

Our Ref: Ref 22-2853

Mr Graham McCormick
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By Email: graham@mscott.co.uk

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Dear Graham

LAND WEST OF WATLING STREET, PARK STREET, ST ALBANS: GREEN BELT REVIEW

I write with regard to the proposed residential development on land west of Watling Street, Park Street, St Albans (referred to as the 'Site'), in response to the recently published St Albans Stage 2 Green Belt Review.

The Stage 2 Green Belt Review has been produced to inform the preparation of the emerging Local Plan. The Review provides a summary of previous Green Belt work undertaken in St Albans, identifies and assesses sub-areas and to what extent they meet the Green Belt purposes, and assesses the washed over villages and their future within or inset from the Green Belt.

A Stage 1 Green Belt Review was undertaken on behalf of Dacorum Borough Council, St Albans City and District Council and Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council in November 2013. With regard to St Albans Council, the review was commissioned to inform the emerging Local Plan and to meet NPPF requirements.

The Site has been located within Parcel GB28 of the Stage 1 Green Belt Review. Parcel GB28 is considered within the review to be one of a number of small-scale sub areas, all found to contribute the least to the Green Belt purposes, considered to be non-strategic in nature and assumed not to significantly adversely impact upon the strategic function of the Green Belt. These small-scale sub areas have been assessed in greater detail within the Stage 2 review.

The Stage 2 Green Belt Review is a more spatially focussed piece of work and as a result, the search area was identified by placing a buffer around each settlement inset from the Green Belt. Buffers were set at 400m from the main settlements and 250m from the lower order settlements. This would allow for the identification of areas of land that could encourage a sustainable pattern of development, whilst maintaining the integrity of the Green Belt.

Park Street has been considered as a lower order settlement, and therefore a buffer of 250m has been applied, which fully contains the proposed Site.

Within the Stage 2 review, the Site is located within Green Belt Parcel SA – 108, which has been assessed against the first 4 purposes of the Green Belt as identified within the NPPF, whilst purpose 5 was excluded from this assessment.

Purpose 1: To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas

Parcel SA-108 scored 0 out of 5 against Purpose 1 of the Green Belt, and therefore was not considered to contribute to the protection of open land at the edge of one of more distinct large built up areas. Nicholsons agrees with this result.

Purpose 2: To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another

Parcel SA-108 scored 1 out of 5 against Purpose 2 of the Green Belt, and is therefore considered to form a 'less essential' gap, which is of sufficient scale and character that development is unlikely to cause merging between settlements. Nicholsons agrees with this result.

Purpose 3: To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

Parcel SA-108 scored 5 out of 5 against Purpose 3 of the Green Belt and is considered that the sub-area contains less than 3% built form and possesses a strong unspoilt rural character. Nicholsons disagrees with this result for the following reasons.

In our professional opinion, the parcel cannot be considered in isolation, but its context must be considered also when making judgements as to whether its character is urban or rural. Its settlement edge location creates a transitional sub-urban character. Whilst it is agreed that the parcel contains less than 3% built form, it is not considered that it possesses a strong unspoilt rural character. The parcel is currently in agricultural use, but it has strong visual and audible connections to the road infrastructure and residential dwellings along Watling Street to the east, and moderate visual connections to Old Orchard to the south. As a result, the parcel feels connected to the existing settlement, and cannot in our opinion be described as unspoilt.



View looking south along Watling Street, with the Site to the right of the road.



View from within Site, illustrating strong connection with the settlement edge.



View from within Site, illustrating mature vegetation along western boundary.



View from within Site, illustrating presence of residential dwellings along southern boundary.

When viewing the parcel from the north, it is possible to look across the parcel and view settlement edge dwellings along two of its three boundaries. Mature vegetation along the parcel's western edge creates a strong defensible boundary between the parcel and the open countryside beyond, and serves to contain the parcel to the west, further strengthening its relationship to the settlement edge to the east and its isolation from the surrounding countryside.

It is curious that the immediately adjacent parcel to the west (SA-107) scores a 3 for Purpose 3 of the Green Belt, and it is reported that the parcel contains less than 10% built form and/or possesses a largely rural character. It is our professional opinion based upon site observation that parcel SA-108 displays no stronger a rural character than parcel SA-107, and yet the latter parcel has scored lower.

In comparison, parcel SA-113 which lies within a settlement gap along the A5183 to the south of the Site, scores a 2 for Purpose 3. Whilst this parcel occupies a settlement edge setting, it is comprised of a large area of mature vegetation and connects to the open countryside to the east.

It is our opinion that scoring parcel SA-108 as a 5 for Purpose 3 is too high, given its transitional sub-urban character and the much lower score for the adjacent parcel that lies further from the settlement edge within open countryside. In our opinion and based upon our evidence, parcel SA-108 better aligns with a score of 2 - *'Sub-area contains less than 15% built form and/or possesses a semi-urban character.'*

Purpose 4: To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

Parcel SA-108 scored 0 out of 5 against Purpose 4 of the Green Belt, and it is considered that the parcel does not abut an identified historic place nor provide views to an historic place, and therefore does not contribute to this purpose. Nicholsons agrees with this result.

Conclusion

The overall performance of parcel SA-108 is concluded within the Stage 2 review to be Strong, but with a Less Important contribution to the wider strategic Green Belt.

It is concluded in our professional opinion that parcel SA-108 should be scored as a 2 against purpose 3 of the Green Belt, which would give an Overall Performance of Weakly meets the assessment criteria, with a Less Important contribution to the wider Green Belt.

Yours sincerely



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Senior Landscape Consultant