



WOOLMER GREEN PARISH COUNCIL

Mrs. Janet Pearce, Clerk,

Village Hall, Hall Lane, Woolmer Green, Herts SG3 6XA

Tel no: 03707 776132

Email: clerk@woolmergreenpc.org.uk

29th November 2021

Dear Mr. Gove,

Woolmer Green Parish Council is writing to you as the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to explain the situation in Woolmer Green regarding the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan examination.

From the beginning of the Local Plan back in 2016 various landowners submitted four potential sites for development in the village; two of them were employment sites and two are Green Belt sites. The two employment sites were designated as an employment area in the Local Plan which demonstrated a lack of local knowledge on the part of Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council. The lease of one of the sites was about to end and become a vacant brownfield site (which is now the case) and the other large factory site only contained four employees in a business being wound up. The landowner always intended to develop this land for residential use but had to wait until it came out of a Trust that prevented this until 2015/16. Neither are viable employment areas.

The largest Green Belt area was allocated as a site for 150 houses, and this remains the case. The second Green Belt site, despite being recommended for inclusion in the Local Plan by officers, was rejected by Borough Councillors. The reason for this is because this site is not within the built area of Woolmer Green at all but on its outskirts and is in fact an extension of our neighbouring village of Knebworth and would join the two villages together. However, the planning inspector decided the site should be re-examined and has concluded that it is suitable for development. This is shamefully undemocratic when Woolmer Green and Knebworth Parish Councils, their residents and Welwyn Hatfield Councillors have all objected. The government has warned planning authorities that it will intervene if Local Plans are slow to progress, but it appears this happens anyway if planning inspectors are able to dictate terms by threatening to find a plan unsound.

On 30th June 2017 the Parish Council met with its MP Grant Shapps to explain the situation that Green Belt was being favoured for development instead of the available brownfield sites. Grant supported the Parish Council and said that in his view the plans for Woolmer Green were not consistent with his vision of the aim of the NPPF which is to protect the Green Belt. The notes of this meeting are attached.

Woolmer Green Parish Council engaged the services of a planning consultant to represent it at every opportunity in the last five years to put the case for safeguarding the Green Belt as "exceptional circumstances" cannot be proven when vacant brownfield sites are available. The Borough Council also received a high number of objections from the public. Despite this nothing has changed, and consultations are regarded as worthless tick box exercises by residents who feel angry, frustrated and ignored.

The Parish Council warned the Borough Council that if the Green Belt sites remained in the Local Plan, Woolmer Green would see disproportionate growth as it is inevitable the owners of the employment sites would pursue permission for residential use meaning all four sites would become residential. Woolmer Green would grow by over 40%. This is now poised to happen as the factory site was granted permission for 72 dwellings, offices and some shops

on appeal. The Borough Council refused the application and robustly objected to it even though the shops would, and subsequently have, benefited the village.

If Parish Council's had more influence on where development should go in their village the whole process would be far less contentious. They have local knowledge and speak to residents first-hand on a regular basis.

In parliament the Prime Minister has consistently supported protecting the Green Belt when answering questions and most recently on 6th October in his speech to the Conservative Party Conference where he said, *"Not on green fields, not just jammed in the south east, but beautiful homes on brownfield sites, in places where homes make sense."* Unfortunately planning inspectors ignore the Prime Minister as swathes of Green Belt across the country is disappearing.

We are writing to you as Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to appeal for your intervention in the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan to recognise that the brownfield sites should be allocated for development and not the Green Belt. Grant has said that he "does not have a formal role in planning" but will "make representations to the Council on this matter". So far there is no progress. The Main Modifications consultation is imminent but although the Parish Council will respond it is certain that it will make no difference.

The government introduced the Local Planning Policy Framework (LPPF) so surely it should ensure it is adhered to. This is essential if our residents are to maintain trust in the Prime Minister as the proposed development in Woolmer Green does not *"make sense"*. Can we rely on you Mr Gove?



Green Belt site earmarked for 150 houses even though brownfield sites are available.



Former factory site now 72 houses, shops & offices which provides the village with a much-needed convenience store and more local employment. Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council refused this application despite its obvious benefits



Green Belt site behind the trees which is outside the built area of Woolmer Green and an extension of Knebworth which can be seen in the distance. The inspector unilaterally decided it is suitable for development.



Former car dealership site at the heart of the village. Rejected for housing development by Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council.

Yours sincerely,



Janet Pearce,
Clerk to Woolmer Green Parish Council.