

**Examination of the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan 2013 – 2032**

**Regulation 19 (submitted Sites)**

## **Woolmer Green**

**Policy SADM 10, (Site EA 10), Land at London Road**

**Statement on Behalf of Woolmer Green Parish Council**

**By Jed Griffiths MA DipTP FRTPI**

**April 2020**

## **Introduction**

1. This statement has been prepared by Jed Griffiths MA DipTP FRTPI on behalf of Woolmer Green Parish Council. It has been compiled in response to an invitation by the Examination Inspector to submit supporting material to be considered at the Stage 8 hearings. This statement is concerned with land at London Road, Woolmer Green. The site was allocated for employment uses in the Draft Local Plan 2016, under Policy SADM 10, as site EA 10.
2. Earlier representations about the site were made by the Parish Council at the Regulation 19 stage. Where appropriate references will be made to the Parish Council's original submissions and to representations made at earlier stages of the hearings. The main purpose of this statement, however, is to address the issues and questions listed by the Inspector in the Schedule published on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2020 (Questions 42 – 46).

## **Employment Land: the Parish Council's Case**

3. For a number of years, the Parish Council has been in dispute with Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council over the issue of land allocations in and around the village of Woolmer Green. In the Draft Local Plan, the Borough Council has set out its objective to stimulate the local economy and to protect areas of employment land. Accordingly, it has designated the land at London Road, for employment uses under Policy SADM 10, and has allocated site HS15 for housing.
4. At the Regulation 19 stage, the Parish Council objected to Policy SADM 10 on the grounds that much of the area could be allocated for housing, thus removing the need to allocate Green Belt land for housing. Since the submission of the Draft Local Plan, circumstances have changed considerably. The former EnTech industrial site, to the west of London Road, has been permitted on appeal for housing. Effectively, this has reduced the area of employment land which would be covered by Policy SADM 10 to sites to the east of London Road.
5. These sites are occupied by three businesses – a chocolate factory (and shop), a stone-cutter's yard (Cawdor), and a national car dealership (Marshall's). Although the first two are locally-based, the last-mentioned is not, and most of its employees travel from elsewhere. The company is also on a short-term lease, which is likely to expire in 2026. In its discussions with the Borough Council, the Parish Council has argued strenuously that the site should be allocated for housing in the Local Plan. Development of Marshall's land would be mixed, with provision for small business units.

6. More recently, the Borough Council seems to have accepted the Parish Council's case. In the recent Site Allocations Consultation, the Borough Council Cabinet has recommended that the site (0.85 hectares) should be allocated for housing in the Local Plan. As explained in the accompanying statement on Policy SADM 27, the allocation of this brown field site for housing, together with the development of the former EnTech site, would provide sufficient additional housing for the needs of Woolmer Green. No land would be needed for release from the Green Belt.
7. In view of the change in circumstances, the Parish Council believes that there is no longer a need to protect all the existing designated employment sites in Woolmer Green. As explained in previous submissions, the structure of business in the village has changed considerably in the past 30 years. The Regulation 19 submission contained a list of several sites where businesses had ceased. Most had changed to a residential use – as a result the housing stock had doubled in numbers during that period.
8. The Parish Council has also observed that larger businesses are no longer interested in re-locating to Woolmer Green – the closure of the EnTech operation has strengthened this view. Arguably, the village location is more suited to small- and medium-sized businesses. Small units are being provided over the shops at the former EnTech site. Accordingly, the Parish Council believes that the reservation of a smaller site EA 10, as described above, would be adequate for local needs (Q43).
9. With its location on the B197 through route, the village does have some attractions for business. The main employment area, however, lacks the scale and quality of servicing and access facilities which are to be found in parts of Welwyn Garden City, Hatfield, and Stevenage.
10. In conclusion, the Parish Council believes that the most sustainable strategy for Woolmer Green would comprise housing developments at EnTech (72 dwellings) and site WE 100 (35 dwellings). A smaller site EA 10 would be adequate for business uses. The Parish Council would consider some minor adjustments to the Green Belt boundary to accommodate the need of existing businesses. The allocation of housing site HS 15 would be removed from the Local Plan, thus protecting the areas of Green Belt which envelop the village. In overall planning terms, this provides a most balanced and sustainable solution.

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7<sup>th</sup> April 2020