

APPENDIX 4 – DEVELOPMENT SITES AND STRATEGY EVALUATION (DSSOE) – BRIEF ADDITIONAL CLARIFICATION

Executive Summary

- The scoring of Green Belt sites by SADC has been one long exercise in deciding what result is politically required, and adjusting the scores as necessary to achieve that result. Appendix 4 is just the latest step in that process. It is a flimsy piece of window-dressing, driven by a determination to cling to the site rankings decided in July 2014, regardless of the evidence.
- Appendix 4 uses a number of well-worn techniques with which we are all now very familiar. When agreed methodologies fail to reach the “right” conclusion, they are abandoned in favour of an alternative method. Evidence which points towards a different answer is ignored or misrepresented. Officers take completely the opposite stance from those previously taken on the same site. Assertions are made for which there is no evidential basis at all.
- PPC members have one last chance to decide whether they want to be forever associated with this evidential dog’s breakfast or are prepared to do the right thing and subject officers’ work to rigorous examination. Hundreds of thousands of pounds of council taxpayers’ money is about to be thrown away on promoting a plan through examination which has no proper evidential basis at all.
- This paper concentrates on the score given to NW Harpenden for traffic and access and provides a line-by-line analysis of the reasoning put forward by officers in Appendix 4 to justify the score of 8/10 for NW Harpenden under Criteria 6: traffic and access, as opposed (in particular) to the score of 3/10 for North of St Albans. That is not because it is only the traffic and access score which is wrong: it is because this score provides a vivid snapshot of the way in which SADC is prepared to manipulate the process to achieve its desired ends.
- We also draw attention to a truly remarkable *volte-face* on the part of officers in their views about the suitability of North of St Albans for mixed-use.

Agreed Scope of Criterion 6

1. We start by reminding PPC members of what they agreed in March 2014. They agreed what Criterion 6 was to measure, and what evidence officers would collect. Here are the relevant extracts from the paper which officers put forward and PPC agreed:

(6) Vehicular access and traffic impact

5.18 The purpose of this assessment criterion is to assess the impact that development of a site will have upon the road network. Consideration here will include whether or not safe and suitable access can be made to the site. The impact that development of the site will have upon congestion will also be assessed here. This will involve detailed discussions with Hertfordshire County Council.

5.19 Primary information sources for assessment:

- Site visits
- Aerial photography / GIS data analysis
- Discussions with Hertfordshire County Council
- Local Transport Plans

(6) Vehicular access and traffic impact

Main factors to consider:

- Can suitable access to the site be achieved?
- Degree of impact upon road network and potential for measures to mitigate the impact

2. Bearing that agreed position in mind, we take each part of the reasoning which officers now put forward to justify giving 8/10 to NW Harpenden for this criterion.

Line-by- Line Analysis of Criterion 6

- A. ***“A small decrease in score from 9 to 8 is proposed, because of the challenge to improved cycling provision at some pinch points that exist and will likely only be partly resolved (e.g. Nickey Line bridge).”***
3. It has been blindingly obvious from the outset to all who know NW Harpenden that a safe cycle route cannot be provided down the A1081 without widening the Nickey Line Bridge, a massively expensive engineering task.
4. Officers acknowledge the Nickey Line Bridge as a “pinch point” as regards cycling provision, but at the same time refuse to acknowledge that it is also a “pinch point” as regards traffic flow, which contributes to this section of the A1081 being designated by HCC as a “congestion hotspot”.
- B. ***“However, no further decrease is considered reasonable as the fundamental positive attributes for access remain”.***
5. See below as to these “fundamental positive attributes”.
- C. ***“Developer presentations and other work confirm that local proposals for delivery of access can be achieved.”***
6. What PPC told officers in March 2014 – more than two years ago – was that they expected officers to have “detailed discussions” with Hertfordshire CC before scoring all 8 of the green belt sites. This is clearly vital, as planning officers do not have the requisite highways expertise.

7. As confirmed by a Freedom of Information Act response, officers did not take **any advice at all** from HCC about the highways aspects of the 8 sites before scoring them in July 2014. So officers did not do what PPC had required them to do.
8. If HCC had now considered the developers' proposals for delivery of access on all 8 sites, and had advised SADC that the proposals for NW Harpenden were substantially better than any of the other 7 sites, justifying a very high score, Appendix 4 would say so. The absence of any reference to HCC clearly shows that it has not.
9. As to "developer presentations", the developer presentations presented to PPC in November 2015 **all** show access points, so the fact that L & G's presentation shows such access points on its slides can hardly be a reason for scoring NW Harpenden more highly than any other site. The question is not whether access points can be shown on a powerpoint slide. It is whether those proposals have been independently evaluated as properly workable, safe and not unduly disrupting traffic flow.
10. As to "other work", we assume this is a reference to the report which L & G have commissioned from Brookbanks, highways consultants, and which forms Appendix 8 to the Infrastructure Delivery Plan ("**the Brookbanks Report**"). It is surprising, however, if the score of 8/10 is said to derive from the information in this report, since this score was put forward by officers in May 2016, and the Brookbanks Report was only written in June 2016. Perhaps PPC members would like to ask officers what evidence they had available to them in May 2016, when they committed themselves to this score?
11. In any event, the data in the Brookbanks Report (appendix B, page 5) indicates that the proposed new access to S5 at Roundwood Lane will be above practical capacity by 2031. Practical capacity of junctions is generally taken as 85% of the ratio of flow to capacity or "RFC". The junction will have an RFC of 89.5% in the morning peak, 89.6% in the evening peak. There will be substantial queues at this new access, contributing yet further to the "congestion hotspot" on the A1081.

D. "There is reasonable secondary access from Ambrose Lane".

12. There is no evidence at all to support the contention that safe and suitable access can be obtained from Ambrose Lane.
13. Neither L & G's presentation slides from November 2015, nor the Brookbanks Report, models this supposed secondary access. Furthermore, Brookbanks have not conducted any traffic surveys along Ambrose Lane or any of the secondary roads around the NW Harpenden site.
14. Again, the absence of any reference to Hertfordshire CC demonstrates that this assertion is not supported by anybody who is independent of the developers and has the requisite highways expertise.

E. "There is a very high capacity to minimise impact upon the road network by measures to mitigate the impact."

15. Where is the advice from HCC to justify this assertion? Does that advice compare S5 with all the other sites? Where is the advice from the Highways England as regards the relative impact of all 8 sites on the Strategic Road Network?

16. HCC has produced some slides showing the initial results of their COMET modelling. These provide only very high level information and do not model the specific impact of each of the 8 sites. However, they do show the A1081 approach to Harpenden from the north as an area of current and future junction delay.
17. The Brookbanks Report does seek to model the specific impact of development of NW Harpenden, but there is no equivalent for all the other sites, including S4, against which comparison may be made. PPC members cannot know whether 8/10 is right for NW Harpenden and 3/10 for North of St Albans without the same assessments being carried out on all 8 of the sites.
18. Furthermore, the Brookbanks Report does not support the contention that there is “*very high capacity to minimise impact upon the road network by measures to mitigate the impact*”. We refer to our analysis of the Brookbanks Report, which we ask PPC members to read in full.
19. In brief, the data in the Brookbanks Report, when properly understood, shows:
 - That the cumulative impact on the road network of all the development planned for the area, including NW Harpenden, will be severe. For example, by 2031 the queues of traffic in the morning peak at the roundabout joining the A5138 and Redbourn Lane will be, on average, 1.8km long. The queue at the roundabout joining Redbourn Lane to the A1081 will be 1.7km long.
 - The “mitigation” which Brookbanks propose to those junctions is essentially fictional. It involves minor tweaks to the junctions which will have the effect of stripping out the additional cars generated by the S5 development, but will not tackle the underlying huge excess over capacity. In reality there will have to be major highways works to which all developers will be required to contribute. What those works are, whether they are possible and what they might cost are all unknown.
 - The mini-roundabout at the junction of the A1081 and Station Road will be massively impacted by development of S5. As of now, this junction is within capacity and has an average queue of 3.2 cars in the morning peak. By 2031, even without development of S5, the junction will be above capacity and the queue will be 16 times longer: 51.9 cars. A queue of that length would stretch from the mini-roundabout to beyond the War Memorial. Development of S5 will more than double the number of cars waiting in that queue, to 117.7 vehicles on average, which means that the queue will start north of the M & S garage. This is only the average: under certain conditions the queue will be twice as long – meaning that it would start close to S5 itself. The “mitigation” which Brookbanks proposes involves removing or narrowing central refuges and other safety features at the mini-roundabout, which is contrary to all policy and best practice because it puts pedestrians at risk. Even this so-called “mitigation” will only bring the queue down to an average 52.4 cars: many, many times greater than the levels we see today. It is extraordinary that officers consider that the removal of pedestrian safety features gives rise to “*very high capacity to minimise impact*”.
 - The consultants have not conducted any traffic surveys or modelled the traffic impact of the development of S5 on two key junctions: Park Hill/A1081/Nickey Line Bridge or

Thrales End/A1081: they say because they are awaiting information from HCC's COMET system. There is therefore absolutely no evidence, even from the developers, which gives any comfort that the traffic at the notorious "pinch point" of the Nickey Line Bridge can be mitigated to acceptable levels.

- F. ***"This area is very well located regarding the road network and access to Town facilities. The fundamental positive transport/accessibility attributes of the site remain that, as set out in the DSSOE (p.287, 289). The site is 1.5 km from the town centre and 1.9 km from the station; as well as being largely flat and level along the A1081 to the town centre and to the station. Walking is realistic (though towards the upper end of reasonable) and cycling is reasonable, as alternatives to the private car."***

20. This is a classic "moving of the goal posts". Criterion 6 is not concerned with proximity to the town centre. This is measured under Criterion 1, Sustainable Location:

(1) Sustainable location

5.7 Focusing development and employment upon sustainable locations reduces the need to travel by private car and ensures that residents have good access to services. The location of sites in relation to services and facilities will be assessed here. Between half a mile (approx. 800 metres) and 3 miles (approx. 4.8km) cycling provides the highest level of accessibility. Below half a mile, walking may be quicker or more convenient, whereas above 3 miles, bus use becomes more relevant.

5.8 Indicative distances to a variety of uses will be used where applicable. Distance assessments will measure approximate routes on the ground rather than "as the crow flies".

21. Nor is Criterion 6 concerned with proximity to the station. This is measured under Criterion 7, Public Transport:

(7) Public transport

5.20 A key sustainability consideration is the availability of alternative modes of transport, other than the private car, from a site. This assessment will not only test the distance to services, but also the frequency of services available. Consideration will also be given to whether there is scope to improve the public transport facilities on offer as part of any development.

5.21 A distance of 400 metres (representing a 5 minute walk) is normally taken as the distance which people are willing to walk to a bus stop. This is increased to 800 – 1000 metres (representing a 10-15 minute walk) for a railway station. Where there are gradients on the footways, the recommended walking distance is reduced by 10 metres for every 1 metre rise or fall. Therefore, a distance of 400 metres will be used in relation to access to a bus stop and 800 -1000 metres for access to a train station. A figure of 4.8km will be used to determine whether it is viable to cycle to a station. Distance assessments will measure approximate routes on the ground rather than "as the crow flies".

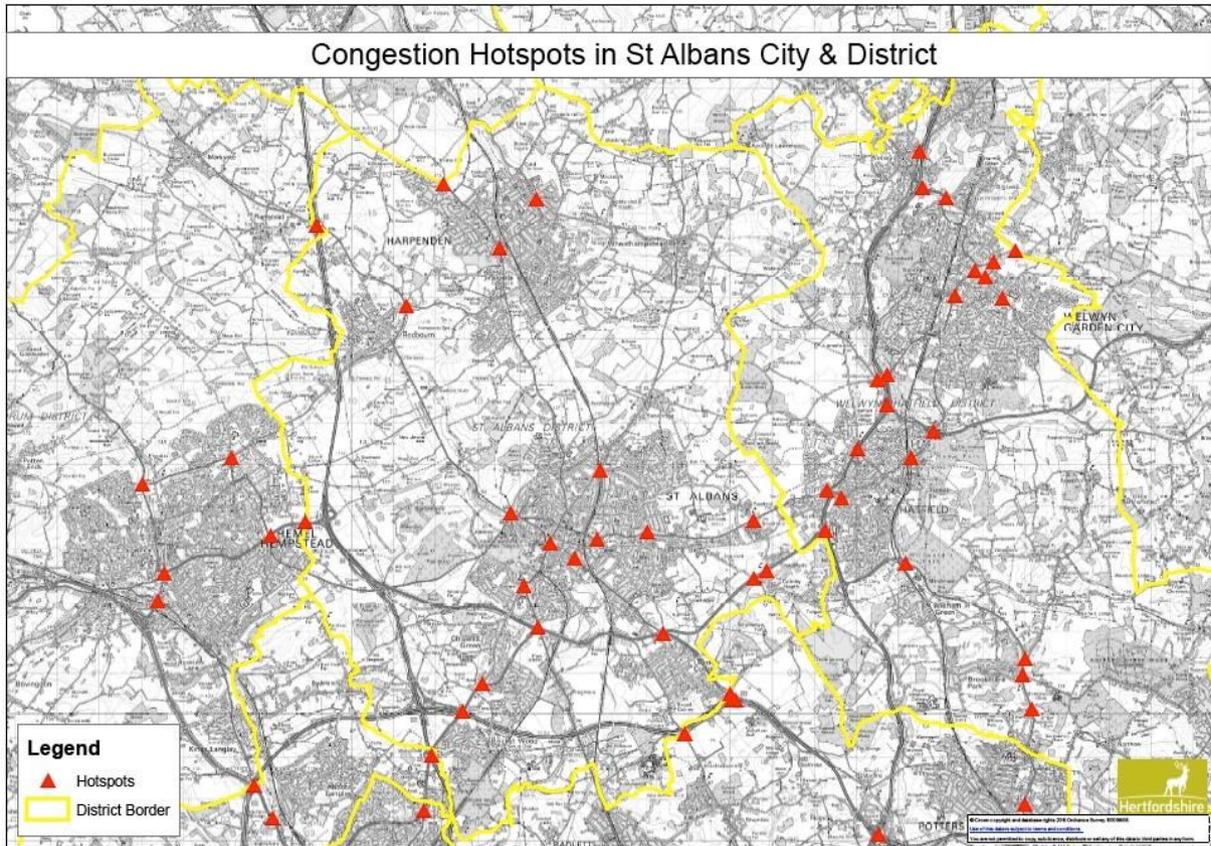
22. Officers are “double-counting” by seeking to introduce new elements into Criterion 6 which they have already taken into account in Criteria 1 and 7.
23. We have made clear in our Regulation 19 consultation response that we do not agree with the measurements of distance and walking time given in the DSSOE. Moreover, by asserting that “*walking is realistic (though towards the upper end of reasonable)*”, officers are directly contradicting what they advised in March 2014 and PPC has agreed.
24. Paragraph 5.7 of the March 2014 agreed methodology for scoring, set out above, indicates that in relation to Criterion 1, a distance of under half a mile (800m) will be treated as a walking distance.
25. Paragraph 5.21 of the same paper, also set out above, shows that under Criterion 7, as regards distance to a train station, 800-1000 m (representing a 10-15 minute walk) is the usual walking distance, but that this is affected by gradients. Even on officers’ doubtful measurements, neither the town centre (at 1.5km) nor the station (at 1.9km) is within the walking distances agreed in March 2014: indeed, the station is nearly twice as far away from S5 as the maximum distance agreed to be an acceptable walking distance.

G. “NB in considering this point it is noted that the now superceded Planning Policy Guidance 13: paragraph 74 said: ‘walking is the most important mode of travel at the local level and offers the greatest potential to replace short car trips, particularly under two kilometres’. “

26. This, too, is a classic sleight of hand. It seeks to persuade PPC members that 2km represents an acceptable walking distance. It does so by substituting a completely different (and superceded) methodology for determining what is a suitable walking distance for that which PPC specifically agreed in March 2014.

H. Missing Information

27. The analysis in Appendix 4 is notable as much for what it does not say, as what it does. Typically, key evidence which points in the “wrong” direction is suppressed.
28. So, for example, in originally scoring North of St Albans at 2/10 for traffic and access, officers were keen to draw attention to HCC’s description in 2009 of the section of the A1081 adjacent to S4 as a “congestion hotspot”. Strangely, although HCC had said exactly the same thing in the same document about the stretch of the A1081 adjacent to S5, officers did not see fit to draw attention to this, instead scoring the site 9/10 on the basis that “*traffic impact is likely to be acceptable.*”
29. What officers have omitted to inform PPC members when rescoring the sites is that as of 2016, HCC considers the stretch of the A1081 adjacent to NW Harpenden to be a “congestion hotspot” but no longer regards the A1081 next to North of St Albans to be one, as this graphic shows:



How did this information come to be omitted, when officers were undertaking the rescoring of these sites specifically in relation to traffic congestion, and in the light of sustained public criticism of the previous scores? Did officers fail to ask HCC because they were not interested in having HCC's views but only in maintaining the existing ranking of sites?

Mixed-Use Scoring for North of St Albans

30. We have concentrated in this paper predominantly on the traffic and access scoring for NW Harpenden, but also refer briefly to the mixed-use scoring for North of St Albans.
31. In July 2014, officers gave North of St Albans 0/5 for Criterion 3, Mixed-Use Development, on the basis that *“the sub-area is likely to be considered only for residential use....there is little scope for mixed use in this sub-area.”*
32. Officers continue to insist that 0/5 remains the correct scoring for the site, despite the fact that the developer's presentation confirmed that the site had potential for up to 4ha of employment space, a local centre with shops and cafés, a hotel, a health centre, a community hall and a primary school. They say they do not see how the site could be attractive to the market for speculative employment development. You might think that this apparent deficiency in the developer's presentation would have drawn to PPC members' attention in November 2015, when they were provided with copies of those presentations, if it was so glaring.
33. It was a different story when officers drew up the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment in 2009, a document which remains a key part of the SADC evidence base

for the SLP. In Appendix 14 to the SHLAA, officers summarised the attributes of North of St Albans like this (emphasis added):

Area of Search 7 – North of St Albans

This area of search covers farmland to the east of Harpenden Road (rear of Texaco filling station), west of the railway line and north of the Porters Wood employment area. Most of the area is owned by St Albans School.	
The site could accommodate 600-1,000 homes. <u>It could also provide local shopping facilities and possibly a food superstore, a primary school and an extension to the Porters Wood employment area.</u>	
Could accommodate an extension to the Porters Wood employment area – <u>this is one of the District’s few realistic opportunities for new employment sites.</u>	Space should be allowed to retain Porter’s Wood.
<u>Conclusions: There would be an adverse impact on attractive Green Belt countryside. However, this area has significant potential for residential or mixed use development. Potential benefits of development include local shopping facilities, public open space, a new access to the Porters Wood employment area and possibly new primary and secondary schools, an extension to the employment area and a food superstore.</u>	

34. So a site which officers in 2009 considered as “*one of the District’s few realistic opportunities for new employment sites*” and having “*significant potential for...mixed use development*” now scores 0/5 for Mixed-Use Development. How can that possibly be?

Conclusion

35. We emphasise that the traffic/access score for NW Harpenden and the Mixed-Use score for North of St Albans are not the only scores in the evaluation matrix which have demonstrably been reached for political reasons rather than being based soundly on evidence. The whole scoring process is fundamentally flawed, as we have set out repeatedly in our representations to SADC and which we will lay before the inspector. Only by requiring officers to start again, and base their scoring on the agreed methodology and on hard evidence, will the plan be sound.