



Dacorum Borough Council

Local Planning Framework

DACORUM CORE STRATEGY EXAMINATION IN PUBLIC

Statement of Common Ground as agreed between

**Dacorum Borough Council,
and
Sellwood Planning for Gleeson Strategic Land and
The Homes and Communities Agency**

in respect of Local Allocation LA1 Land at Marchmont Farm, Hemel
Hempstead

and:

Representations 758, 761, 762, 768 and 770 from Sellwood Planning
(Representor 621389) for Gleeson Strategic Land.

August 2012

Purpose of this Statement

The purpose of this statement is to inform the Inspector and other parties about the areas of agreement between Dacorum Borough Council (DBC) and land owning interests, including Sellwood Planning for Gleeson Strategic Land, in relation to matters relating to the Pre-Submission Core Strategy.

Background

The Council, as local planning authority, and parties representing the key landowners have met several times to discuss how Local Allocation LA1 can be delivered. Joint discussion and agreement has covered technical work and future consultation concerning the Core Strategy and planning process. The evidence base has been extended where appropriate.

The first statement which follows relates specifically to Local Allocation LA1 and has been agreed by all the parties.

The second statement refers to representations on other matters and the Council's proposed changes in the Report of Representations.

Agreed Matters: (1) Local Allocation LA1

Dacorum Core Strategy

Site LA1 : Marchmont Farm Joint Planning Statement

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this Joint Planning Statement is to confirm that the proposed Marchmont Farm allocation is available and deliverable, meeting the criterion of ‘effectiveness’ set out in paragraph 182 of the National Planning Policy Statement.
- 1.2 This Joint Planning Statement is the result of collaboration between the landowners / option holders and the Council, as local planning authority. All are committed to the implementation of the Marchmont Farm proposed housing site in accordance with the submitted Core Strategy Policy LA1. The landowners / option holders are Dacorum Borough Council (DBC), the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and Gleeson Development Ltd (GDL).

2.0 Land Control

- 2.1 The potential site area is subdivided into three ownerships as shown on the plan in **Appendix 1**. Gleeson control, by Option, the southern part of the site and the access on to the link road. The Option runs until 2031. Dacorum Council owns a small paddock on the north eastern boundary adjoining Grovehill and the Government’s property body, the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), owns the remainder of the potential site as well as further land to the west. The Council also owns the adjoining Margaret Lloyd Park.
- 2.2 Since all three landowners support the proposed LA1 allocation and are willing for their land to be brought forward in accordance with the Core Strategy proposal, there

are no land ownership impediments to the successful development of the site. In addition, Gleeson is an experienced housebuilder.

3.0 Planning Context

3.1 The Marchmont Farm site, along with all other potential development locations, has been the subject of a full planning assessment and Sustainability Appraisal process. This is set out generally in the Council's evidence base, but more particularly in the 'Assessment of Local Allocations and Strategic Sites' June 2012 document (**Examination Document HG15**).

3.2 The assessment was a three stage approach whereby the number of sites was reduced at each stage, as inappropriate sites were rejected. Stage 1 discounted locations which failed key SA / SEA designations and deliverability criteria. Stage 2 then tested the reduced number of sites against the (then) PPG2 criteria and Stage 3 reviewed the remaining sites against wider sustainability criteria and the Draft Core Strategy vision and objectives. The result of this process was the selection of Marchmont Farm as a proposed allocation for around 300 dwellings.

3.3 The detail of the Marchmont Farm assessment concluded

- Stage 1 : No impact on key environmental designations and the site promoters support delivery. Also noted the support for the allocation of the site by the last Local Plan Inspector as a logical extension to Grovehill
- Stage 2 : The PPG2 purposes were assessed. The impact on the Green Belt was felt to be limited
- Stage 3 : When considered against wider sustainability criteria, the assessment concluded (p 35) that "Marchmont Farm is the most sustainable of the greenfield sites considered". It is also assessed as a deliverable option, which does not require significant new infrastructure.

- 3.4 On the basis of the above, the report concluded that Marchmont Farm should be the first Green Belt site to be developed in Hemel Hempstead (p 177).
- 3.5 After the adoption of the Core Strategy, Dacorum Council will progress the Sites Allocation DPD. The parties will continue their collaboration and elaborate how the site should be developed through a Master Plan. This will help expedite the adoption of the Sites Allocation DPD and prepare the way for the submission of a planning application.
- 3.6 All parties acknowledge the Council's and HCA's position that the local allocation may need to accommodate a small number of pitches for travellers, in addition to housing. The area was identified as a potential location, together with others, in the Scott Wilson Report (**Examination Document HG5**). The Council expects any decision to be taken in the light of an updated Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment and further consideration and examination through the Site Allocations DPD.

4.0 Access and Movement

- 4.1 The development of Marchmont Farm for housing has been discussed between Gleeson Homes and Hertfordshire County Council as the local highways authority over a number of years. During these previous discussions, the options of either a priority junction access or a roundabout onto the East-West Link Road (A4147) were developed. This was reflected in a recent transport modelling exercise undertaken as part of the evidence base for the Core Strategy which included the principle of an access on to the Link Road. Potential access options are shown on the attached Vectos plan (**Appendix 2**) together with connections to existing cycle route on the southern side of Link Road. There is some flexibility in the precise location of the access. The potential for a secondary access onto Laidon Square into the Grovehill Estate has been retained. This could be an access for all vehicles or an emergency access only. Both of the access options onto Link Road would have more than sufficient capacity to accommodate up to 300 residential units.

4.2 Either main access option will provide crossing facilities for pedestrians and cyclists to reach the existing route on the southern side of Link Road. Piccotts End Lane runs through the site and provides a connection for pedestrians and cyclists to both Grovehill, including the local centre, and to existing bus services. It also provides a connection to Piccotts End to the west. Within the site, roads will be designed in accordance with the principles of the Manual for Streets Design Guide to ensure that vehicles do not dominate the layout while ensuring access for servicing, refuse collection and emergency vehicles.

5.0 Agricultural Land Quality

5.1 An assessment of the Agricultural Land Quality of the original Marchmont Farm site was undertaken by J M Hollis in July 1987. The area surveyed is shown on the attached plan (**Appendix 3**) and whilst it does not quite encompass the whole of the potential LA1 site, it is considered representative of the complete area. Importantly, this was a survey done with a soil auger rather than a desk study and is therefore based on actual empirical evidence. The attached plan shows that the majority of the area is classified as Grade 3B with smaller areas of 3A to the east and south. Whilst the assessment was done in 1987, there is no evidence that the quality of the land would have materially changed in the last 25 years.

5.2 The development of Marchmont Farm would, therefore, accord with the approach set out in the NPPF (para. 112) by primarily developing Grade 3B agricultural land which is of lower quality.

6.0 Archaeology

6.1 A desk based archaeological assessment was undertaken of the site by CgMs in October 2004 (**Examination Document JS9**). The study notes that there are no statutorily protected sites within the LA1 site. The nearest Scheduled Ancient Monument is at Gadesbridge Park and the report concludes that there would be no impacts on this site or its setting.

- 6.2 The report notes that there is a low potential for evidence on site dating to the Prehistoric, Saxon / early Medieval or Medieval periods. However, there is moderate potential for the presence of stray finds dating to the Roman period.
- 6.3 The County Council's Historic Buildings Advisor has been consulted on the proposed allocation and a copy of the reply forms **Appendix 4**. This confirms that whilst the site has a moderate potential for the presence of heritage assets of archaeological significance, there is no overriding archaeological constraints which would prevent the allocation of the site for housing. However, further assessments to determine the significance of the heritage assets will be required to inform the masterplanning process and prior to the submission of any planning application.

7.0 Ecology

- 7.1 A Phase 1 Habitat Survey was undertaken of the potential LA1 site by LDA Design in October 2004. This found that there are no statutory wildlife sites within 2km. There are however three County Wildlife Sites (CWS) within 2 km. One of these, Howe Grove, is also a Local Nature Reserve and lies directly to the south, on the opposite side of the A4147. The other two CWSs are the meadow by the River Gade to the north west and the disused railway line to the south east. It is not anticipated that the development will have any material adverse impact on these CWSs.
- 7.2 An update of the Phase 1 Habitat Survey (**Examination Document JS10**) was undertaken by LDA in July 2012. This confirmed that there have been no material changes since 2004.
- 7.3 With regard to habitat, the bulk of the site is dominated by improved grassland. There are some areas of semi improved grassland to the north and east of the site, however areas of species richness are likely to be of only local importance. These could either be retained in situ or translocated.
- 7.4 A badger sett has been recorded on site and updated surveys will be required prior to development. Some trees have the potential for bat roosts. However all trees and

hedgerows are proposed for retention. Further bat, breeding birds and reptiles surveys will need to be undertaken to support a planning application.

- 7.5 It is recognised that there are important ecological corridors through and around the site to Howe Grove, Margaret Lloyd Park (which is also sometimes referred to as Grovehill Park in the Landscape Assessment) and the wider countryside, and these linkages will need to be maintained.

8.0 Landscape and Visual Assessment

- 8.1 A Landscape Assessment was initially undertaken by LDA Design in November 2004 and this was updated in June 2012 (**Examination Document JS11**). The report concludes that whilst the development of the site will change its landscape character, the landscape and visual context of the site and the degree of partial visual containment provided by the topography and existing vegetation, means that the site has capacity to absorb development. The site forms part of a wider landscape tract (the High Gade Valley), as defined by the Landscape Character Assessment (**Examination Document EN2**) where opportunities should generally be taken to conserve and strengthen the landscape character. It contains urban edges which are both screened and unscreened. The site is elevated in places but because of a local ridge line, does not form an especially prominent element in the wide valley landscape or setting of Hemel Hempstead and Piccotts End. The developed site is capable of assimilation, if correctly masterplanned and appropriately landscaped, without significant detriment to the overall landscape character of the area. A softer edge between the town and the Green Belt could be achieved through sensitive development of this site.
- 8.2 The 2004 Landscape and Visual Assessment and 2012 Landscape Appraisal have informed the preparation of the ‘Constraints and Opportunities’ (**Appendix 5**) and ‘Key Landscape and Development Principles’ (**Appendix 6**).
- 8.3 Section 10 explains how the Landscape and Visual Assessment has informed the Concept Master Plan.

9.0 Utilities and Services

- 9.1 A Utilities Assessment has been undertaken of the site. This has confirmed that no utility services or infrastructure cross the site (above or below ground) but a range of service connections exist close to the site boundary. In summary, no capacity constraints have been identified. Whilst Thames Water is likely to require developer funded capacity studies, it supports the development strategy.
- 9.2 Electricity : There is no EDF cabling or apparatus within the potential LA1 site. There is an existing high voltage cable in the Link Road to the south as well as a low voltage cable in the residential roads in Grovehill. There appear to be no significant issues involved in providing an electricity supply to the site.
- 9.3 Gas : There are no Transco mains or associated apparatus within the potential LA1 site. However there is a low pressure main to the east of the site and a 6 inch low pressure main in the carriageway of Marlborough Rise. Gas can be provided to the site.
- 9.4 Water : Thames Water have water mains and associated apparatus on the boundary of the potential LA1 site. Foul and surface water sewers run along the southern and eastern boundaries of the site. Diversionary works are not anticipated in creating the access on to the Link Road since the services are already situated in the carriageway.
- 9.5 Telecommunications : There are no BT mains or apparatus within the potential LA1 site. However, there is an underground network in Grovehill to the east. Whilst there is BT apparatus to the south of the site, this is not envisaged as a constraint to development.
- 9.6 Foul Drainage : Thames Water is working on an impact study looking at the capacity of Maple Lodge Treatment Works. Investment in this plant is expected to come forward in due course. Thames Water also says that developer funded studies will be necessary to fund capacity studies to identify any capacity constraints with the

existing networks. This may be necessary to fully determine infrastructure up-grade requirements arising from LA1. Thames Water has expressed support for the development strategy of a small number of large sites (including LA1) as being one that can more readily be accommodated in infrastructure planning.

10.0 Key Landscape and Development Principles for the Development

10.1 A concept master plan ('Key Landscape and Development Principles') for the development of the Marchmont Farm local allocation is attached (**Appendix 6**). This represents a synthesis of the factors described in sections 2 to 9 above and set out in the 'Constraints and Opportunities' Plan (**Appendix 5**). These have been prepared by LDA Design and reflect the following principles which seek to strengthen the assessed landscape character of the area by

- establishing a permanent defensible Green Belt boundary that is appropriately 'soft' and is considered an appropriate response in defining the separation of Piccotts End from the new edge of Hemel Hempstead
- introducing a long term planted boundary to the site to establish a strong western and southern edge to contain the site with the planting of native species following the pattern of existing field boundaries
- retaining views to Piccotts End from Hemel Hempstead along the A4147
- retaining open land on the prominent ridgeline shoulder of the site, to include new planting
- designing the layout to retain views to Grovehill Wood (in Margaret Lloyd Park), where possible
- respecting the topography of the site and align development with the site contours, where possible

- retaining and enhancing Piccotts End Lane and Grovehill wooded edge as features in the site layout
- avoiding unnecessarily puncturing Piccotts End Lane with too many road crossing points to retain its integrity and take into account the hedge trees along the lane
- sensitively planning the interface with existing development
- extending existing hedgerows, incorporating old hedgerow patterns, as a basis for establishing compartments for development
- working towards a structured masterplan, capitalising on site topography and strategic landscaping and allowing a lower density development edge to relate to Piccotts End and the A4147
- maintaining green open space and habitat links between Grovehill and the wider farmland landscape including Howe Grove
- providing an extension of Margaret Lloyd Park through the site
- considering open surface water drainage for the development with drainage features building on the topography of the site, creating the potential for new habitats.

10.2 Further work will continue to refine the plan into a site master plan for the purposes of the forthcoming Sites Allocations DPD. The ‘Key Landscape and Development Principles’ plan shows how the site naturally subdivides itself into two parts, north and south of Piccotts End Lane. The gross site area amounts to 19.67 hectares, however the net developable area once green infrastructure has been deducted will be significantly less. The precise net developable area will emerge through the work on the Sites Allocation DPD and a detailed master plan for the site. However, all parties are confident that the site is capable of accommodating the dwellings sought in Policy LA1.

- 10.3 The main elements of the plan include green links running west from Margaret Lloyd Park along Piccotts End Lane, south to Howe Grove and north along the existing urban edge of Grovehill. Existing trees and hedgerows will be retained, where possible, and a network of foot and cycle ways will integrate the site with Grovehill. The primary access will be from the Link Road to the south and links will be provided across the road to the existing cycleway.
- 10.4 The density of the development should reduce towards the western boundary where the edge will be further softened by new planting behind the ridge line. The average density should be around 25 to 30 dwellings to the hectare which will deliver a range of house types, dwelling sizes and tenures including affordable housing.
- 10.5 The master plan concept will be subject to more detailed work and consideration. However **Appendix 6** shows that an appropriate design response to the sites location and assimilation with the landscape is positive.

11.0 Delivery

- 11.1 The site is in the hands of three willing landowners (including one housebuilder), who support the sites' development. There are no insurmountable access, infrastructure or environmental constraints. No abnormal costs have been identified.
- 11.2 Gleeson estimate that the first house completions could be achieved within 15 months of the grant of outline consent or 10 months from the grant of full planning permission. Hemel Hempstead is an active housing market area and it is anticipated that the development would take around four to five years to complete.
- 11.3 Since the primary access for both the development and construction traffic would come from the south (the A4147), the logical sequence of development phasing would see the land south of Piccotts End Lane developed first, followed by the land to the north of the lane.

Conclusion

11.4 The proposed Core Strategy housing allocation at Marchmont Farm (LA1) constitutes an appropriate and deliverable urban extension. It would extend Grovehill to its westward limit and be part of that neighbourhood. New occupiers would access existing services and facilities in Grovehill, thus enhancing their viability.

Agreed Matters: (2) Other Matters

The Homes and Communities Agency has no objection to the Pre-Submission Core Strategy.

No party has any objection to the minor changes put forward by the Council in its Report of Representations Annex B Table 3 (Examination Document SUB5).

Sellwood Planning made the following objections to the Pre-Submission Core Strategy, i.e. Representations:

- 758 – Policy CS17 (New Housing): to seek a higher housing target of 520 dwellings p.a.
- 761 – Policy CS4 (The Towns and Large Villages): to refer to local allocations
- 762 – Policy CS28 (Carbon Emission Reductions): to avoid the accelerated rate for meeting carbon emissions set out in Table 11
- 768 – Table 11: as above
- 770 – Policy CS3: Managing Selected Development Sites: to insert a criterion on the prevailing housing supply.

The Council has given responses to the representations in Annex B Table 2 Report of Representations. Briefly these are as follows:

- 758 – The housing target has been set to ensure objectively assessed demand and local need are met as fully as possible taking a balanced view of competing factors, including environmental matters. The Council has separately published *Background Paper – Selecting the Core Strategy Housing Target* (Examination Document HG16) to explain its position more fully.
- 761 – The policy applies to land within the existing boundary of a town or large village. The Site Allocations DPD would define the Green Belt boundary and relevant urban structure for local allocations.
- 762 and 768 – The Council is under a responsibility to promote sustainable development. The evidence to the Council suggests that some acceleration of the move to carbon emission reductions is reasonable, particularly for larger schemes or where district heating opportunities are apparent. Minor changes (MC56, MC57, MC58, MC60, MC63 and MC64) will help clarity and flexibility in policy application. Monitoring of applications (including a carbon compliance check) is in place now. There are safeguards in the policy to ensure development is viable.
- 770 – Policy CS17 covers the management of the housing supply. If housing supply falls short, the Council will take remedial action. There may be much the Council can do to stimulate the local housing market in terms of its own land ownership, working closely with developers, landowners and other partners, to be more flexible in relation to viability/contributions and to help overcome blockages. Releasing local allocations is another option, not necessarily the first choice. Policy CS3 provides specific considerations for land release, the primary one being the intended release date to be set in

the Site Allocations DPD.

Sellwood Planning accept the responses given to Representation 762 and 768 and accordingly withdraw these representations.

Outstanding Matters

Representation 758 (to Policy CS17), Representation 761 (to Policy CS4) and Representation 770 (to Policy CS3) from Sellwood Planning remain outstanding.

AGREEMENT

Signed by:

on behalf of Dacorum Borough Council

Dated 24 August 2012

on behalf of the Borough Council as
landowner

Dated 22 August 2012

on behalf of the Homes and Communities
Agency

Dated 24 August 2012

on behalf of Sellwood Planning for Gleeson
Strategic Land

Dated 24 August 2012