

HALLAM LAND MANAGEMENT LIMITED
AND ST ALBANS SCHOOL

St Albans Local Plan 2041

Regulation 19 consultation response

November 2024



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

These representations have been prepared in response to the Local Plan Regulation 19 consultation on behalf of both Hallam Land Management (“Hallam”) and St Albans School, who are working together to bring forward a new neighbourhood to the north of St Albans, known as “Woollam Park”. The representations are prepared in the context of Broad Location B1, allocated at Policy LG1 in the current consultation document. This is a continuation of the proposed allocation in the Regulation 18 consultation document of 2023 and the previous draft Local Plan of 2018.

The representations follow from those submitted in 2023 in response to the Regulation 18 version of the Local Plan, and are set out to follow similar themes to the comments previously raised. They concern the strategic and non-strategic policies, the Broad Locations, and the allocation of the site in the Part B document of the Local Plan.

Hallam and St Albans School remain supportive of the intention to continue to promote the City of St Albans as the *“pre-eminent focus in the District for housing, employment, services, retail, the evening economy education and healthcare”* at Strategic Policy SP1.

The settlement hierarchy at Strategic Policy SP1, which intends to locate *“most growth generally within and adjacent to the larger and most sustainable urban centres”*, is also supported.

Hallam and St Albans School also continue to support the principle of amending the Green Belt and allocating Broad Locations on such land as set out in Strategic Policy SP1; it is unsurprising that once again the Local Plan seeks to achieve a provision of a *“sufficient amount of good quality housing which meets the needs of all sections of society in sustainable locations”*, and it is agreed that changes to the Green Belt boundary is necessary if the Local Plan is to accomplish this.

The District Council intends that the Local Plan will identify and allocate land for the delivery of at least 14,603 net additional new houses, or 885 per annum in the period 1st October 2024 to 31st March 2041, as set out in Strategic Policies SP1 and SP3. This is also supported by both Hallam and St Albans School. As confirmed by the Sustainability Appraisal, there is no justification which could support a lower housing requirement at Strategic Policy SP3, however for context, there is a *“high level case for exploring growth scenarios involving setting the housing requirement above the [local housing need], particularly given latest understanding of unmet housing need within the sub-region”* (para 5.2.25).

The Local Plan proposes a number of development locations which currently fall within the Green Belt reflecting the number of steps that the District Council has had to consider before it can soundly conclude that exceptional circumstances exist to amend the Green Belt (para 3.5). As an approach, this is no different to the conclusions consistently reached in 2014, 2018, and 2023 as to how future development needs are met. This is unsurprising.

A site selection assessment has been adopted to consider constraints and threats before arriving at the proposed allocations. This involved a multi-stage process, which included a combination of qualitative, and quantitative measures underpinned by economic, social and environmental objectives in line with both the National Planning Policy Framework (“NPPF”) and the Local Plan process.

Hallam and St Albans School are of the opinion that the continuation of North St Albans as a proposed Broad Location is, in the round, a suitable and appropriate for growth. They therefore continue to support its allocation at Table 3.1 in Strategic Policy SP1.

To summarise the key conclusions, it is apparent that the District Council acknowledge that:

- a) North St Albans benefits from a main settlement location with good access to existing infrastructure, services and facilities.
- b) there is good public transport and cycle access to the city centre and the rail station.

- c) Harpenden Road is a priority location for investment in walking and cycling.
- d) there are clear and defensible boundaries that serve to contain new built development and assimilation with the urban area, thus minimising Green Belt and landscape impacts.
- e) development can be accommodated with the appropriate separation from Longspring Wood, a local wildlife site and ancient woodland.
- f) the site is not at risk of fluvial flooding and is within Flood Zone 1 in this regard. To a small extent, there are surface water flow paths which are discussed in the Council's Strategic Flood Risk Assessment. This does not represent a constraint to development and the JBA assessment has screened out more detailed consideration of this.
- g) there are no heritage considerations, such as listed buildings, conservation areas or archaeological features within or in close proximity to the Site.
- h) the site's principal ecological value is provided by its hedgerows which are part of a wider pattern across the locality. Otherwise, as arable farmland, its ecological value is limited.

The North St Albans Broad Location includes Hallam and St Albans School's site, and a small portion of land to the west which is now in control by Cala Homes. This benefits from outline planning permission, and a reserved matters application remains undetermined having been submitted in summer 2024. The fact that outline permission has been granted for up to 150 dwellings already in this location demonstrates there are no fundamental constraints at North St Albans which preclude development.

The remaining and more substantial part of the Broad Location, hereafter referred to as Woollam Park, is in single ownership and is thus without the complications that arise where there is a multiplicity of landowners. This will assist with future delivery.

It should be noted that St Albans School has a number of other property and land interests within St Albans associated with its premises and it has prepared separate representations which concern the practical effect of the proposed development management policies in those terms.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 These representations are prepared in response to the St Albans Local Plan Regulation 19 consultation on behalf of Hallam and St Albans School. They follow similar themes to the comments previously raised as part of the Regulation 18 Local Plan consultation.
- 1.2 LRM Planning have been working alongside these parties for a considerable period of time to bring forward a new neighbourhood, Woollam Park, at North St Albans. This forms the majority of the Broad Location identified at Policy LG1 of the Regulation 19 version of the plan, which was also identified for such development in the 2023 Regulation 18 version of the Local Plan, and the 2018 Regulation 19 Local Plan submitted for examination.
- 1.3 Hallam is well established, highly regarded, and widely respected as one of the UK's most experienced and successful land promoters. St Albans School has been at the heart of the city since 948AD and are responsible for some of the oldest and most important buildings in the city. Both Hallam and St Albans School are committed to creating an exemplar new neighbourhood that will establish a lasting legacy for the school.
- 1.4 These joint representations relate to the following policy areas:
 - Strategic policies relating to the spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy, the development strategy and exceptional circumstances to amend the Green Belt, the housing strategy and the specified housing requirement for the plan period.
 - Broad Locations, specifically the new neighbourhood proposed at North St Albans.
 - Non-strategic policies, including various development management policies.
- 1.5 The Local Plan is being prepared in accordance with the prescribed regulations and the 2023 version of the NPPF. It is acknowledged that the NPPF is going through a period of consultation, however at the time of writing, the 2023 version remains the relevant edition. It is this version of the Framework that the Local Plan has been prepared in the context of.
- 1.6 As a matter of principle and approach, local plans should be prepared with the objective of contributing to sustainable development. In the context of the planning system, sustainable development is defined by reference to social, economic and environmental objectives. The Local Plan thus has an active role in guiding new development towards sustainable solutions, taking into account local circumstances and the character, needs and opportunities of the District. These are factors that are rightly acknowledged in the opening passages of the consultation document.
- 1.7 The character, needs, and opportunities of the District are summarised later in the introduction to the consultation document, as they were in the Regulation 18 version. Whilst not unique, St Albans District has particular characteristics that a sound Local Plan has to address and cater for. These include proximity and accessibility to London, the extent of the Green Belt and its highly restrictive delineation relative to main settlements (which has largely been retained for 40 years), the historic character and sensitive nature of a number of settlements, a prosperous local economy overall but with acute house price affordability problems, which has caused considerable levels of need for both market and affordable housing. Socio-economic trends are also prevalent with an aging population with labour supply consequences.
- 1.8 Hallam and St Albans School remain of the view that the absence of a plan-led strategy for over two decades is in no small part a contributing factor to the widely accepted affordability problems in the District and the structural demographic change which has been experienced. The importance of the Local Plan in setting out a positive long term and deliverable strategy that, as with all planning decisions, balances these considerations cannot be overstated. Hallam and St Albans School support the approach that this consultation document is taking in respect of these matters.

- 1.9 It is evident that there remains a need to improve the supply of future housing land in the District. Consistent with previous consultation documents, this in turn points unambiguously to exceptional circumstances to amend the Green Belt adjacent to the District's main settlement to achieve a sustainable pattern of development.
- 1.10 At the present time, the tests of soundness for a Local Plan are those listed at §35 of the NPPF. These are set within the context of its earlier passages regarding the presumption in favour of sustainable development, plan making and strategic policies. Whilst the Government has consulted on potential changes to the NPPF, those changes maintain important plan making principles regardless. As such, the role of the District Council's Local Plan in providing a strategy, proposals and policies that contribute to sustainable development in the well-known circumstances that exist in the District, has not changed.
- 1.11 Accordingly, these representations are structured around the following sub-headed sections:
- Section 2: Vision and Local Plan objections
 - Section 3: The spatial strategy
 - Section 4: The climate emergency
 - Section 5: Sustainable use of land and green belt
 - Section 6: North St Albans
 - Section 7: Housing
 - Section 8: Community infrastructure
 - Section 9: Transport
 - Section 10: Natural environment
 - Section 11: Built environment
 - Section 12: Design
 - Section 13: Implementation

2 Vision and Local Plan objectives

- 2.1 The Vision for St Albans remains the same as it was drafted for the Regulation 18 version of the Local Plan. This simply seeks to achieve “A thriving, inclusive and sustainable community which is a great place to live and work and has a vibrant economy”. This has consistently aligned with the Vision set out in the Council’s Corporate Strategy, and, whilst unobjectionable, it is likely to mean different things to different people in the District.
- 2.2 The Vision can only be properly understood by reviewing the supporting Local Plan objectives, which are grouped around six themes which are similarly aligned to the Corporate Strategy priorities. Its sub-sections also reflect the extent of strategic policies required by §20 of the NPPF. The Local Plan objectives remain unchanged for the most part, save for minor alterations to wording. For this reason, Hallam and St Albans School continue to support:
- the adaptation for and mitigation of climate change and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions;
 - the efficient and best use of land;
 - the provision of a sufficient amount of good quality housing which meets the needs of all sections of society in sustainable locations;
 - making provision for accessible community infrastructure in sustainable locations;
 - encouraging the use of active and sustainable means of transport and reduce the need for people to travel;
 - protecting and conserving the natural and historic environments; and
 - achieving high-quality, inclusive, active and distinctive places and sustainable communities.
- 2.3 These objectives give rise to a number of important considerations for the Plan’s spatial strategy and the proposals that flow from this.
- 2.4 As the consultation document acknowledges, meeting future development needs cannot be achieved simply on previously developed land. In fact, meeting those needs at accessible locations which enable active travel and promote a reduction in private care use and carbon emissions affords an importance to new development being located adjacent to the District’s main settlement.
- 2.5 Greenfield development is therefore an entirely legitimate proposition. As is evident from the Sustainability Appraisal, this necessitates and justifies the Green Belt being amended.
- 2.6 In turn, this requires a positive approach to plan-making and the allocation of land for development as is proposed in the form of Broad Locations. This, and in particular the proposed allocation at North St Albans, is welcomed by Hallam and St Albans School.
- 2.7 Moreover, several of the development management policies contribute towards placemaking and environmental enhancements.
- 2.8 Taken together, the policies and proposals contribute to the objectives that underpin the Vision.

3 The spatial strategy

Strategic Policy SP1 – A spatial strategy for St Albans district

- 3.1 The Local Plan has continuously promoted St Albans as the pre-eminent settlement of the District since work on the plan commenced. As part of the Regulation 18 response, Hallam and St Albans School acknowledged that the Part 1 of the Settlement Hierarchy Study places St Albans at top of the hierarchy, noting that it scores almost twice as high as Harpenden, which sits second in the tier. They supported the recognition of the role of St Albans and continue to agree that St Albans City itself is a sustainable location and should continue to be the focus for new development in the District.
- 3.2 The Sustainability Appraisal reiterates this position, stating that *“As the district’s primary town there is a clear need to direct a good proportion of growth to St Albans”*, with no headline reasons to direct growth away from the city to other locations (page 121 refers).
- 3.3 In the context of the above, Hallam and St Albans School continue to firmly support the approach of Strategic Policy SP1, where St Albans will *“continue to be the pre-eminent focus in the District for housing, employment, services, retail, the evening economy, education and healthcare”*.
- 3.4 Noting the relative performance of St Albans as the principal settlement, the hierarchy in Strategic Policy SP1 that intends to distribute new development by *“locating most growth generally within and adjacent to the larger and most sustainable urban centres”*, is also very much supported.
- 3.5 These policy objectives are entirely consistent with and will contribute towards a sustainable pattern of growth which is the cornerstone of the NPPF (§105).
- 3.6 Strategic Policy SP1 continues to encourage growth on land in urban areas *“and then the Green Belt”*, in order to make the most sustainable use of land. In this context, “growth” is understood to mean “new development”. Whilst as a matter of approach the consultation document is right to afford an importance to the use and re-use of land in urban areas, it is clear that future development needs cannot be met by only relying on previously developed land. This is a widely understood characteristic that was acknowledged within the 2014, 2018, and 2023 draft Local Plans, and circumstances are no different at the present time. Therefore, for the city of St Albans to perform the role that Strategic Policy SP1 intends, new development will need to be located adjacent to the existing urban area. Consequently, enlarging the urban area is a legitimate proposition if the overarching principle of a sustainable pattern of development is to be achieved.
- 3.7 As is explained in the consultation document, St Albans is enclosed by the Green Belt. The designation is tightly drawn and new development will therefore need to be located on land that is presently subject to that designation. Amending the Green Belt is permissible by national policy where exceptional circumstances exist (§140).
- 3.8 For this reason, the District Council has long understood that the Green Belt constrains the extent to which its existing urban areas are able to grow, and that the designation will need to be amended in order for future development needs to be met in a manner that achieves a sustainable pattern of development. Crucially, as highlighted in the representations to the Regulation 18 version of the Local Plan, Hallam and St Albans School would reiterate that the Sustainability Appraisal notes that there is *“a clear strategic case for Green Belt release at St Albans”* (para 5.4.34).
- 3.9 In this context, it is no surprise that the consultation document maintains the approach set out in previous draft Local Plans. Hallam and St Albans School firmly support the principle of amending the Green Belt and the identification of North St Albans in Strategic Policy SP1. This is discussed North St Albans is discussed specifically in Section 6 of these representations.

- 3.10 Strategic Policy SP1 also identifies the housing requirement for the plan period, and Hallam and St Albans School support the fact that the Council aspires to identify and allocated land for the delivery of at least 14,603 net additional new houses, which equates to 885 dwellings per annum. It is noted that this provision is slightly less than was previously set out in Regulation 18 version of the Local Plan, which intended to identify land for 15,096 net additional new houses (888 per annum), however it is appreciated that this reflects the updated plan period and the standard methodology in the NPPF. The Regulation 18 Local Plan referred to a plan period of 17 years, whilst the Regulation 19 version refers to a 16.5 year plan period. The difference of 493 net new dwellings is therefore understood to reflect the six month reduction of the plan period, rather than being an actual reduction of housing numbers. As such, Hallam and St Albans School continue to support the overall level of housing growth proposed. There are however indicators that suggest a greater amount of new housing should be provided In the District.

Strategic Policy SP6 - City, town, and village centres and retail

- 3.11 Hallam and St Albans School are supportive of the recognition placed on city, town and village centres as essential providers of retail, services, leisure, entertainment and other services. The fact that this policy considers both existing centres, and those which have the opportunity to be delivered through Broad Locations, is also supported.
- 3.12 Whilst criterion (h) specifically acknowledges the role of new local centres at Broad Locations and how they can contribute to the day-to-day needs of the wider resident population, it is considered that not enough recognition has been placed on the importance these centres can have in supporting the creation of new communities. There is a risk therefore that the functions and uses required to allow these centres to establish as community communities is overlooked. As such, it is suggested that a sentence is added to the end of the policy test to acknowledge the role such centres can have within new communities.

4 Climate emergency

Strategic Policy SP2 – responding to the climate emergency

- 4.1 Hallam and St Albans School acknowledge and support the District Council's declaration of a Climate Emergency made in 2019. They believe that development in the right location, which is designed and constructed responsibly, can make a strong contribution to climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- 4.2 Both Hallam and St Albans School broadly support the objectives of Strategic Policy SP2, but given the importance of addressing the climate emergency, a number of suggested amendments and/or enhancements are proposed to improve its effectiveness and soundness.
- 4.3 It is disappointing that Strategic Policy SP2 does not go so far as to say the Council will “strongly” support proposals that help combat climate change. In order to achieve the sustainable development that the Local Plan seeks to achieve, the District should offer greater support to developers who prioritise combatting climate change, and Strategic Policy should be amended to reflect this.
- 4.4 Hallam and St Albans School are of the opinion that the most effective mechanism to mitigate large quantities of carbon emissions is to ensure that new development is located in the most sustainable locations, where the use of walking, cycling and public transport can provide the principal means of travel as an alternative to private car use. Although they support the changes made to the wording of criterion (f) to “prioritise” the use of sustainable and active travel rather than just “support” it, there remain some areas where the policy could be strengthened.
- 4.5 It was previously suggested that Policy SP2 should be amended to recognise the carbon emission savings which can be secured through the use of more sustainable modes of transport. Greater weight should be afforded to this criterion given that transport emissions typically account for over a third of local and national emissions, and therefore locating development in the most sustainable locations would be one of the most powerful actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It is suggested that the policy is reworded as follows to offer developers another mechanism for promoting sustainable travel. It is therefore reiterated that the following sentence should be added, as below:
- “Use the most sustainable locations for growth and so minimising the need to travel while encouraging walking, cycling and the use of public transport. Development proposals are encouraged to demonstrate carbon savings secured through the switch to more sustainable modes of transportation”.*
- 4.6 Criterion k is also confusing in that it requires *“the combination of environmental payments through stacking of different types of credits on sites”*. It is unclear exactly what the District Council are trying to achieve with this policy; it should be clarified how they intend to secure carbon credits on site, or how they can be meaningfully and practically secured, in the absence of a carbon offsetting policy.

Policy CE1 – Promoting sustainable design, construction and building efficiency

- 4.7 The provision of key indicators and targets for promoting sustainable design and construction techniques at Policy CE1 is generally supported. However it is considered that the inclusion of rainwater harvesting weakens the policy by relying on a technique which has many technical challenges, particularly for residential development, when compared against other water efficiency measures such as flow restrictors. Furthermore, the target requirement for 110l per person per day should be the main focus with compliance judged against the measures to meet this target, as opposed to specifying specific routes to compliance such as rainwater harvesting. There is also a risk

that the strict requirements of this policy could be quickly outdated through national legislative changes, meaning that these local provisions could be overtaken by national requirements.

- 4.8 On this basis, it is suggested that the reference to new development requiring rainwater harvesting is removed.

5 Sustainable use of land and green belt

- 5.1 One of the Local Plan objectives is to *“prioritise the effective use of land by locating new development on previously developed land first, where appropriate; and protecting and enhancing the Green Belt”*.
- 5.2 The emphasis on focusing development opportunities on previously developed land in the first instance is reiterated throughout the consultation document, and has consistently been made clear in previous versions. However, it is acknowledged that the Council cannot solely rely on development in such locations to meet the District’s development requirements. As such, the second limb of the objective remains crucial.
- 5.3 It is right that this continues to be acknowledged, with the Local Plan noting that *“this approach above favours meeting need within or close to existing settlements to draw on existing infrastructure and reduce the need to travel”* (para 3.4), and recognising that *“it may be necessary to meet the need by considering other available land; in St Albans District this includes looking at Green Belt land and its boundaries”* (para 3.5).
- 5.4 This is consistent with Strategic Policy SP1 which identifies Broad Locations for development in locations adjacent to the city of St Albans as the main urban area in the District, amongst other places.
- 5.5 What is absent from the objective is a recognition of this circumstance (i.e., there is no second limb to follow the first.) This objective should be recast accordingly to reflect that development will also occur at locations presently within the Green Belt (but to be removed through this Local Plan process) that contribute to a sustainable pattern of development.

REQUIREMENTS FOR GROWTH

- 5.6 The representations submitted by Hallam and St Albans School as part of the Regulation 18 consultation process commented on the local housing requirement and the need to increase the supply of new homes. The District Council’s intent to *“provide a sufficient amount of good quality housing which meets the needs of all sections of society in sustainable locations”*, was, and is, supported, and it was acknowledged that the Local Plan rightly uses the standard method to calculate the number of new homes required. It remains instructive that the Council has not sought to argue that there are exceptional circumstances to justify an alternative approach as is permissible by the NPPF (§61).

SOURCES OF DEVELOPMENT LAND

- 5.7 The Local Plan identifies two sources of development land in the District. First, previously developed land, and second, greenfield land, which, because of the extent of the designation, equates to Green Belt land. The Regulation 19 version of the Plan continues to fairly refer to the tension between competing objectives of protecting the Green Belt and achieving a sustainable pattern of development.
- 5.8 The representations previously submitted explained that the Green Belt in St Albans has not been subject to substantive amendment since 1985 and save for where very special circumstances have existed it has endured for nearly four decades. In this regard, very special circumstances have increasingly been proven to exist in recent years, because of the absence of a plan-led approach to its review and the concomitant lack of supply of development land.
- 5.9 It is therefore unsurprising that in trying to resolve this tension, the District Council is again finding that as a matter of principle, the Green Belt boundary should be amended to contribute to meeting

local housing need. It remains pertinent and appropriate that the Sustainability Appraisal confirms that there is a “*clear strategic case for Green Belt release at St Albans*” (para 5.4.34).

- 5.10 This aligns and responds with the NPPF which acknowledges that “*the supply of large numbers of new homes can often be best achieved through planning for larger scale development, such as new settlements or significant extensions to existing villages and towns, providing they are well located and designed, and supported by the necessary infrastructure and facilities*” (§73) and “*the planning system should actively manage patterns of growth in support of these objectives. Significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes*” (§105).
- 5.11 Hallam and St Albans School therefore are still of the opinion that the critical mass of new development that large scale strategic allocations at St Albans can achieve means that they should underpin the Local Plan’s strategy, not least because they can contribute to meeting the established housing requirement and positively contribute to a range of Local Plan objectives and also support the provision of new infrastructure. The role of North St Albans as a Broad Location is crucial in this respect.

GREEN BELT REVIEW

- 5.12 It is well known that St Albans is tightly constrained by the Metropolitan Green Belt, one of the fundamental aims of which is to prevent urban sprawl by retaining the openness of land. Its initial purpose was to prevent the outward expansion of greater London, but there has been a recognition of the proximity of other towns in relation to the greater London area and the need to prevent them from merging.
- 5.13 Locally, its primary purpose is to prevent settlements within and adjoining the District merging, which is a crucial factor when assessing the role of the Green Belt at different locations.
- 5.14 The Green Belt was assessed in 2013/14 by SKM and more recently in 2023 by Arup. The previous representations explained that they adopted very different approaches, with SKM adopting a strategic consideration of the role of the Green Belt and potential locations which could accommodate large scale development, and Arup rather considering individual field parcels which make up the potential larger strategic sites. As such, it was concluded they are not comparable and conclusions from the Arup work cannot be read to supersede SKM’s conclusions. Hallam and St Albans School maintain this position and therefore are of the opinion that limitations of the Arup work mean that, alone, it cannot properly or singularly inform the Local Plan policies and proposals.

HOUSING TRAJECTORY

- 5.15 Commentary was previously provided on the District’s housing trajectory as part of the Regulation 18 consultation, and Hallam and St Albans School continue to agree with the conclusions made at that time. It is notable that the existing housing supply is limited with a very obvious need for new development opportunities to be brought forward. On this occasion, the trajectory appears to delay the contribution of Broad Locations until 2031 and beyond. However, in doing so, it adopts a stepped trajectory with low levels of housing completions between now and 2031. There is no good reason for this where North St Albans is able to deliver housing sooner.
- 5.16 Most significantly, Hallam and St Albans School previously raised concerns about the resilience of the housing supply position. At the time, the Regulation 18 Local Plan identified a total potential supply of 15,938 new homes against a requirement of 15,096. This was calculated to equate to a flexibility allowance of some 5.5%. It was noted that although no specific guidance exists in this regard, it is commonplace to see flexibility allowances of 10% or greater. The Regulation 19 Local Plan reduces this flexibility allowance even further; Strategic Policy SP3 confirms that the standard methodology identifies a total need for 14,603 dwellings whilst the housing trajectory contained at Table 3.2 identifies a total housing land supply of 14,989 dwellings. This equates to a flexibility

allowance of just 2.6%. Hallam and St Albans School are increasingly concerned that the housing supply position is delicate and insufficient.

SITE SELECTION

- 5.17 The Regulation 19 document proposes a number of development locations which are within the Green Belt presently. There are several steps that the District Council must consider before concluding, as it has, that there are exceptional circumstances to amend the Green Belt. As an approach, this is no different to the conclusion reached in 2014, 2018, and 2023 as to how future development needs are to be met
- 5.18 In 2023, Hallam and St Albans School concluded that the process accords with the national guidance on plan preparation set out at §32 of the NPPF, and that the selection process also responds to the objectives of the Local Plan, and this position remains unchanged.
- 5.19 It is for this reason that it remains unquestionable that the site selection process quite rightly leads to the proposed allocation of North St Albans.

6 North St Albans

- 6.1 Strategic Policy SP1 and Table 3.1 lists North St Albans as a Broad Location for development within the District. Part B of the Local Plan contains the proposed site allocations and identifies North St Albans at B1.
- 6.2 North St Albans is strategically important to the Local Plan's strategy; both in terms of achieving the spatial outcome of a sustainable pattern of development focused on the District's main urban area and also the provision of new housing and associated infrastructure to meet identified needs. New development can similarly be located here without causing the merging of the City of St Albans and Harpenden and thus maintain the important purpose of the Green Belt in separating those two settlements.
- 6.3 North St Albans has consistently been identified as a strategic location for large scale growth, and Hallam and St Albans School remain highly supportive of the Council's decision to allocate it.
- 6.4 Crucially, before reviewing the relevant policy context in any great detail, Hallam and St Albans School would like to alert the District Council to a discrepancy issue in relation to the capacity of North St Albans. Table 3.1 at Part A of the Local Plan identifies the Broad Locations and confirms a minimum capacity of 1,146 dwellings, however B1 of Part B of the Local Plan confirms an indicative figure of 1,097 dwellings. This lack of consistency is not effective and does not meet the test of soundness. The District Council are urged to revisit this and ensure that it provides a consistent, reliable and realistic housing capacity which a future developer can achieve.
- 6.5 Notwithstanding this, the District Council are aware that Hallam and St Albans School have been undertaking survey work and suites of technical work which have informed an illustrative masterplan for the remainder of the North St Albans site, which excludes the 150 dwellings approved under 5/2021/0423. This has been evolving for some time but is now at a point where site capacity can be tested, confirming that the realistic capacity of this larger remaining portion of the site is 1,080 dwellings, accounting for the various specialist accommodation types required by the District and County Councils. As such, the overall capacity of the North St Albans Broad Allocation is calculated to be 1,230 dwellings of which 80 are the C2 care home.

B1 (Local Plan Part B) – North St Albans

- 6.6 B1 of the Local Plan identifies North St Albans as a Broad Location for development. It identifies the key requirements for the development, which will comprise the main components of the scheme and identifies the District's aspirations for the site.
- 6.7 Hallam and St Albans School have undertaken a vast suite of technical and survey work for the North St Albans site and therefore whilst they are supportive of the Council's approach to identify key development requirements, they consider that some of these objectives require alteration in order to meet the tests of soundness required of a Local Plan to ensure that the full development capacity can be reached.
- 6.8 Firstly, the proposed use is described as "*primarily residential 1,097 units (indicative) (this includes 150 from planning permission 5/2021/0423).*" Accounting for the units provided for the specialist accommodation, nursing home, and additional disability service units, and on the basis of updated capacity work, this figure should be updated to read "*primarily residential 1,230 units (indicative) (this includes 150 from planning permission 5/2021/0423).*" This will allow 1,080 new dwellings to come forward on the remainder of the North St Albans scheme.
- 6.9 Our comments in regard to the specific development requirements are set out in turn below.

One extra-care facility comprising of 70-80 self-contained units, one 70-80 bed nursing home and 4 supported living units for people with disabilities (these units are included within the indicative dwellings figure).

Capacity work has been undertaken and confirms that the extra care facility will offer 80 self-contained units, and the nursing home will also support 80-beds. The provision of four supported living units is supported but these are referred to as “adult disability service units” in light of on-going discussions with Hertfordshire County Council’s adult services directorate.

A 2FE primary school, including Early Years provision, to serve the new and wider community. This should include provision of an all weather playing pitch available for community use.

The site can accommodate space for a two-form entry primary school, however Hertfordshire County Council have agreed that they will be responsible for delivering this. As such, the policy should be amended to read “land for a two-form entry primary school”. Moreover, it will be the Local Education Authority (“LEA”) who are responsible for the specification of the school and its playing field. The extent to which the primary school and associated playing field is available for community use will similarly be determined by the LEA and the school sponsor.

A new local centre to provide local services, including Medical Centre and commercial development opportunities.

Again, the local centre can accommodate space for a medical centre, but the Integrated Care Board have expressed that they would wish to deliver this themselves. As such, it is suggested that the policy should be amended to read “including sufficient space for a medical centre”.

Replacement of the displaced playing fields. The replacement playing fields must be an equivalent or better playing field in terms of quantity and quality and delivered prior to commencement of any development on the existing playing field. Sport England will be a statutory consultee on any future planning application that would affect the playing field within this site allocation.

The area of the allocation has been amended in response to previous representations to ensure sufficient land is identified to allow for the relocation of the existing playing pitches. As playing fields are appropriate uses in the Green Belt, we note the proposed revision to its boundary intends that the pitches are on land that continues to be designated accordingly, and this is not considered to be a conflict with national policy. Sport England and the England and Wales Cricket Board have requested that a small sports pavilion annex is provided to serve the replacement playing fields. This should be acknowledged and the policy should be reworded accordingly to note that the provision of a new building will be supported where it serves the replacement pitches. Again, such a facility would not conflict with Green Belt policy.

On-site outdoor sports provision to meet the additional needs generated by the development. An offsite facility may be acceptable where justified by evidence and subject to early delivery of the offsite provision prior to occupation of first home.

No comments or observations.

Contributions / enhancements to support relevant schemes in the LCWIP and GTPs as indicated in the TIA.

No comments or observations.

Support for a transport network (including walking and cycling links) and public transport services upgrades / improvements, including off-site improvements to Harpenden Road, Sandridgebury Lane, Valley Road, Ancient Briton junction and King William IV junction, links to St Albans City Centre, station and education; aligned to schemes in the GTPs and LCWIP.

Discussions have been held with the local bus providers and any scheme would look to incorporate their aspirations accordingly. As such, it is suggested that the policy is amended to read “public transport services upgrades / improvements as appropriate”.

Whilst discussions have also been held with Hertfordshire County Council as the local highway authority, the exact off-site improvements are still to be confirmed. It is therefore suggested that this is also rewritten to read “including off-site improvements to Harpenden Road, Sandridgebury Lane, Valley Road, Ancient Briton junction and King William IV junction, that prioritise active and sustainable transport, as appropriate”. Similarly, the links to the city centre, the station and education facilities are also being finalised, thus “as appropriate” should be introduced after the reference to education.

Provide pedestrian and cycle links with the part of the site that is delivering 150 homes from planning permission 5/2021/0423.

There are no in principle issues with this, however it will depend on the developer of planning permission 5/2021/0423 delivering suitable connection points to the boundary of that site. This should be reworded to read “provide pedestrian and cycle links to the points of connection along the site boundary of the part of the site that is delivering 150 homes from planning permission 5/2021/0423.”

Support for the improvement of the Public Rights of Way network to enable active travel and recreational use to Heartwood Forest and Nomansland Common.

No comments or observations.

Development proposals must take appropriate account of the Ancient Woodland, County Wildlife Site, Priority Habitat and trees covered by Tree Preservation Order along the south-east boundary, and the Priority Habitat close to the eastern boundary comprising an area of deciduous woodland.

No comments or observations.

A noise assessment must be carried out regarding the railway line and appropriate mitigating measures provided as necessary.

No comments or observations.

Take appropriate account of these Environmental Constraints: Source Protection Zone (SPZ) 3; Bedrock Aquifer; Superficial Aquifer.

No comments or observations.

- 6.10 Given the extent of changes proposed, a tracked changes version of B1 is contained at Appendix 1 to highlighted the proposed amendments.

Policy LG1 – Broad locations

- 6.11 Policy LG1 sets out a series of criteria which development within Broad Locations should achieve. Hallam and St Albans School previously provided commentary on the various criteria and how they align with the development proposals for North St Albans. The compatibility of the North St Albans proposals with the policy is not repeated here, however as the scheme has evolved, some further observations are made in light of these criteria.

j. Make efficient and effective use of the site, with a minimal overall net density of 40 dwellings per hectare; utilising a range of densities that take account of adjacent character, uses and identity.

This policy position is noted and Hallam and St Albans School acknowledge that this refers to an “overall” net density of 40 dwellings per hectare, allowing for a range of densities to be adopted across the site.

n. Plant at least 1 semi-mature tree for each dwelling; for C2 accommodation plant 1 semi-mature tree for every 2.5 dwelling equivalent bed spaces.

Hallam and St Albans School are committed to new tree planting throughout the development, however are concerned that semi-mature trees require more land to establish than young trees which could result in a less efficient use of land within the site.

Policy LG5 – Green Belt

- 6.12 Hallam and St Albans School previously commented on the role of Policy LG5 in the context of the Broad Locations, and concluded that as North St Albans is to be removed from the Green Belt, the policy is not applicable save in respect of the relocated playing fields.
- 6.13 Observations were previously made in relation to criterion (b)(iii), and its inconsistency with paragraph 154 (b) of the NPPF which states that the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation should not be regarded as inappropriate development as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. It was concluded at the time that reference to outdoor sports and recreation facilities should be deleted from this policy accordingly as they do not require very special circumstances where the qualifications of 154 (b) are met. Hallam and St Albans School remain of this view.

7 Housing

- 7.1 This section comments on the proposed housing policies given that North St Albans is a housing led allocation.

Strategic Policy SP4 – Housing

Policy HOU5 – Self-build and custom housebuilding

- 7.2 Hallam and St Albans School support the intention to deliver good quality housing that meets the needs of all parts of the society. They do however note some concerns with the deliverability of certain aspects of the policy.
- 7.3 Specifically, the fifth bullet point of Strategic Policy SP4 states that the Council seeks to *“to diversify the housing market and increase consumer choice through encouraging Self-build and Custom Housebuilding in sustainable locations”*. The North St Albans scheme allows for sufficient land to accommodate self and custom build plots to be provided, however the wording of the policy is strict in suggesting that housing diversity can only be encouraging through provision of such housing. This can be problematic on some sites due to viability, and therefore the policy should be appropriately worded to ensure that this is not the only option available. As a suggestion, the bullet point should be amended to add *“where appropriate”*.
- 7.4 Similar conclusions are made in respect of Policy HOU5.

Policy HOU1 – Housing mix

- 7.5 Hallam and St Albans School support the amendments to Policy HOU1 which allow for some flexibility in housing mix at Broad Locations. It is acknowledged that a final sentence has been added at the end of the policy stating that *“the delivery of specialist housing at Broad Locations could affect the housing mix by increasing the number of smaller units. Therefore, the housing mix may be adjusted on sites that deliver specialist housing units to take account of an increased proportion of smaller units”*. This amendment from the Regulation 18 version is supported.

Policy HOU2 – Affordable housing

- 7.6 The provision of affordable housing is plainly important in the District given the low levels that have been provided historically and the evidence of local housing need in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment. Hallam and St Albans School are therefore supportive of this policy in overall terms.
- 7.7 To some degree it is over prescriptive. Criterion (b) notes that Council will seek to meet the District's affordable housing needs by *“encouraging three bedroom affordable homes to address the priority needs of the Council's Housing Register and the needs of those in temporary accommodation”*. This has evidently been informed by the current needs of the Council's Housing Register, but may become outdated in the context of the plan period. It seems logical that the policy is amended to more broadly refer to the need to take into consideration the Council's Housing Register.

Policy HOU3 – Specialist housing

- 7.8 Hallam and St Albans School support the District Council's decision to support development proposals which provide specialist housing to meet the needs of older people and people with disabilities.
- 7.9 The introductory text of the policy states that *“the Council will support development proposals for specialist housing to meet the needs of older people and people with disabilities”* in accordance with the policy criteria. This eligibility is narrow in scope and does not consider other groups with

specific socio-economic needs. The policy should be amended to increase the scope and definition of specialist housing.

8 Community infrastructure

- 8.1 This section comments on the proposed policies concerning community infrastructure, mindful that an element of the North St Albans allocation will provide new community infrastructure.

Strategic Policy SP7 – Community infrastructure

- 8.2 Hallam and St Albans School agree with the support the Council affords to community infrastructure as it relates to new development in the Broad Locations. Observations are made however in regard to the amendments which have been made to the policy wording since the Regulation 18 version was consulted on, which now includes the new following statement:

“In relation to sports facilities (and open space and recreation) such existing facilities can be built on if the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the needs for which clearly outweigh the loss (e.g. a dual use sports hall being built on a school playing field)”.

- 8.3 This is a direct conflict with the allocation of North St Albans at B1 of Policy LG1 whereby one of the key development requirements includes the “replacement of the displayed playing fields”. The District Council are aware of the need to relocate the playing fields on land to the north of the allocation to facilitate the development of the wider scheme; specifically, the land currently hosting the Old Albanian Sport facilities need to be relocated to allow for a suitable access to be provided to serve the other scheme components.
- 8.4 As currently drafted, Strategic Policy SP7 would prevent development of the existing sport pitch land for anything other than alternative sports and recreational provision, which conflicts with the wider aspirations of Policy LG1. It is therefore suggested that Strategic Policy SP7 is amended to read as follows:

“In relation to sports facilities (and open space and recreation) such existing facilities can be built on if the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, or other suitable land is identified and secured as agreed by the District Council, the needs for which clearly outweigh the loss (e.g. a dual use sports hall being built on a school playing field)”.

- 8.5 When defining “community infrastructure” within the policy, the list is definite and explicit, but there are concerns that this should be more flexible to acknowledge that some community spaces can be used for a variety of interchangeable uses. The Alban Arena is one such example of this type of space, as acknowledged at Policy TCR5. Community spaces have potential and scope to be used for a variety of day and evening activities, and can be used recreationally, for education purposes, and offer co-working and business spaces. As currently drafted, the policy does not allow for this flexibility of use.
- 8.6 Further to the point of rigid definitions, Hallam and St Albans School query whether the reference to “flood defences” should be amended to refer more broadly to “sustainable drainage systems”.

Policy COM1 - Education

- 8.7 Hallam and St Albans School continue to support the principle of providing sports facilities as part of a new school. Whilst it is agreed that these facilities can in some circumstances also serve a community function, ultimately this will be a matter for the Local Education Authority to decide. Hallam and St Albans School have no in principle objection to this secondary use of the school facilities, but are of the view that the District Council cannot oblige a developer to ensure this is met. It is therefore suggested that the following sentences are removed from COM1(b):

“The associated indoor and outdoor sports facilities should serve a community joint function”

and

“The provision of playing pitches for community use will be required at new primary and secondary schools”.

Policy COM3 – Community, leisure and sports facilities

- 8.8 Hallam and St Albans School agree with the level of support afforded to new, retained and improved community, leisure and sports buildings and facilities. It is acknowledged that this includes *“new local provision as part of major residential development at Broad Locations and strategic sites, including possible joint use of education and multi-purpose community buildings / halls or improvements to existing parish halls / centres near to the new housing areas”*. Although best endeavours will be made to ensure this can be met, the strict wording is limiting and there may often be operational or safeguarding reasons which make dual use not feasible. It is therefore suggested that this should be amended to read *“where a need can be demonstrated”*.

9 Transport

- 9.1 This section comments on the proposed transport policies. The Local Plan objectives encourage the use of active and sustainable means transport and a reduction in the need for people to travel by car. As set out above, this is framed by the District Council's Sustainability and Climate Emergency Strategy which intends to encourage facilities and infrastructure for low carbon travel in order to initiate a step-change in travel behaviour.

Policy TRA1 – Transport considerations for new development

- 9.2 Policy TRA1 lists the transport considerations for new development. Hallam and St Albans School previously raised concerns with the wording Criterion (a)(ii) which requires that development would not lead to highway safety problems or cause unacceptable impacts on the transport network. This language is considered imprecise and ambiguous when contrasted with §115 of the NPPF which states: *“Development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe”*. (emphasis added). This opinion remains.
- 9.3 Criteria b(i), b(iv) and b(x) of Policy TRA1 references the implementation of active travel routes, suggesting the elements of the wider active travel network which will need to be delivered independently by Broad Locations, even where the routes may benefit more than one Broad Location.
- 9.4 Specifically, it is suggested that criterion (b)(x) is amended to read:

“Suitable mechanisms will be provided to secure sustainable transport measures, including contributions towards or delivery of schemes identified in the LCWIP, Bus Service Improvement Plan, Growth & Transport Plan and IDP and improvements to the existing highway network and other appropriate transport mitigations, including as identified in Supporting Documents to the Local Transport Plan.”

Policy TRA4 - Parking

- 9.5 Parking standards are set out in Policy TRA4. Whilst the District Council's approach to lower than standard parking requirements at Broad Locations is supported, the aspiration to maintain current levels of parking in more central areas is not, and neither is the presumption of refusal of permission of proposals in the built up area. Indeed, the intention to increase parking provision in the case of new development in these locations, appears to be contrary to criterion (c) of Policy SP8 which seeks to promote a reduction in car journeys for new and existing settlement. In this regard, criterion (b) is likely to hamper or prevent delivery of active travel infrastructure on routes identified for improvement within the LCWIP and within the North St Albans wider active travel measures proposals. Given the constrained highway network with St. Albans, particularly in central areas, there must remain flexibility to consider the relocation or reduction of on-street parking provision in order to meet active travel objectives. We consider this policy as written will undermine the aims of Policy SP8.

10 Natural environment

- 10.1 This section comments on the proposed natural environment, biodiversity and landscape. Hallam and St Albans School are supportive of the intention to protect and enhance green infrastructure for its role in combating climate change and supporting biodiversity, along with its value for recreation, health and wellbeing, and landscape value. In the context of these objectives, North St Albans represents a positive opportunity to enhance green and blue infrastructure what is presently a limited baseline provision.

Policy NEB1 – Woodlands, trees, and landscape features

- 10.2 In the case of the Broad Location at North St Albans, Hallam and St Albans School support the intent to enhance tree cover and protect existing woodlands, trees and landscape features. Further clarity is however sought in relation to criterion (a), which requires one semi-mature tree for each dwelling. It is not clear from the policy wording what this provision is expected to include, whether it be on-plot planting, or could be delivered in part or in whole through woodland creation. There also appears to be a discrepancy in the policy, which does not reflect the intentions of Policy LG1 which also requires one tree to be provided per 2.5 bedspaces for C2 accommodation.
- 10.3 The wording of criterion (e) of the policy also creates potential problems from a deliverability perspective, and although the presumption against the removal or destruction of any hedgerow that is considered important is acknowledged and understood, it is considered that this sentence should be concluded to read *“unless material considerations exist to justify their loss or amendment, and any loss can be mitigated for”*.

Policy NEB7 – Biodiversity provision in the design of new buildings and open spaces

- 10.4 It is agreed that development proposals should have regard to existing biodiversity on site, and how future biodiversity considerations can be designed for.
- 10.5 Criterion (c) specifically identifies the requirements for new residential development, which includes one swift brick box, one bat box, and one insect box, per dwelling. It also states that the swift boxes should be installed in groups in optimal locations. Consideration needs to be afforded to the practicality of this; although there are no in principle objections to the installation of such measures, the requirement for three boxes per dwelling would require consideration at a fairly early stage of the development proposals for large schemes to establish where they would be most successful. This should also be dependent on the result of survey work; if there are existing high levels of species within the site then there should be a greater emphasis on delivering these measures.
- 10.6 It is suggested that criterion (c) is amended to read:

“Where practical and feasible, all housing proposals should provide:

- i. at least one swift brick per dwelling, on average for the development, installed in groups in optimal locations;*
- ii. at least one integrated bat box, on average for the development, per dwelling; and*
- iii. at least one integrated insect box, on average for the development, per dwelling.*

In instances where survey work reveals an existing high presence of these species, greater emphasis should be placed on delivering these measures”.

Policy NEB10 - Landscape and design

- 10.7 Hallam and St Albans School agree that landscaping elements of development are essential to creating sustainable and attractive places.
- 10.8 Criterion (a)(vi) requires the use of appropriate native species with all stock "*sources and where possible grown entirely in the UK*". Although it is acknowledged that this does state "*where possible*", this is still quite restrictive.

Policy NEB12 - Green space standards and new green space provision

- 10.9 The need to identify specific requirements for new green space is supported, and the level of detail provided is welcome and will be helpful in informing development proposals. There are however a couple of sections where the policy could be strengthened and/or clarified.
- 10.10 In regard to new green space, criterion (a)(vi) states that the creation of new green space should "*encourage the provision of ancillary infrastructure to support the use of green spaces, where appropriate*". The policy does not offer any definition of ancillary infrastructure in this context so it is not possible to ascertain what type of supporting built development may or not be acceptable.
- 10.11 The requirement for natural and semi-natural green spaces has been increased to 34.6sqm per person, from 5sqm per person in the Regulation 18 consultation document. There does not appear to be sufficient evidence to justify this increase; within the Open Space Study (2024), the Fields In Trust suggest 1.8ha per 1000 population, which equates to approximately 18sqm per person. The Open Space Study also reveals a current provision of approximately 3.46ha per 1000 population, which equates to approximate 34.6sqm per person. There is evidently a surplus of such space in the District per population and therefore whilst 18sqm per person may be aspirational, it does not appear to be necessary, and a provision of 34.6sqm per person is therefore certainly unnecessary. Conversely, the existing overprovision in the District suggests a lower quantum of natural and semi-natural green space can be justified.
- 10.12 The Regulation 18 version of the Local Plan also identified a necessary provision of 0.18sqm per person for teenage play areas. The Regulation 19 version has excluded this, without any apparent justification. The provision for children's play area has also stayed the same at 0.6sqm per person and so it plainly has not been accounted for elsewhere. Hallam and St Albans School suggest that this needs to be revisited.
- 10.13 In regard to allotments, the draft policy strictly refers to provision of "allotments". This is incredibly onerous and conflicts with current best practice which encourages inclusive, community-focused productive landscapes. Hallam and St Albans School consider that a more beneficial policy requirement would be for this to refer to "allotments and/or community grow zones". Strict adherence to such a policy requirement might also compromise the achievement of other equally important policy objectives and as such a balanced approach will be necessary in considering individual development proposals. This amendment would represent a positive policy approach.

11 Built environment

- 11.1 This section comments on the proposed built environment, which Hallam and St Albans School are supportive of protecting and enhancing.

Strategic Policy SP11 - Historic environment

- 11.2 Strategic Policy SP11 relates to the need to balance the need for growth with proper conservation and enhancement of the historic environment. There is some conflict between criterion (a) and the NPPF, with the first policy test stating that strategies for conservation will include "maintaining a strong presumption in favour of the retention, conservation and enhancement of heritage assets and their setting according to their significance". Paragraph 205 of the NPPF does indeed identify the need to consider the impact of a proposed development on the significant of an asset, but makes no similar conclusions in respect of their setting. As such, it is considered that criterion (a) is rewritten accordingly:

"Maintaining a strong presumption in favour of the retention, conservation and enhancement of heritage assets according to their significance."

Policy HE4 - Scheduled monuments

- 11.2.1 As drafted, Policy HE4 requires all development which would adversely affect a scheduled monument to obtain a Scheduled Monument Consent prior to planning permission being granted. This is problematic because it relies on the full suite of information and detailed drawings to be available at that time, however, this is not practical for applications that are submitted in outline, with detailed matters reserved for subsequent approval. In these scenarios it is therefore not possible for the sufficient level of information to be provided and for the Scheduled Monument Consent to be issued. As such It is suggested that Policy HE4 is reconsidered in this context and the need for separate Scheduled Monument consent is instead sought at the detailed design stage, whether that be outline or reserved matters.

12 Design

- 12.1 Hallam and St Albans School are committed to delivering a high quality scheme at North St Albans which offers good placemaking, responds to the site context, and is befitting of its edge of settlement location. Whilst generally supportive of the draft policies relating to the design of spaces, a few minor amendments are proposed to strengthen the enforcement of these requirements.

Strategic Policy SP12 - High quality design

- 12.2 Criterion (b) of Strategic Policy SP12 refers to schemes being of a "*high quality architecture*". It is considered that the reference to "architecture" being of a high quality lends itself to subjectivity, and should instead be reworded to "high quality placemaking".

Policy DES1 - Design of new development

- 12.3 Criterion (i) of Policy DES1 identifies the need for dwellings to be "*set a minimum of 1m from the property / party boundary above ground floor level, where it would otherwise result in an undesirable terracing effect*". This is overly specific, and arguably will not be relevant in the consideration of all development proposals. To avoid any potential future conflict, it is suggested that this is reworded to allow minimum floor levels to be controlled via a suitably worded planning condition.

Policy DES2 - Public space

- 12.4 Criterion (b) of Policy DES2 refers to the need for public space to "*prioritise pedestrian and bicycle movements and be Integrate with active travel networks*". It is suggested that this is reworded to refer to "existing active travel networks", as not all future development proposals will be of a scale which includes new active travel networks.
- 12.5 Criterion (f) states that public space should also "*be supported by ancillary infrastructure where appropriate*", however it is suggested that "*ancillary infrastructure*" is replaced with "*associated functions*" to increase flexibility of these spaces.

Policy DES3 - Efficient use of land

- 12.6 Policy DES3 states that development should:

"Where additional residential units are proposed, achieve at least the density of the existing site context or 40 net dwellings per hectare, whichever is higher"

- 12.7 Hallam and St Albans School consider that this should be balanced against other factors, including for example, the respective requirements for housing mix and/or contextual factors which may necessitate a lower density in order to be in keeping with local context and character. A strict residential density could result in inappropriate development which complies with policy but does not relate to the immediate site environs.

Policy DES5 - Residential amenity standards

- 12.8 Standards in regard to amenity space can be useful in forming development proposals, however it is considered that a suitably worded sentence should be included to identify that some exceptions to the policy may exist where higher density development can be achieved. There is risk that as currently drafted, the requirements of Policy DES5 could conflict with the need to seek to make the most efficient use of land as per Policy DES3 and in turn compromise other important policy objectives.

13 Implementation

13.1 This section comments on the proposed implementation of development proposals.

Strategic Policy SP14 - Delivery of infrastructure

- 13.2 Strategic Policy SP14 concerns the delivery of infrastructure either by direct provision or by way of planning obligations. It is noted that criterion (a)(iv) requires any adverse impacts to be mitigated. Hallam and St Albans School do not agree that any and all adverse impacts require mitigation, and it is normal for this to relate only to “unacceptable” adverse impacts. Adverse effects may be outweighed by positive beneficial effects and not warrant mitigation. However, as currently written, the practical operation of criterion (c) of the policy would be that such development should be refused. In this regard, it should be noted that paragraph 55 of the NPPF acknowledges that *“unacceptable development could be made acceptable through the use of conditions or planning obligations”*.
- 13.3 There are also concerns that criterion (b) requires “new infrastructure to support new development is operational no later than the completion of development or phase in which it is needed, unless otherwise agreed with relevant providers”. Whilst indeed developers should ensure that these mechanisms are in place, there is potential that a development could have made the appropriate contributions to infrastructure delivery, but are unable to ensure that it is physically delivered within any particular timescale, requiring a delay of unknown length in the development delivery. This is particularly likely to be the case when developers are relying on the District or County Council(s) to deliver particular elements of infrastructure.

14 Soundness of the Local Plan

- 14.4 In the process of plan-making, paragraph 35 of the NPPF identifies four tests of soundness to determine whether Local Plans have been prepared in accordance with the necessary legal and procedural requirements and can therefore be deemed “sound”.
- 14.5 These four tests are set out as follows, and can be applied to non-strategic policies in a proportionate way, taking into account the extent to which they are consistent with relevant strategic policies for an area. Specifically, the NPPF confirms that plans can be considered “sound” if they are:
- positively prepared;
 - justified;
 - effective; and
 - consistent with national policy.
- 14.6 Although Hallam and St Albans School are generally supportive of the key components of the Local Plan and indeed the District Council's allocation of North St Albans as a Broad Local for mixed use development, there remain some policy nuances which do not meet these tests of soundness.
- 14.7 Without repeating the commentary and analysis above in earlier sections of these representations in any great detail, the key concerns in relation to the soundness of the Local Plan are summarised below.
- 14.8 The conflict in the residential capacity of North St Albans as noted throughout Parts A and B of the Local Plan affects deliverability, and does not provide any meaningful quantum of development for a developer to aspire to achieve. This is not **effective** and will affect how the decision maker interprets the Local Plan and potentially hinders deliverability of the allocation.
- 14.9 The housing supply position is not resilient. There is a total housing need of 14,603 dwellings and the housing trajectory identifies a total housing land supply of 14,989 dwellings, resulting in a flexibility allowance of just 2.6%. Although no strict guidance exists, this is significantly lower than the 10% flexibility allowance which is commonplace. This will not be **effective** in achieving actual housing need targets, nor does it demonstrate **positive preparation** on the Council's behalf.
- 14.10 In the context of this housing need, the stepped housing trajectory and indeed the delayed delivery of North St Albans until later in the plan period cannot be **justified**. Significant amounts of work have been undertaken to progress the proposals for North St Albans, meaning that it could reasonably be expected to contribute to the identified housing need in the first part of the plan period. This is neither **effective or justified** and does not suggest that it has been **positively prepared**.
- 14.11 The key development requirements identified for North St Albans at B1 do not reflect the latest capacity work undertaken, and the discussions held between Hallam, St Albans School, the District Council, and Hertfordshire County Council. In many instances the wording is not **justified or effective** and cannot be said to have been **positively prepared**.
- 14.12 The greenspace standards set at Policy NEB12, particularly in relation to natural and semi-natural green spaces, cannot be **justified**. The requirement has increased from 5sqm to 34.6sqm per person without sufficient evidence to explain the inflation. There is also an absence of requirements for teenage play areas, despite there previously being a need for 0.6sqm per person, which again cannot be justified.

- 14.13 Policy NEB12 also strictly refers to allotment provision and omits other forms of inclusive, community-focused productive landscapes. It is considered that this is not **effective** and cannot be deemed to be **positively prepared**.
- 14.14 The lack of flexibility around implementation and infrastructure could result in development proposals being refused on grounds of unacceptable impact, and could also stall delivery of development proposal assets. This is not **justified**.
- 14.15 Summarily, for these reasons, and whilst the overarching strategy, approach and proposed allocation at North St Albans is soundly based, in these limited instances it cannot be concluded that the Local Plan as currently drafted can be considered sound.

Appendix 1. Proposed rewording of B1 at Part B of the Local Plan

Proposed use: Primarily residential ~~1,230~~ 1,097 units (indicative) (this includes 150 from planning permission 5/2021/0423)."

Key development requirements:

One ~~age restricted specialist extra-care~~ facility comprising of 70-80 self-contained units, one 70-80 bed nursing home and 4 ~~supported living adult disability service~~ units for people with disabilities (these units are included within the indicative dwellings figure).

~~Land for a~~ 2FE primary school, including Early Years provision, to serve the new and wider community. This should include provision of an all weather playing pitch available for community use.

A new local centre to provide local services, including sufficient space for a Medical Centre and commercial development opportunities.

Replacement of the displaced playing fields. The replacement playing fields must be an equivalent or better playing field in terms of quantity and quality and delivered prior to commencement of any development on the existing playing field, and will include a new pavilion annex to serve the replacement fields. Sport England will be a statutory consultee on any future planning application that would affect the playing field within this site allocation.

On-site outdoor sports provision to meet the additional needs generated by the development. An offsite facility may be acceptable where justified by evidence and subject to early delivery of the offsite provision prior to occupation of first home.

Contributions / enhancements to support relevant schemes in the LCWIP and GTPs as indicated in the TIA.

Support for a transport network (including walking and cycling links) and public transport services upgrades / improvements as appropriate, including off-site improvements to Harpenden Road, Sandridgebury Lane, Valley Road, Ancient Briton junction and King William IV junction, that prioritise active and sustainable transport, as appropriate, and links to St Albans City Centre, station and education as appropriate; aligned to schemes in the GTPs and LCWIP.

Provide pedestrian and cycle links to the points of connection along the site boundary with of the part of the site that is delivering 150 homes from planning permission 5/2021/0423.

Support for the improvement of the Public Rights of Way network to enable active travel and recreational use to Heartwood Forest and Nomansland Common.

Development proposals must take appropriate account of the Ancient Woodland, County Wildlife Site, Priority Habitat and trees covered by Tree Preservation Order along the south-east boundary, and the Priority Habitat close to the eastern boundary comprising an area of deciduous woodland.

A noise assessment must be carried out regarding the railway line and appropriate mitigating measures provided as necessary.

Take appropriate account of these Environmental Constraints: Source Protection Zone (SPZ) 3; Bedrock Aquifer; Superficial Aquifer.

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