

Date: 8 July 2013
Your Ref.
Our Ref: 7.16
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Dear Mrs Nicoll

Petition re Proposed Development at West Hemel Hempstead

Further to my letter of 28 May I am now able to respond to the issues raised in the petition that you and local residents have submitted to the Council in objection to the above planned development.

The Leader of the Council (who is also the Planning and Regeneration Portfolio Holder) and relevant senior Officers have been made aware of the requests set out in this petition and the response set out below. A copy of this letter has also been sent to Mr Mike Penning MP, as the petition was jointly addressed to him. This letter will shortly be published on the LA3 page of our website – www.dacorum.gov.uk/localallocations so that all petition signatories have access to the Council's response.

Background:

The Dacorum Borough Local Planning Framework Core Strategy is now at an advanced stage and the Council has taken time and care to identify what are considered, on balance, to be the best sites to bring forward for new housing. The principle of designating West Hemel Hempstead (LA3) and some other 'local allocations' (Green Belt housing sites) has been agreed by the Council. The key matter now is to set out the detail on how each site should be developed.

The decision to allocate the site at West Hemel Hempstead for development has been taken in the context of the Government's planning policy document – the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). This requires, amongst other things,



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Councils to *'positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of the area'* (para 14); and *'boost significantly the supply of new housing'* (para 47).

The decisions made regarding both the overall level of new homes and whether there should be any Green Belt releases to help deliver these new homes was discussed at an Examination in Public held in October 2012. All of the information pertaining to this Examination is available online at www.dacorum.gov.uk/corestrategyexamination. The Examination was presided over by a Planning Inspector independent of the Council. The Inspector was aware of the concerns raised by local residents over the scale and location of new homes planned: including concerns over site LA3. The Council is awaiting receipt of the final Report into the Examination from the Inspector. This is due to be received later this month and will be published on our examination webpage when available. Provided the Inspector finds the document 'sound' then the Council can formally adopt the Core Strategy. The Council's Cabinet and Full Council are expected to consider this adoption at their meetings in September (17th and 25th respectively).

Extent of the site:

The first concern raised in your petition relates to the physical extent of the site.

All of the land that comprises the LA3 proposal is currently Green Belt – both that to the north and south of the underground gas pipeline.

The draft version of the Dacorum Borough Local Plan 1991-2011 (published in October 1998) included a housing proposal that focussed on the northern slopes of the site and comprised about 550-600 new homes and open space. However, this scheme was not taken forward into the final adopted version of the Dacorum Borough Local Plan, as the release of the Green Belt around the Manor Estate meant that further Green Belt housing land was not required at this time.

However, since work began on the review of the Dacorum Borough Local Plan and production of the Council's replacement planning strategy, the whole area i.e. land bounded by Pouchen End Lane and Chaulden Lane has been under consideration. It has not been recently expanded as implied. For example, the current LA3 site was included in the Supplementary Issues and Options - Growth at Hemel Hempstead consultation held in November 2006; the Consultation Draft Core Strategy published for consultation in November 2010 and the Pre-Submission version of the Core Strategy published for consultation in October 2011.

The Council has concluded that the larger site is required to meet local housing needs and that it is also preferable to deliver a comprehensive new residential neighbourhood that can support a new primary school, shops and related facilities, rather than a smaller development where such new facilities would not be viable.

Site access:

The second concern raised in your petition relates to how the site will be accessed – and the request that Lindlings, Furze Road, Campion Road and Musk Hill are not used.

The issue of road capacity and access were key concerns raised through consultation on the emerging Core Strategy. They were also key issues considered at the stakeholder workshop held at the South Hill Centre on 15 May, at which I know you and other representatives from this area of Chaulden were present. The report of this workshop has now been published and is available on the local allocations page of the Council's website (see above). Concerns over access issues and traffic have also been discussed with committee members of the newly formed West Hemel Action Group (WHAG), with whom the Leader of the Council and Officers met on 26 June.

A Question and Answer sheet has been prepared relating to LA3 and question 13 covers the issue of how land will be accessed. It states that:

"The Council considers that the main points of vehicular access should be from Long Chaulden and The Avenue. Traffic studies show that traffic can be accommodated on the wider road network on the western side of Hemel Hempstead (with some improvements at key junctions). Vehicular access from Pouchen End Lane has been ruled out. There are however a number of other issues to consider – for example, bus, cycle and pedestrian access and routes, emergency access, the role of minor estate roads."

As the above text acknowledges, there are a number of secondary access points that will need to be considered before full access arrangements can be confirmed. For example, the Council has been advised that there is a right of access to the south eastern field (from Campion Road), and that this is owned by Hertfordshire County Council (HCC). However, this is not the same as the Council accepting that it is appropriate to use this access point to serve a part of the new housing development. At this stage the Council and the highway authority (HCC) wish to hear opinions regarding access options and these opinions will be sought as part of work to draw up the masterplan for the site (see 'Next Steps' below).

It is of course the view of HCC as the local highway authority that will ultimately determine what access points will be used. It is normal that this is decided finally through a planning application, when a detailed traffic assessment will be prepared and submitted by the applicant. However the (Borough) Council will give as much certainty as it can through the Site Allocations document (upon which we will consult next year) and the accompanying masterplan.

Next steps:

I am sure that you will understand that it is a difficult decision for any Council to identify land in the Green Belt for development, but from time to time this is necessary. In the case of Proposal LA3 and the other local allocations in the Core Strategy, the Council has reached its decision after thorough consideration. The next stage which we are moving into is how to plan each local allocation well. The best outcome will require constructive community input, which we will endeavour to achieve.

Following on from the stakeholder workshop, the Council will be asking for feedback on the principles that should be contained within the masterplan for the West Hemel Hempstead site. Consultation on these masterplan principles will run

from 15 July – 12 August. We would encourage people to submit comments using the online consultation portal. Consultation documents, including a questionnaire, are also available to download from our website, with papercopies available on request. The consultation includes an exhibition at Warners End Community Centre from 1pm-9pm on Monday 22nd July, where Officers from the Council and representatives of the landowners and developers will be available to answer your questions. The exhibition boards will then move to the Civic Centre in HemelHempstead for the remainder of the consultation period.

The Council has added the names of the petition signatories onto its planning consultation database to ensure that everyone with an interest in this site is notified of this consultation, and will continue to be informed of future opportunities to help shape this development.

If you have any further questions there is additional information on the local allocations webpage, inclosing the full Question and Answer sheet referred to above. Alternatively you can contact the Strategic Planning team on 01442 228660 or email strategic.planning@dacorum.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely

Chris Taylor
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