

4.3 Consultation Draft East of England Plan (December 2004)

The Draft Plan identified Hemel Hempstead as a key centre for development and change, but only proposed 6,300 new dwellings in Dacorum and 7,000 in St. Albans.

Entec, on behalf of The Crown Estate, responded to this document in March 2005. This response incorporated technical work relating to household projections and included the Draft Gorhambury Concept Plan. The main issues raised in this response are summarised below.

- The draft Plan does not plan to meet the housing needs of the region or make any contribution to helping address the growing problem of housing shortages in neighbouring regions or severe shortages of affordable housing in the region.
- The draft Plan does not take into account more recent household projections. The housing provision set in the Plan is driven by household projections. As preparation of the Plan has progressed, new population and household projections have become available.
- The Core Strategy does not provide a framework that allows the regional economy to grow. Such constraints will impact on economic growth and affordability of housing.
- The spatial strategy is over reliant on a small number of locations, specifically in Hertfordshire at Harlow and Stevenage which will undermine the deliverability of the RSS.
- The potential for development at Luton, Thetford and Hemel Hempstead was highlighted along with the need for Green Belt reviews in these locations.

4.4 Examination in Public (EiP) November 2005 to March 2006

A number of submissions/written statements were made to the EiP on behalf of The Crown Estate. These were then followed up with EiP appearances relating to economic issues, household projects and the London Arc (including Hemel Hempstead). There was discussion about the expansion of Hemel Hempstead and the Gorhambury Concept at the EiP.

Much of the discussion at the EiP was around the household projections which form the basis for establishing the housing provision targets set in the draft Plan. A key element of the increase in the number of households is the trend of reducing household sizes (due to greater life expectancy and household fission). Migration is the other key variable which affects the region's future population and households. Following the publication of updated demographic projections, it was considered by the Panel that the demographic pressure was greater than previously thought and that the draft Plan provided for significantly less households than the demographic information suggests. This view was also put forward by DLP on behalf of The Crown Estate.

A number of technical background papers including papers on delivery and implementation and economic development issues were also submitted to the EiP. Supplementary statements were later submitted at the request



of the Secretariat, including those on the latest household projections, the Buncefield incident and the Barker Review. The Gorhambury Concept document was submitted to the EiP library as a background document.

Entec's EiP submission relating to Hemel Hempstead included a Sustainability Statement which accords with the guidance provided by GO-East for those making representations to the EiP for alternative strategic locations and also accords with PPS11 (paragraph 2.51) which states that: "...the Panel will expect alternative options put forward at the EiP to have been the subject of an SA, if not by the RPB then by those making the relevant representations."

There were considerable objections to the draft plan, particularly from the Hertfordshire authorities who considered the levels of housing proposed for Hertfordshire to be too high. Many of the objections focused on the lack of commitment from the government for infrastructure funding.

4.5 Publication of Panel Report (June 2006)

This is the independent report prepared by the Panel who preside over the EiP which sets out their findings and recommendations for changes to the draft Plan.

One of the Panel's recommendations was for a Green Belt review and growth at Hemel Hempstead involving urban extensions. The recommended text indicated that this Green Belt review consider land in St. Albans (i.e. east of the town).

4.6 Publication of Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the Draft Revision to the RSS (for Public Consultation) in December 2006

The Secretary of State's Proposed Changes take on board the majority of the Panel's recommendations. The main exception with regard to strategic location for housing is North Harlow.

The Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to Draft RSS14 for the East of England (Policy LA12: London Arc) proposes:

"...Exceptions to the approach in (1) are made at Hemel Hempstead, Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield where strategic Green Belt reviews will be undertaken to permit these new towns to develop further as expanded Key Centres for Development and Change..."

The supporting text at paragraph 13.45 states that:

"...With their history as new towns, Hemel Hempstead, Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield have a good record of matching new housing with employment and are well-placed on strategic communications routes which makes them both attractive for business growth and accessible to the London jobs market."



The Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to Draft RSS14 for the East of England Policy LA2 specifically relates to Hemel Hempstead as a key centre for development and change and proposes that:

"...Overall housing growth of 12,000 at Hemel Hempstead and elsewhere in Dacorum by 2021...Extension of Hemel Hempstead into St. Albans District will probably be required, taking account of constraints and any opportunities arising from decisions on Buncefield and involving preparation of joint or coordinated LDDs with St. Albans DC. Identification of the urban extensions will require a strategic review of the GB that allows scope for continued growth of Hemel Hempstead until at least 2031."

The Secretary of State's Proposed Changes also identify the need for a Green Belt review at Hemel Hempstead, "involving land in Dacorum and probably St. Albans District".

Chapter 4 (Part A) of this document specifically relates to the need for housing in Dacorum and St. Albans, based on the emerging regional policy, in particular the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to Draft RSS14.

4.7 Further Consultation on Draft RSS14 Incorporating the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes

In October 2007, further changes were proposed to the draft RSS14 incorporating the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes. These changes are as a result of further work that has been undertaken related to the Habitats Directive. These proposed changes do not affect the overall levels of growth or strategy of the plan.

Given the delays to finalisation of the Regional Spatial Strategy for the East of England, GO-EAST advised local authorities in its letter to EERA in June 2007 that the delays should not hold up putting in place higher levels of sustainable growth within the region, nor should it delay progress on Development Plan Documents.

4.8 The implications of Regional Spatial Strategy development for development around Hemel Hempstead

Whilst the RSS has not yet been finalised, guidance from GO-EAST to EERA suggests that local planning authorities should progress their LDFs on the basis of higher levels of growth. The Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to Draft RSS14 provide for 12,000 new dwellings in Dacorum by 2021 and states that extension of Hemel Hempstead into St. Albans will probably be required. There is therefore a need for Dacorum to respond to this level of provision, which is in fact set out as a minimum provision in the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes. Assuming this level of growth remains in the final plan, then Dacorum will need to plan for significant growth in its Development Plan Documents. This level of growth is likely to require extension of Hemel Hempstead, and the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes indicate that extension to the east should certainly be a consideration, particularly given that it does not refer specifically to growth in any other direction.



The proposals at Gorhambury offer the opportunity to meet this need for new dwellings in the form of a sustainable urban extension at Hemel Hempstead. Allocation of the proposed development in the Dacorum/St. Albans Development Plan Documents will assist the local authorities in meeting this requirement for new housing in a sustainable way. The single land ownership at Gorhambury by The Crown Estate offers clear advantages and avoids land assembly problems that can often delay development from coming forward. The Crown Estate therefore believes that the Gorhambury Concept area should be identified in the Dacorum/St. Albans Core Strategies as a mixed use urban extension to the town in order to assist the Councils' in providing the minimum level of housing growth required in the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy.

4.9 Conclusions

The Regional Spatial Strategy for the East of England which will set the required levels of growth for Dacorum and St. Albans has not yet been finalised. It has however, been through Examination and the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes have been published. Advice from the Government Office suggests that local planning authorities should progress their LDFs on the basis of the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes. These changes provide for 12,000 new dwellings in Dacorum and makes specific reference to the possibility of an urban extension to the east of the town. Dacorum therefore needs to find additional sites to meet these needs. Proposed development on The Crown Estate's land to the east of the town can assist both Dacorum and St. Albans in meeting this regional need which will be required to be provided up to 2021. The Secretary of State's Proposed Changes indicate that similar levels of growth are likely to be required after 2021. There is also scope to meet some of this longer term growth through development of an urban extension to the east of Hemel Hempstead.





Creating the environment for business



5. Local Housing Context

5.1 Introduction

This chapter of the document focuses specifically on how Dacorum Borough Council will be able to meet the regional housing requirements as proposed in the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to Draft RSS14 (see Chapter 4 for regional context) and what their greenfield requirement will be to meet this need. It begins by briefly examining the existing housing situation in Dacorum, for 1991-2011 based on the Hertfordshire Structure Plan requirement. It goes on to consider the impact of the RSS housing requirement (as set out in the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes) in terms of how new houses will be required and where the Council may be able to provide these.

5.2 Dacorum Borough Council's Current Housing Requirement

Table A4.1 sets out the Hertfordshire Structure Plan housing requirement for Dacorum between 1991 and 2011 against completions. This shows that there is a remaining Structure Plan requirement up to 2011 of 2,019 dwellings or 404 dwellings per annum. This is around 50 dwellings per annum higher than historic completions between 1991 and 2006.

Table A4.1 Housing Requirement 1991-2011

A. Structure Plan Requirement (1991-2011)	7,200
B. Completions 1991-2006 (15 years)	5,181
C. Remaining SP Requirement (A minus B)	2,019
D. Annual Rate Required for rest of Plan period (C/5 years - remaining SP Period).	404
E. Annual Rate Achieved 1991-2006 (5,181/15)	345

Table A4.2 summarises details of current commitments and outstanding allocations.

Table A4.2 Commitments and Allocations at March 2006

A. Current Commitments		849 Consents 525 S106 <u>1,374 TOTAL</u>
B. Outstanding Allocations (Housing Proposal Sites)	Part I (pre 2006 sites)	704
	Part II (2006-2011 sites)	418*
C. Total commitments and allocations		2,496

*All Greenfield provision



As can be seen from Tables A4.1 and A4.2, Dacorum has a current identified supply of 2,496 dwellings through existing commitments and allocations. Whilst this exceeds the outstanding Structure Plan requirement by 477 dwellings, there is some uncertainty as to whether or not all of this capacity could come forward in five years.

5.3 The Impact of the RSS (Secretary of State's Proposed Changes) Housing Requirement

Table A4.3 sets out the level of housing growth proposed in Dacorum in the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to Draft RSS14 alongside completions and the required numbers to achieve to the proposed level of growth.

Table A4.3 Housing Requirement 2001-2021 (and 2031)

A. RSS Requirement (2001-2021) (set in the Secretary of States Proposed Changes)	12,000
B. Completions 2001-2006 (5 years)	1,764
C. Remaining RSS Requirement (A minus B)	10,236
D. Annual Rate Required for rest of Plan period (C/15 years - remaining RSS Period).	682
E. Annual Rate Achieved 1991-2006 (5,181/15)	345
F. Annual Rate Achieved 2001-2006 (1,764/5)	353

Table A4.3 shows that the annual completion rate required to deliver the outstanding balance in relation to the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to Draft RSS is almost double what is currently being achieved. A significant 'step-change' in annual completions is therefore required for the 14 years up to 2021 and possibly beyond up to 2031 as the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes at Policy H1 states that:

"...Local Planning Authorities should seek...to plan for continuous delivery of housing for at least 15 years from the date of adoption, the first round of local development documents should make the assumption that the annual average rate of provision during the early years after 2021 will be the same as for 2006 to 2021."

Table A4.3 also shows that in relation to identified supply at March 2006 there is a shortfall of 7,740 dwellings (10,236 minus 2,496).

5.4 Finding Land for 7,740 Dwellings in Dacorum

If the RSS requirement for 12,000 dwellings is ultimately approved in Final RSS then Dacorum needs to identify land for a further 7,740 dwellings up to 2021. At varying densities the land required could be as follows:



Table A4.4 Estimate of Land Requirement for 7,740 Dwellings by Density

Density - dwellings per hectare (dph)	Land requirement (ha)
30	258
35	221
40	194
45	172
50	155

Table A4.4 is purely based on land required for dwellings and does not include the land required for associated infrastructure, open space, landscaping and social and community facilities.

5.5 Dacorum Borough Council's View

The figures set out in this chapter indicate that the Council need to find land for 7,740 dwellings up to 2021, however Dacorum Borough Council indicate that they need to find land for just 3,181 dwellings as they take into account urban capacity sites and windfalls identified in their urban capacity study. The urban capacity study indicates a total supply of 5,994 dwellings to 2021, also adding outstanding greenfield sites (with capacity for 1,174) and 'other' sites (with capacity for 1,732). The total supply that the Council identifies is therefore 8,819 and 3,181 short of the RSS target of 12,000 (see Table A4.5).

Table A4.5 Arriving at a Capacity Estimate of 8,819

Urban Capacity 2001-2021	5,994
Greenfield Sites (allocated - Part I and Part II) these were not considered as part of the UCS.	1,068 10% increase 1,174
Other sites - urban sites and greenfield sites	1,732
TOTAL	8,900 (APPROX)

These 'other' sites that the Council includes have a quite significant influence on the total requirement. What these sites include is set out in Table A4.6.



Table A4.6 Contribution from 'other' sites

Source	Number of Dwellings
Town centre growth	725
Target for Maylands Business Area	300
10% higher density on plan sites	107
Loss of Open Land	250
Land at North East HH	350

Changes in Government policy and guidance since the urban capacity study was undertaken, mean that there is a need for Dacorum to review this, now in the form of a Housing Market Assessment. This is essential to test if the capacity of 5,994 is realistic. There is also a need to undertake work to establish if these 'other sites' are realistically going to come forward for development.

5.6 Summary of Housing Context

Table A4.7 Summary of Overall Housing and Land Requirement

	Outstanding requirement taking into account existing commitments and allocations (brownfield and greenfield)	Outstanding requirement taking into account urban capacity + greenfield allocations	Outstanding requirement taking into account urban capacity + greenfield allocations + 'other' sites
	7,740	4,832	3,181
DENSITY	HECTARES OF ADDITIONAL LAND REQUIRED		
30dph	258	161	106
35dph	221	138	91
40dph	194	121	79
45dph	172	107	71
50dph	155	97	64

NOTE: this Table is simply an *estimate* to use as a guide, based on the overall dwelling requirement in relation to average densities.

Table A4.7 shows that at 40dph, 79 hectares of greenfield land could need to be identified to meet the requirement for 3,181 in relation to the RSS requirement. The requirement for 3,181 seems to be the Council's preferred approach, which is why this column is shaded (although for the other sites they are options at this stage - to be consulted on through the LDF process).



When planning for the additional housing requirements up to 2021, Dacorum and St. Albans will also need to consider that the level of required development beyond 2021 is likely to remain at similar levels. A sensible approach would therefore be to consider development in locations where there is potential for further development beyond 2021, such as at East Hemel Hempstead. Due to the nature of the land to the east of Hemel Hempstead, there are opportunities to provide for very different types of housing in areas with significantly different character, such as in the Leverstock Green Area in the south and to the north, north and east of Three Cherry Trees Lane and south of the Nicky Line.

5.7 LDF Preparation

The joint LDF consultation (Dacorum Borough Council and St. Albans City and District Council) on Core Strategy Issues and Options relating to the growth of Hemel Hempstead put forward a number of options for possible urban extensions to Hemel Hempstead as ways of meeting the housing targets proposed by the Secretary of State in her Proposed Changes to Draft RSS14. This included the Gorhambury Concept area in the options, although it was split into several smaller areas. Comments on some of the alternative sites put forward as part of this consultation are provided in Chapter 6 of this part of the document.

5.8 Conclusions

The Crown Estate considers that its land to the east of Hemel Hempstead can assist the Council in meeting the minimum number of new dwellings required in the emerging RSS. Provision of such dwellings on this scale offers a number of advantages in terms of provision of associated community facilities and infrastructure. This should be a key consideration for the Councils in assessing the most sustainable directions for growth. Development of a number of smaller brownfield sites is unlikely to bring the same advantages in terms of infrastructure provision. It is therefore considered appropriate for the land to the east of Hemel Hempstead to be identified in the Core Strategies as a direction for growth in order to assist Dacorum in meeting its housing requirements up to 2021.





Creating the environment for business



6. Green Belt Context and Review

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to set the context for the review of the Green Belt at Hemel Hempstead and to assess the contribution that The Crown Estate's land to the east of Hemel Hempstead makes towards the purposes of including land in the Green Belt and towards the objectives of the Green Belt. It goes on to consider how a new Green Belt boundary could be defined to the east of Hemel Hempstead, to enable the town to grow whilst also creating a new robust boundary that will protect the wider countryside from inappropriate development in the longer term.

6.2 Context

Hemel Hempstead is very constrained by the Green Belt as the Green Belt boundary is tightly drawn around the town. To the east the Green Belt boundary runs around the built up area, with the proposed development at Hemel Hempstead east, between the edge of the town and the M1 motorway currently being in the Green Belt.

The Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to Draft RSS14 for the East of England (Policy LA12: London Arc) proposes:

"...Exceptions to the approach in (1) are made at Hemel Hempstead, Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield where strategic Green Belt reviews will be undertaken to permit these new towns to develop further as expanded Key Centres for Development and Change..."

The Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to Draft RSS14 at Policy SS7: Green Belt state that:

"...However, strategic reviews of Green Belt boundaries are needed in the following areas to meet regional development needs at the most sustainable locations:

Hemel Hempstead, involving land in Dacorum and probably St. Albans District;

...These reviews will have to satisfy national criteria for Green Belt releases, accord with the spatial strategy, and ensure that sufficient land is identified to avoid the need for further review to meet development needs before 2031. Where reviews cover more than one local authority area, they should be undertaken through a joint or co-ordinated approach."

There is therefore a need to consider the direction of growth at Hemel Hempstead up to 2031 so that sufficient land can be removed from the Green Belt and protected for development at the appropriate time. The supporting text to this policy at paragraph 3.29 states that strategically significant development is directed to major urban areas for sustainability reasons that apply equally to urban areas within as well as beyond the Green Belts. It is recognised that tightly drawn Green Belt boundaries, while assisting urban concentration, have made it increasingly difficult to



meet development needs and have resulted in greater dispersal of development, leading to unsustainable travel patterns.

A landscape and planning appraisal of the Green Belt land to the east of Hemel Hempstead is set out below. This assesses the land against the purposes and objectives of including land in the Green Belt as set out in PPG2.

Chapter 6, alternative sites at Hemel Hempstead considers how suitable some of the other possible urban extensions to the town are. As part of this appraisal, the contribution of each site to the purposes/objectives of the Green Belt was considered.

6.3 Landscape and Planning Appraisal

A landscape and visual appraisal was carried out of the land located to the east of Hemel Hempstead between the town and the motorway (refer to Site Location Plan, Figure A6.1) to consider its contribution to the aims, purposes and objectives of the Metropolitan Green Belt designation. As a result of the appraisal, advice has been provided on a possible alternative Green Belt boundary in landscape and visual terms.

6.4 Contribution to the Green Belt as Stated in PPG2

6.4.1 Appraisal of the Site's Contribution to the purposes/function of the Green Belt as stated in PPG2

PPG2: Green Belts sets out five purposes of including land in Green Belts at paragraph 1.5. These are:

- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- to prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another;
- to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

In respect of these five purposes of including land in the Green Belt, landscape and visual issues have been considered and the findings set out below.

'To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas'

The north eastern part of the site does play a role in checking urban sprawl due its close proximity to the settlement of Redbourn and the elevated nature of the site. Although well contained by the M1 and Nicky Line, this part of the site is visually more open to views from Redbourn and is generally viewed in context of the wider countryside.



The removal of this part of the site from the Green Belt and its development would, in landscape and visual terms, cause harm to the Green Belt function. No development is proposed in this location.

The north western part of the site plays a limited role in checking urban sprawl as it is a relatively small area of land quite well contained by valley topography. Although the southern part of this area is elevated and can be viewed from the wider countryside to the north, the area is generally well defined by woodland vegetation associated with the Nicky Line to the north, and field boundaries to the south and east. In addition, a number of urbanising elements are visible in views of this area including the M1, the eastern edge of Hemel Hempstead, and a number of pylons and overhead transmission lines (refer to Viewpoint 1, Figure A6.2). The removal of this part of the site from the Green Belt would not, in landscape and visual terms, harm the Green Belt function.

The central part of the site plays a limited role in checking the urban sprawl as it is relatively narrow; and contained and enclosed by defined boundaries - particularly the M1 to the east. The land also lies immediately adjacent to the existing urban area of Hemel Hempstead and subsequently is not well related to the wider countryside (Refer to Viewpoint 2, Figure A6.3). The removal of this part of the site from the Green Belt would not, in landscape and visual terms, harm the Green Belt function.

The southern part of the site plays a limited role in checking urban sprawl as although it occupies an elevated position, it is well enclosed by the M1 to the east, by vegetation associated with the local road network to the south and west, and by the presence of higher land directly to the south. Subsequently, views of this area from the wider countryside and existing settlement of Pimlico are restricted to glimpsed views of the A4147 and Bunkers Lane. The land is generally not well related to the wider countryside and the western area of this part of this area is located immediately adjacent to the existing urban edge of Hemel Hempstead (refer to Viewpoint 3, Figure A6.4). The removal of this part of the site from the Green Belt would not, in landscape and visual terms, harm the Green Belt function.

Development in accordance with the landscape strategy (as proposed in Part D of this document) would reinforce the Nicky Line, M1, A4147, Bunkers Lane and Bedmond Road as well defined boundaries through the provision of additional structure planting. This would therefore not lead to sprawl of the built-up area but would ensure that the new Green Belt boundary would be a clear boundary which would prevent any future sprawl.

It is considered that the landscape strategy could ensure the proposed development would provide an appropriate transition between town and country.

‘To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another’

The northern part of the site is located between the eastern edge of Hemel Hempstead and the south western edge of Redbourn. The north eastern part of the site is a broad triangular piece of land located to the south west of the settlement of Redbourn and the M1. This part of the site is well related to both the wider countryside and the settlement of Redbourn and prevents these settlements from merging. In landscape and visual terms this land should be retained as open land. It is considered that development within the north western part of the site subject



to the retention of land to the north east as Green Belt would have little effect on this Green Belt function in landscape and visual terms.

The central part of the site is a relatively narrow piece of land separated from the wider countryside by the M1. St. Albans (located 2.2km to the south west) and Redbourn (located 1.8km to the north east) are separated from the site by significant and well defined areas of intervening farmland. The development of this part of the site would have little effect on this Green Belt function in landscape and visual terms.

The southern part of the site is separated from the wider countryside by the M1 to the east and vegetation associated with the local road network and elevated land further south. Although located 0.6km from the settlement of Pimlico, a significant swathe of well defined and elevated countryside associated with Blackwater Wood prevents these settlements from merging in landscape and visual terms.

Development in accordance with the landscape strategy would not result in merging of neighbouring towns. In particular the M1 motorway provides a clear boundary between Hemel Hempstead and St. Albans which is over 2km away.

‘To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment’

The site is physically well separated from the wider open countryside by the M1 and local road network.

The central and southern parts of the site are visually separated from the wider open countryside due to the presence of the M1 to the east, and vegetation associated with the road network to the south. These sites are well related to the existing urban edge of Hemel Hempstead and make limited contribution to the open countryside in landscape and visual terms.

The north-western part of the site is for the most part visually separated from the wider open countryside - especially the area related to lower lying land adjacent to the Nicky Line. Clear open views of the wider open countryside are available from a small area of elevated land and north facing slopes located within the north-western part of the site. Where elevated the north-western part of the site, in landscape and visual terms, is well related to the countryside.

The north eastern part of the site has clear open views of the wider countryside and, in landscape and visual terms, is well related to the open countryside and performs this function well.

Development in accordance with the landscape strategy will provide an appropriate transition between town and country through the provision of a greener edge and enhanced landscape setting to Hemel Hempstead.

‘To preserve the setting and special character of Historic Town’

This purpose is not very relevant to the land to the east of Hemel Hempstead as St. Albans is the nearest historic town, although it is some distance away. The site contributes little to the setting and special character of the historic town of St. Albans.



Views of the site from the wider countryside are limited by screening elements such as intervening topography and vegetation; and the dispersed nature of potential visual receptors.

Views of the central part of the site from the wider countryside and approaches to Hemel Hempstead are principally from the M1 and local road/public footpaths located to the east of the M1 within the wider countryside. These views are dominated by the Buncefield Oil Depot, Breakspears development, adjacent industrial/commercial development; the M1 and associated traffic; all of which dominate the eastern edge of Hemel Hempstead. The central part of the site is for the most part screened by the M1 and associated traffic, and is well related to the industrial/commercial development that forms the existing urban edge.

Views of the northern part of the site from the wider countryside and approaches to Hemel Hempstead are principally from the local road/footpaths located to the north of the site, from the Nicky Line, and from the settlement of Redbourn. From vantage points located to the north, the north eastern part of the site is perceived as being well related to the wider countryside. Views of the north western part of the site from the wider countryside and approaches to Hemel Hempstead are principally from the local road/footpaths located to the north of the site and from the Nicky Line. The site is not perceived as being well related to the existing urban edge.

Views of the southern part of the site from the wider countryside and approaches to Hemel Hempstead are principally from local road/footpaths located to the south and west of the site. These views are glimpsed through vegetation associated with field boundaries/road corridors, and for the most part the site is not visible.

‘To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict or other urban land’

The area of Green Belt between the town and M1 does not meet this purpose. Much of the Green Belt land at this location is poor quality urban fringe. The proposed development of this land will in fact assist in the regeneration of the town, in particular the eastern part of the town, but there will also be benefits for the wider town. As a new town, Hemel was designed to grow, but has now reached a stage at which there is a need for regeneration and new development, particularly following the Buncefield incident.

6.4.2 Appraisal of the Site’s Contribution to the objectives of the Green Belt as stated in PPG2

PPG2 identifies at paragraph 1.6 that Green Belts should have a positive role to play in fulfilling the following objectives:

- to provide opportunities to access to the open countryside for the urban population;
- to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation near urban areas;
- to retain attractive landscapes, and enhance landscapes, near to where people live;
- to improve damaged and derelict land around towns;



- to secure nature conservation interest; and
- to retain land in agricultural, forestry and related uses.

Paragraph 1.7 however, states that the extent to which the use of land fulfils these objectives is not itself a material factor in the inclusion of land with a Green Belt, or in its continued protection.

An assessment of the land to the east of Hemel Hempstead in relation to the above objectives is set out in the following paragraphs:

‘To provide opportunities for access to the open countryside for the urban population’

There are only three footpaths that currently run through the site. The northern part of site contains a public footpath that runs parallel to Cherry Tree Lane. The central part of the site contains a footpath that runs parallel to the A414, and a footpath that runs between Westwick Row and the M1.

As a part of the landscape and recreation strategy a comprehensive system of footpaths would be proposed to improve existing connections and provide new routes connecting Hemel Hempstead to the wider countryside.

‘To provide opportunities for outdoor sport and other recreation near urban areas’

This objective of the Green Belt is not applicable as the site is comprised of agricultural land and is not used for recreational purposes.

Development in accordance with the landscape strategy will provide an opportunity for the enhancement of existing Public Rights of Way and the provision of additional recreational resource, thus improving links to the countryside to the east of the M1.

‘To retain attractive landscapes and enhance landscapes near to where people live’

The site is designated as a part of a broad ‘Landscape Development Area’ in accordance with St. Albans Local Plan (1994)’. The Local Plan policy relating to this states that:

“These areas are in need of attention. Structure Plan Policy 7 therefore seeks to guide long-term change, secure renewal, improvement and management of landscapes, and create new landscapes.”

The proposed landscape strategy would ensure the retention and enhancement of existing landscape features and characteristics considered of value; and would implement and manage landscapes in a manner sensitive to existing landscape character.

‘To improve damaged and derelict land around towns’

The site does not contain any damaged or derelict land and therefore this objective is not applicable to these sites.



‘To secure nature conservation interest’

The arable farmland forming the majority of the site is of negligible nature conservation importance. There are no statutory sites of nature conservation value within the site, although there are three non-statutory Wildlife Sites (WS) within this area, and one outside, but adjacent to it. These would be retained within the proposals. There are ample opportunities for any required mitigation or compensation and biodiversity enhancement within the proposed development and the land to the east of the M1, subject to agreement of tenants of the latter.

‘To retain land in agricultural, forestry and related uses’

The site is currently agricultural land and therefore this objective of the Green Belt is applicable to the site. PPS7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas does however state at paragraph 28 that:

“The presence of best and most versatile agricultural land... should be taken into account alongside other sustainability considerations (e.g. biodiversity, the quality and character of the landscape, its amenity value or heritage interest; accessibility to infrastructure, workforce and markets; maintaining viable communities; and the protection of natural resources, including soil quality) when determining planning applications.”

The need for growth at Hemel Hempstead should be balanced with the need for agricultural land. There are significant shortages of affordable housing in the area, and the proposed development offers the opportunity to provide significant numbers of new affordable housing. Issues such as this, and the potential benefits of the proposed development, need to be weighed against the value of the agricultural land that would be lost. The growth proposals for Hemel Hempstead will most likely involve the development of greenfield and Green Belt land on the outskirts of the town. This will inevitably involve the loss of agricultural land.

6.4.3 Defining New Green Belt Boundaries

The policy context for the review of the Green Belt at Hemel Hempstead is set at the regional level, and as set out in the section on Regional Context, the Secretary of State’s Proposed Changes to RSS14 identify the need for Green Belt review at Hemel Hempstead and that this should consider the direction of growth up to 2031.

PPG2 at paragraph 2.8 states that:

“Where detailed Green Belt boundaries have not yet been defined, it is necessary to establish boundaries that will endure. They should be carefully drawn so as not to include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open. Otherwise there is a risk that encroachment on the Green Belt may have to be allowed in order to accommodate future development. If boundaries are drawn excessively tightly around existing built-up areas it may not be possible to maintain the degree of permanence that Green Belts should have.”

Regarding the location of an alternative Green Belt boundary in landscape and visual terms, it is recommended that the southern edge of the Nicky Line or Redbourn Road, the western and southern edges of woodland located to the south of the Beeches, the western edge of the M1, the northern edge of the A4147 and Bunker’s Lane, and the



eastern edge of Bedmond Road would form a long term defensible Green Belt boundary (refer to Figure A5.5). Through reinforcing these southern boundaries with structural planting, this boundary would provide a well defined and defensible boundary that would accord with paragraph 2.9 of PPG2. This would also serve to reinforce the visual and physical separation of urban development from the countryside and would provide an enhanced setting to the eastern edge of Hemel Hempstead.

The M1 is a clear enduring boundary which will act as a long term boundary to Hemel Hempstead in the longer term.

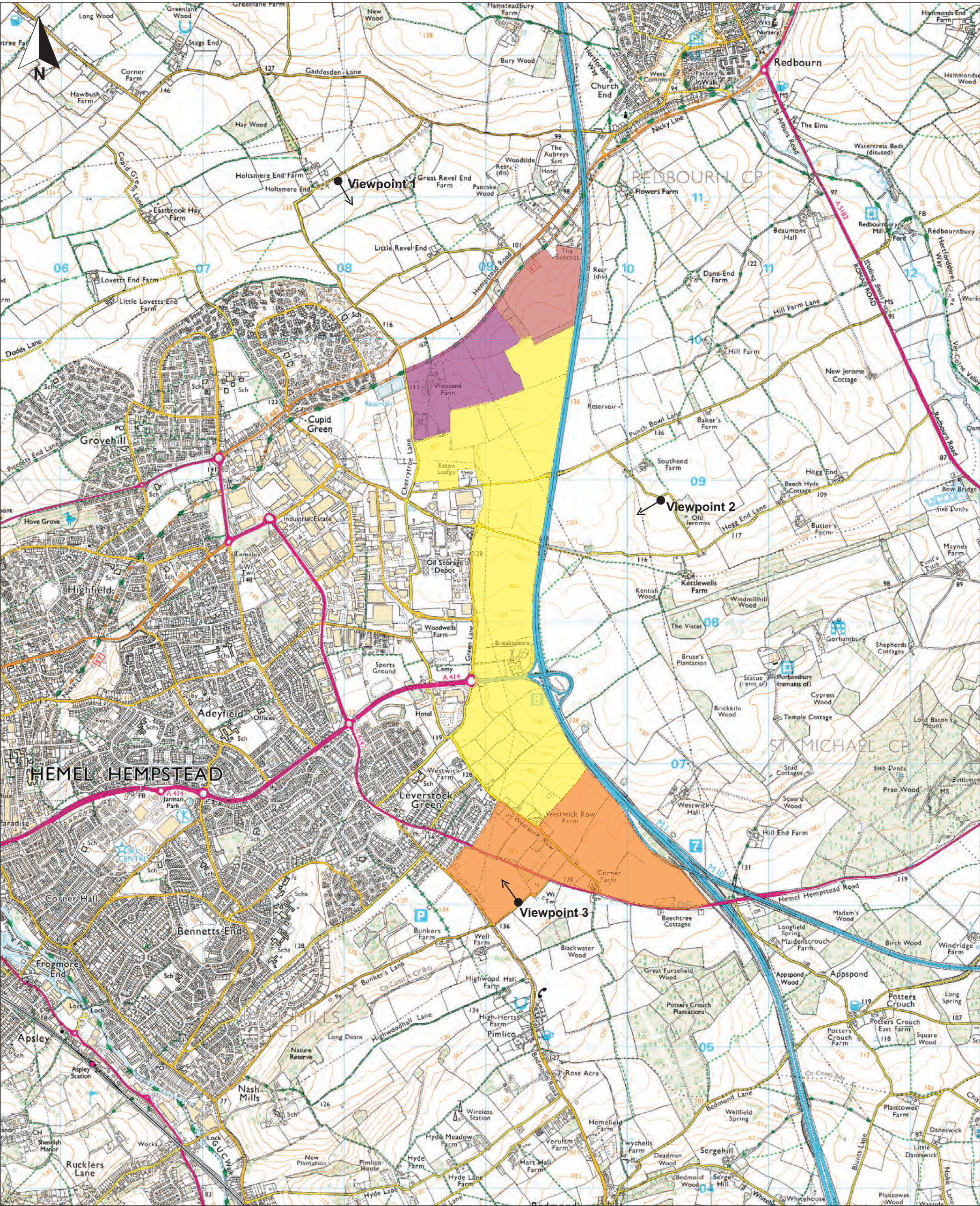
6.5 Conclusions

The growth of Hemel Hempstead is very constrained by the Green Belt, and this is recognised in the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to RSS14 which identify the need for a strategic review of the Green Belt boundary at Hemel Hempstead, involving land in Dacorum and probably St. Albans. This chapter highlights the need to consider the most appropriate direction for growth at Hemel Hempstead and the need to release sufficient land from the Green Belt to meet housing needs up to 2031 as set out in the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to Draft RSS14. Considering growth needs up to 2031 will ensure that further Green Belt reviews up to 2031 can be avoided.

On the basis of the assessment of the land to the east of Hemel Hempstead as set out above, it can be concluded that the site contributes little to the purposes and objectives of the Green Belt as set out in PPG2. Due to the location and relatively well contained and enclosed character of the site, it is considered suitable for development. There is limited public access to the site at present, and development of the site will offer an opportunity to provide new recreational links and possibly extended footpaths to the east of the M1, thus providing new links to the countryside for the new residents and the existing population of the town.

In the context of RSS14 for the East of England, the proposed new Green Belt boundary would provide a long term robust boundary which would not need to be reviewed until 2031. It would ensure that the town can expand as necessary in a sustainable way, and would avoid development being pushed beyond the Green Belt boundary resulting in more travel by private car.





Key

- Southern part of the site
- Central part of the site
- North west part of the site
- North east part of the site
- Viewpoint

The Crown Estate
Gorhambury LDF Submission

Figure A6.1
Site Location: Landscape

0 km 1.5 km

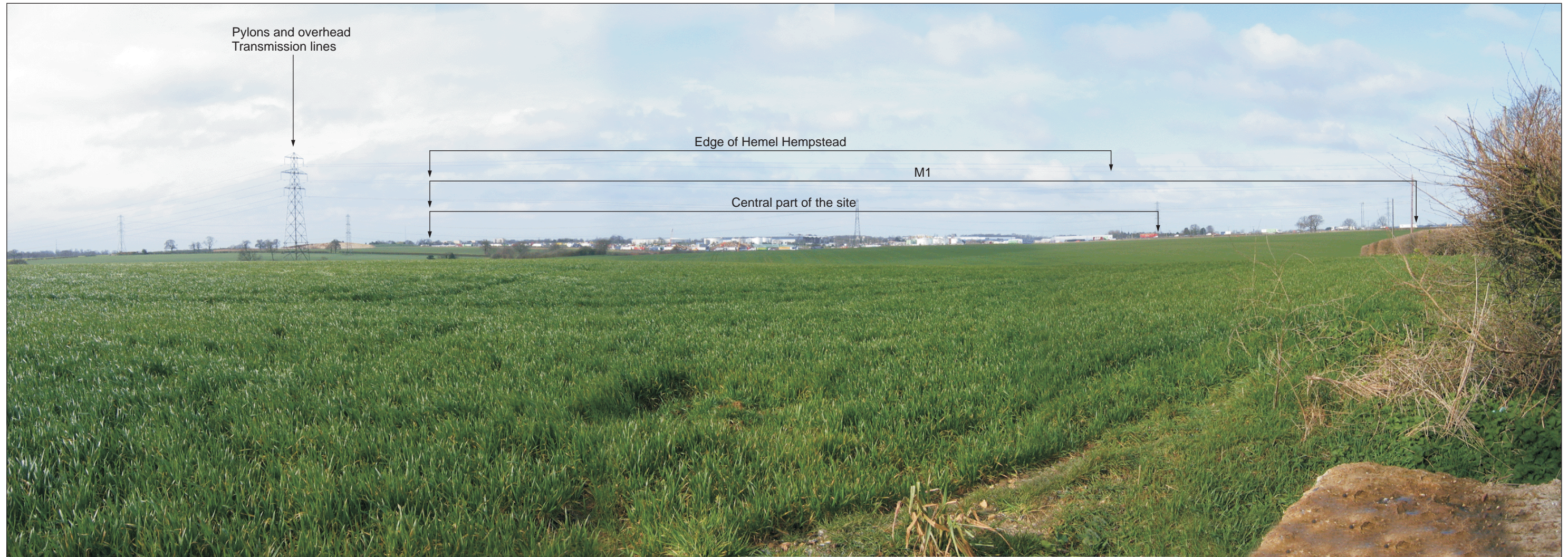
November 2007
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Viewpoint 1



Viewpoint 2

The Crown Estate
Gorhambury LDF Submission

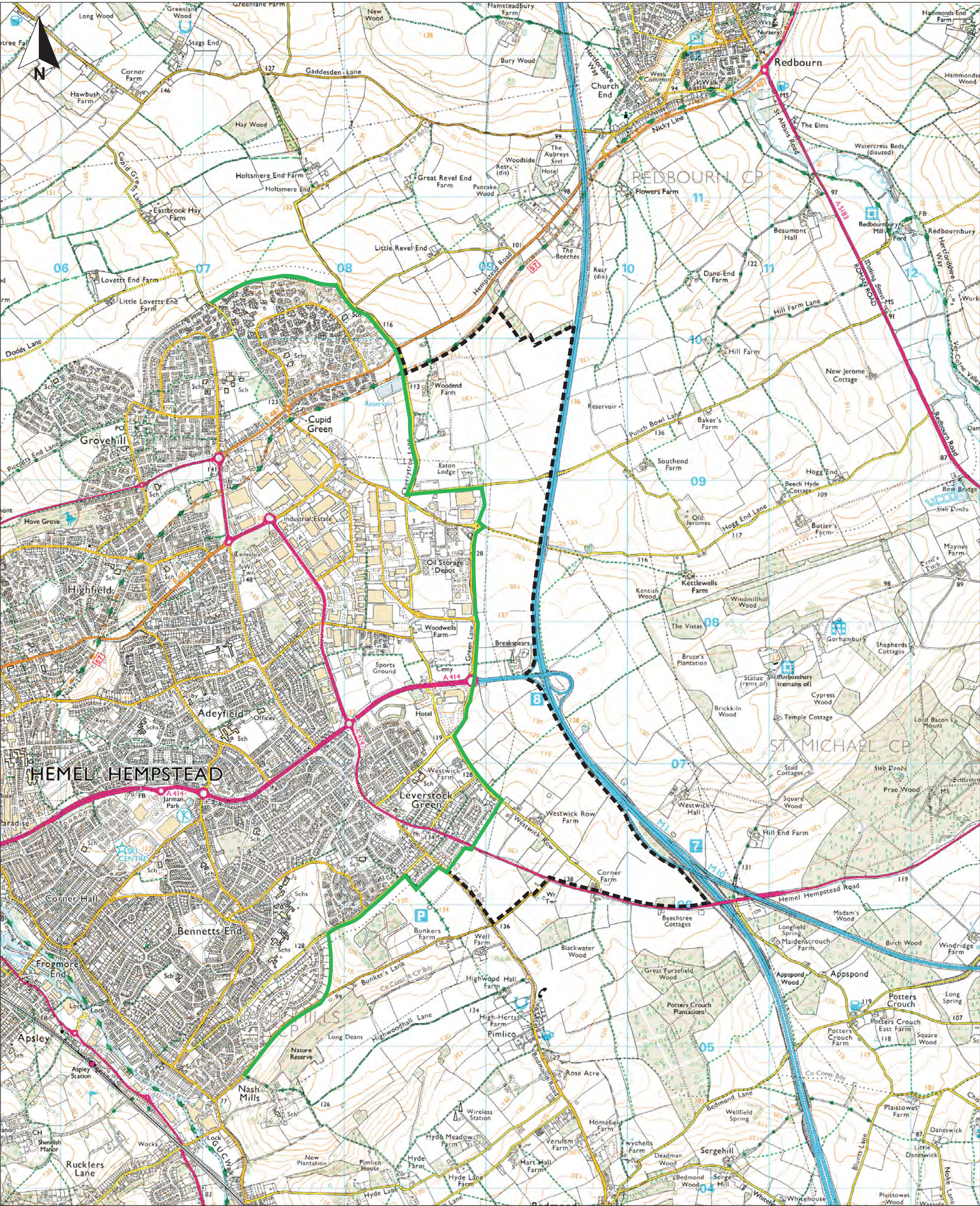
Figure A6.3
Viewpoint 2: Landscape

November 2007
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Viewpoint 3



Key

- Proposed Green Belt boundary
- Existing Green Belt boundary

The Crown Estate
Gorhambury LDF Submission
Figure A6.5
Proposed Green Belt Boundary

0 km 1.5 km

December 2007
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7. Alternative Locations for Growth at Hemel Hempstead

7.1 Introduction

As part of its joint consultation (Dacorum Borough Council and St. Albans City and District Council) on the Core Strategy Issues and Options for Growth at Hemel Hempstead, a number of possible options for urban extensions to Hemel Hempstead were put forward (please see the Figure A3.1, page A9). These options included the land owned by The Crown Estate to the east of the town. This chapter sets out an overview of the high level appraisal that was undertaken of these alternative sites.

7.2 High Level Appraisal of Alternative Sites

A high level appraisal of these alternatives has been undertaken. This considered the following:

Site Characteristics and Constraints

- Physical Constraints
- Ownership Constraints
- Landowner/Developer Aspirations
- Other Constraints
- Sustainability

Site Context

- Impacts on Landscape Character
- Relationship to Existing Built Form
- The Green Belt
- Local Plan Policy

This appraisal concluded that overall The Crown Estate's land to the east of the town performed well against the other sites on a number of grounds. In particular the scale of opportunity to the east of the town would ensure much greater potential for provision of new infrastructure including community facilities and services than a number of the other options. At the same time, development to the east would still provide people with a choice of locations for new housing as the northern and southern parts of the Gorhambury Concept area to the east of the town are very different in character.



A number of the other possible locations for growth are unsuitable given their status as a country park, risks associated with flooding, possible negative impacts on local character (Old Town and Conservation Area) and likely coalescence with Redbourn. In comparison, the land to the east of Hemel Hempstead currently has very limited public access, it is not used as a recreational resource and there are no risks of flooding. Development to the east of the town would not impact on any Conservation Areas or areas with special character, and there would not be any coalescence with Redbourn as the north eastern part of The Crown Estate's land at this location would be retained as open space.

A number of the alternative locations put forward as possible urban extensions to Hemel Hempstead do not have clear defensible long term Green Belt boundaries and would result in urban sprawl and encroachment into the open countryside with no longer term clear boundary. Much of the Green Belt land to the east of Hemel Hempstead on the other hand is poor quality urban fringe and development of this land would assist in improving the area and would assist in the regeneration of the eastern part of Hemel Hempstead, including the Maylands and Buncefield area.

Other sites suffer from access constraints, physical detachment from the urban area, being areas of moderate scenic beauty, having a landscape with a low capacity to accept development, proximity of Regionally Important Geological Sites and close proximity to a number of environmental designations. There are no environmental constraints to development to the east of the town, the landscape has a moderate to high capacity to accept development and has a relatively lower landscape character sensitivity (reflecting its arable land use, the appearance of field amalgamation and presence of overhead power lines and M1). Given the above factors, in particular the lack of major constraints and the location of the M1 which could be a clear long term new Green Belt boundary, land to the east performs well as a location for development. In addition, the scale of the proposed development to the east of the town enables key new infrastructure to be provided, leading to the conclusion that east Hemel Hempstead is a more sensible direction for growth than the other possible directions for urban extensions that have been identified by Dacorum and St. Albans.

7.3 Conclusions

This chapter has set out an overview of the possible locations for growth, or urban extensions put forward by Dacorum and St. Albans as part of their Core Strategy Issues and Options Paper. Overall, The Crown Estate's land to the east of the town performed well against other sites around the town. In particular the large scale of The Crown Estate's land offers advantages in terms of infrastructure provision, including community facilities and services. There are no risks associated with flooding, loss of public open space or negative impacts on Conservation Areas as there are with a number of the other sites. A clear advantage of this site is the clear defensible Green Belt boundary, the M1 which would act as a boundary to longer term development. The majority of other locations do not have such a clear and obvious new Green Belt boundary.



8. Conclusions

The preceding chapters have established an evidence base for the consideration of Hemel Hempstead, and of The Gorhambury Concept area, as a location where significant urban development might take place in order to meet a number of important regional and local planning objectives.

The issues involved are clearly complex and require the adoption of a long term strategic view. At this stage of the LDF process and on the evidence presented here, it is possible to draw the following broad conclusions about the future of the Gorhambury Concept area in the context of the emerging LDFs.

- Major new development at eastern Hemel Hempstead would be timely in providing a significant boost to efforts to regenerate the town in employment and social terms. Development of the scale proposed could offer significant benefits to the regeneration of the whole town, potentially offering an opportunity to create a new Hemel Gateway creating an improved ‘entrance’ to the town from the M1, and offering an opportunity to provide a high profile site for a new town stadium. The proposals have been developed within the context of the growth of the whole town rather than in isolation.
- At the regional level, the Secretary of State’s Proposed Changes to Draft RSS14 for the East of England require significant growth at Hemel Hempstead and indicate that consideration should be given to an urban extension to the east of the town. The Gorhambury proposals offer an opportunity for meeting this requirement for growth in a sustainable way that assists in the regeneration of the town. The Dacorum and St. Albans Core Strategy Preferred Options Development Plan Documents should therefore identify significant growth to the east of the town.
- An assessment of the local housing context demonstrates that even taking into account urban capacity sites, windfalls, outstanding greenfield sites and ‘other’ sites, there is a need for new greenfield sites to be identified in order to meet the need for growth in Dacorum and in particular to meet longer term growth up to 2031. The Crown Estate’s land to the east of Hemel Hempstead should therefore be identified in the LDF in order to meet this need for new dwellings on greenfield sites.
- The Green Belt to the east of Hemel Hempstead between the edge of the urban area and the M1 is currently performing poorly in terms of its key purposes and wider uses. A redefinition of the boundary along the M1 would at once provide breathing space for Hemel Hempstead to grow sustainably, whilst ensuring a long term defensible Green Belt boundary on the town’s eastern edge.
- With regard to alternative development locations, the Gorhambury Concept area offers the best balance of opportunity, variety and flexibility and impact of the sites considered as realistic alternatives. The scale of the development also offers significant advantages over other sites in terms of ability to provide new infrastructure.





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