital.
- 6.2 The science park movement in the UK began in the early 1970's with the creation of the Cambridge Science Park and Heriot-Watt University Research Park, both of which were modelled on the parks being developed in the USA. Both of these parks evolved slowly, and the movement only really took hold in the mid 1980's, when the Conservative government introduced policies requiring Universities to make themselves more relevant to the needs of industry. This encouraged Universities such as Manchester, Aston, Birmingham and Warwick to develop their own science parks aimed at fostering high technology businesses.
- 6.3 A further growth in science parks occurred during the mid 1990's as a result of the reorganisation of the higher education system, with the conversion of the former Polytechnics in to Universities in 1992. The growth of the IT industry in the 1990's made it more attractive to invest in property developments accommodating these industries, and the privatisation of Government research laboratories also encouraged further science park development in this period. Examples of more recent parks include the Culham Science Centre at the UK Atomic Energy Authority laboratories in Oxfordshire, the Cheshire Innovation Park near Ellesmere Port on the former Thornton Research and Technology Centre and the York Science Park, a joint venture between the University of York and P&O Developments Limited.
- 6.4 Science parks do not fall into a definitive size category. Some parks arise from major regionally focussed projects whilst others are more modest in scale, sometimes with just one building. An analysis of the membership of the UK Science Park Association indicates that there is a broad pattern to the development of science parks. They range in size from 2.6 hectares to 290 hectares with the average size being 31 hectare. The size of the Hemel Gateway lies within this range and is similar to the Durham University Science Park or the Staffordshire Technology Park in Stafford.
- 6.5 In planning terms, science parks tend to have user restrictions preventing their use as open B1 business parks. Parks are often restricted to uses within Class B1b of the Use Classes Order; research and development, laboratories and high tech uses. However care needs to be taken to ensure that conditions are not so restrictive as to undermine the viability of the scheme. For example, the Chilworth

Science Park is restricted to R&D and manufacturing linked to R&D but is seeking to relax this and to allow more support functions on the park.

- 6.6 Environmentally, science parks are generally low-density developments, comprising low-rise buildings (2-3 storeys) with high quality landscaping, parkland and communal amenity space. Examining the available information on the members of the UK Science Parks Association indicates that the average density of development on such parks is around 25 - 30% floor space as a proportion of site area. The highest density is found on the Aston Science Park in central Birmingham, which is developed to a density of approximately 45% floor space to site area. The low density of these developments may be a function of the suburban or semi rural nature of the location of many of the parks; it may also reflect the potential for future expansion.
- 6.7 In terms of property size, science parks tend to be dominated by small companies employing less than 15 people. Statistics gathered by the UK Science Park Association indicates that the profile of occupiers on its Members' parks shows that 50% of tenant companies employ 5 people or fewer and a further 20 % employ 6 - 15 people. The main source of demand is therefore for small units of less than 400 square metres (4,300 square feet).

#### Science Park Occupiers: Unit Sizes



Source: UKSPA 2004

- 6.8 Larger parks should make provision for a small number of large occupiers; Cranfield Technology Park in Bedfordshire for example has Nissan as the main anchor occupier with approximately 20,000 square metres on the 40.5 hectare park (approximately 20% of the park in land area). Smaller parks, such as could be accommodated on the Hemel Gateway site can contain more modest developments. For example, the Staffordshire Technology Park occupies a 17 hectare site on the edge of Stafford and accommodates a range of building sizes, including small units of 160 - 670 square feet and medium sized units of 11,500 square feet and larger units of up to 45,000 square feet available.
- 6.9 The location of science parks is influenced by the geography of higher education or research institutes. Of the full members of the UK Science Parks Association, 59%

are either developed by/in partnership with a University or are located close to a University, and a further 9% are associated with a research establishment such as the UKAEA or Defence Science and Technology Laboratory. A report prepared by Angle Technologies for the County Council in August 2004, concluded that access to a higher education or research centre was the least important reason for choosing a business location. Whilst this may be true when a company is already established, (their conclusion was based on a survey of existing businesses) the fact remains that the majority of science parks are located in proximity to an educational or research facility. These facilities are important sources of inspiration for the type of company that occupies a science park; they are also an important source of the intellectual property, technical entrepreneurs and an educated workforce. Furthermore there are important synergies with many universities, enabling companies to utilise university facilities and expertise. Examples of where this takes place are the Cambridge Science Park, Brunel Science Park and Nottingham Science & Technology Park.

## Gateway Site as a Science Park

### *Potential as a Science Park*

- 6.10 The Angle Technologies report or Hertfordshire County Council has concluded that there is potential demand for 70,600 square metres (760,000 square feet) of floorspace for STA type businesses, of which 19,000 square metres (205,000 square feet) is estimated to arise from local sources (i.e. within 5 mile radius). The Angle Technologies report is based upon a small sample of companies that were surveyed as part of their research. Companies surveyed were asked whether they would consider space at a development at Spencers Park and those responding 'yes' were grossed up based on the sources of tenants taking space on science parks in the M25 area in 2001. This methodology makes a lot of assumptions, not least of which that all those indicating a preference for Spencers Park would actually move and that there are no other sources of accommodation. We have strong reservations about these conclusions and would not wish to rely upon these figures without further analysis.
- 6.11 With regard to the development of a meaningful science park in Hemel Hempstead, the lack of a connection with a University or research institution is likely to be an obstacle. As discussed earlier, the majority of the existing UK science parks are in University towns or connected with a Government or private sector research facility, none of which is readily available in Hemel Hempstead.
- 6.12 We would also question how such a development would be funded. Of the members of the UKSPA, the majority of the parks were developments led by a university, local authority or regional development agency. Whilst there are examples of private sector funded schemes, such as the Milton Science Park in Didcot (MEPC) or the Cambridge Research Park (Slough Estates), these tend to be in or close to established science park locations. Hemel Hempstead does not have the characteristics of a classic science park location; therefore for such a development to come forward in the town, either at the Gateway site or Spencers Park, it may well need to be public sector led.
- 6.13 Nevertheless, taking Angle Technologies conclusions that there is latent demand for 70,600 square metres of STA/science park floorspace in the Hemel Hempstead

area, we have examined the capacity of the Gateway site to accommodate this need. Assuming a 30% development density on the site, the Hemel Gateway could accommodate 50,700 square metres of floorspace. If we increase the density to 45%, which is the density suggested for standard business parks by the British Council for Offices (BCO), the site could yield 76,000 square metres of floorspace. Therefore, if the site were developed at the lower density similar to other science parks, it could accommodate over 70% of the latent demand estimated by Angle Technologies; all of the demand could be accommodated if the site were developed to the BCO standard.

### *Ancillary Facilities*

- 6.14 These initial calculations assume that ancillary facilities for employees will be provided but we have made no special allowance for this in the floorspace calculations, as this is too detailed a matter for this level of analysis. Nevertheless, we consider that the provision of ancillary facilities needs to be considered. The daytime population of north east Hemel Hempstead is approximately 25,000 people, based on the amount of employment floorspace currently in the area. This does not include the potential additional workforce at the Peoplebuilding development or that may arise from the development of the Gateway Site or Spencer's Park.
- 6.15 Facilities in north east Hemel Hempstead are currently inadequate for the size of the daytime population. There are no meaningful retail outlets in the area and restaurants are mainly on-site cafeterias such as at Breakspear Park. The leisure offer has improved recently with the opening of Esporta at Peoplebuilding but there is no centre or focus for the area and we suspect that people working in the area regularly travel elsewhere during the day for food, leisure and convenience retail. North east Hemel Hempstead is undoubtedly a major employment location in the South East but is operating in a competitive market and faces competition from other locations, particularly the major growth areas such as Milton Keynes. Whilst the area undoubtedly has advantages particularly for the distribution sector, office occupiers will be more footloose. It is important to consider what makes north east Hemel Hempstead special as place to work and do business. At present, it lacks social amenities and this affects its attractiveness as an employment location.

### **Gateway Site versus Other Opportunities**

- 6.16 If a general case can be made to justify the continued reservation of land for a science park/STA, then the Hemel Gateway site is a more attractive location than the Spencer's Park site on Three Cherry Trees Lane. The environmental quality of Spencer's Park is less conducive to science park uses. Although it is a greenfield site with open countryside on its eastern boundary, the main approach to it is via Boundary Way, Buncefield Lane or Green Lane, all of which pass through an unattractive and heavily industrialised area dominated by the Buncefield Oil Depot, warehouses and factories. Close proximity to industrial uses, and their associated noise, vibrations, odours and visual intrusion, detracts from the quality of an office environment. This can discourage occupiers, as it will have an impact both on the image of the office location (and thus the tenant/occupier) and the quality of the working environment within the development.

- 6.17 Furthermore, Spencer's Park is a peripheral office location relative to the land use pattern of the northeast Hemel Hempstead employment area. The core out of town office location in Hemel Hempstead is the Maylands Avenue/Breakspear Way area that is centred around the office campus at Breakspear Park, the new Peoplebuilding development on south Maylands Avenue and the established 1980's office complexes further north on Maylands Avenue, such as The Campus. There is some office accommodation on Boundary Way but generally this area is more mixed and is dominated by warehousing and industrial uses.
- 6.18 The Hemel Gateway site would have a high degree of visibility and commercial prominence, enabling the science park to be developed as a high profile 'destination'. The image and profile of a science park in this location would be enhanced by its proximity good quality business developments, such as Peoplebuilding, and would not be hampered by proximity to an unattractive, industrially focussed environment.

### Other Opportunities for the Gateway Site

- 6.19 Those factors that make the Hemel Gateway a suitable site for a science park are equally valid for a broader based office development if, in the longer term, a science park/STA in the Borough cannot be justified. However, the Employment Space Study has already concluded that there is a surplus of employment land in Dacorum Borough to 2021 if Spencer's Park is developed, although a shortfall is expected if Spencer's Park fails to come forward. On the basis of current predictions and policy direction, there is no justification for the development of both Hemel Gateway and Spencer's Park in the foreseeable future (i.e. to 2021).
- 6.20 When compared to the Spencer's Park site, the Gateway site has potential to be a better location for an STA, or a more broadly based office development, and this may make it a more deliverable employment site. It has better physical prominences and is better related to the existing out of town office market in Dacorum. There would therefore be merit in considering this site further as a potential alternative to the Spencer's Park site. A view will need to be taken on the landscape and open space merit of the Gateway area and local access arrangements will need detailed examination to ensure that the site is practically deliverable.



## 7 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

- 7.1 We were not asked for a definitive view on the future of the Hemel Gateway site but to give thought to the issues which the Council needs to consider in coming to a firm view on the way the site should be treated in the forthcoming LDD. There are some aspects where we have been able to come to preliminary conclusions and others where our review has raised questions which need far more depth research/technical advice than we have been able to undertake within our brief.
- 7.2 Our first point is that the Gateway site is of sufficient size and in the right location to be a 'high quality/impact' employment site. The site is in a prime location and could be developed to make a positive statement about Hemel as an employment location. It does not do this now.
- 7.3 However, the Gateway site is effectively the land to the north of Breakspear Way. To the south, there are significant constraints readily apparent and an insufficient developable area for the area to make a meaningful contribution. In the longer term, if and when any of the existing buildings and/or the balancing pond are no longer required in their current location, the position could be reviewed. But, for the foreseeable future, land to the south of Breakspear Way is not part of the Gateway equation - other than the potential to enhance the appearance (landscaping) of this side of the road.
- 7.4 There is sufficient land available to the north of Breakspear Way to make a meaningful employment development and this is what we are describing when talking about Hemel Gateway. In saying there is sufficient land, we have included site E2 and assumed that the caravan park (north of the petrol filling station) would be relocated. We have not done any detailed work to assess the effect of excluding either one or both of these from a Gateway scheme (detailed design work and market testing are needed to come to a firm conclusion) but, the preliminary view is that both sites would be needed to make a meaningful Gateway scheme.
- 7.5 We have worked on the basis that any park and ride site north of Breakspear Way would need to be as near to the M1 as possible. However, it should not be located where it would detract from the impact of a Gateway development. Therefore we have suggested a site (not included in our original brief) further to the north (along Green Lane). There are obvious traffic implications of park and ride in this location and we have no information to judge whether the possible site we have indicated might be suitable from a highway perspective.
- 7.6 Highway issues have generally been a concern for us. In the absence of advice from the Highways Authority, we have assumed that another access north from Breakspear Way, directly serving a Gateway development, would not be acceptable and have looked at accessing the site from the east and west. Our advice to the Council is, and perhaps before anything else is done, that the Highways Authority is asked for guidance on a) the capacity of the network to absorb traffic generated by a Gateway development of the scale we have indicated and a park and ride facility, b) any implications of the scheduled work to widen the M1 and c) access options for the Gateway site.

- 7.7 Redevelopment of the Gateway site is likely to require additional highway works, the cost of which will need to be met by the development. The possible scale of these and their impact on the potential development of the site are issues for later detailed consideration and lie outside our brief.
- 7.8 There is the option to develop the Gateway site for a restricted range of uses, such as the current STA definition. This would be akin to a science/technology park. Using the Angle Technology estimates we can see that there is sufficient land to do this. However, we do have reservations about the potential to create a true science/technology park in Hemel. Without an association with a higher education or other 'driver', there is no particular reason for such a scheme to succeed here. Our reservations would not necessarily be overcome by adopting a watered down version of the STA definition. We think the whole issue of a specialised high value 'science park' employment scheme without a tie-in to a higher education facility needs more thought.
- 7.9 We are also concerned about support facilities generally in the north east Hemel employment area. Facilities available are very limited and, in a competitive market, this could well be to the Gateway's disadvantage.
- 7.10 If a strong case can be made for the 'science park' option, then a high quality, well designed and imposing Gateway development would seem a better site for the purpose than Spencer's Park. The Gateway site is more prominent, has excellent and direct links with the M1 and could be designed to be a 'special place' and clearly different from adjoining employment uses.
- 7.11 Taking into account the conclusions of the Employment Land Study however, we do not consider that the development of the Gateway site should come forward if both the Leavesden Park and Spencer's Park allocations are taken up. Whilst the site is a quality location for office development, the Study has identified a surplus of 166,000 sq m of office stock in the period to 2021 if existing allocations are developed as planned. There is therefore no scope in the foreseeable future to justify the development of the Gateway site in addition to existing commitments. We would only envisage the site coming forward as an alternative to Spencer's Park; either as a science park, or a broader based office development.