

Extract from the CH&PP meeting report October 15th 2014

WGC4 Panshanger Aerodrome has been designated in the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan as an Area of Special Restraint (ASR) since 1993. At the last consultation in 2012, WGC4 was identified as a suitable Broad Location for Growth. This gave rise to a number of objections about the loss of the aerodrome from local residents, aviation groups and Sport England. Sport England view WGC4 as a strategically important site for aviation, that is of at least regional importance to air sports. There are no proposals to relocate this facility elsewhere in the region and the redevelopment of the site will therefore result in the loss of a facility and an opportunity to participate in the sport.

The Council has received a number of representations expressing concern about the safety implications of closing the airfield which have been passed onto the land owners.

Two different reports about the economic potential of the airfield have also been received. Including jobs off-site one report estimated that 43 full time equivalent jobs were associated with the airfield, while the other estimated that there were 20 jobs. One report and several representations to the Emerging Core Strategy consultation pointed out the potential for business people to fly into the airfield for meetings with local companies. No response has been received from Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) with regards to this site but it is not referred to in the Strategic Economic Plan for the county as a key asset. One of the reports considered that, for the airfield to have expanded its role, there would have needed to be significant investment. It suggested that the airfield's future could be secured by developing its role in business aviation increasing the number of flights without involving significantly larger aircraft or jet aircraft, but with limited helicopter operations and improved hangars. This report also suggested that, to facilitate these developments, the runway could be realigned to reduce its noise impact.

The owners of the airfield have been asked to consider providing a new runway aligned to the north of the existing one which would allow for the provision of some housing development on part of the existing airfield site.

Environmental issues

- A number of representations expressed concerns relating to the loss of a wildlife habitat. The site is not designated as a wildlife site. An ecological survey will be required to inform the masterplanning stage. The requirement for a structural landscape belt will provide an enhanced woodland habitat.
- Its elevated position gives rise to potential for polluted runoff into the river Mimram and impact on Tewinbury SSSI. Use of appropriate sustainable urban drainage should address this issue.
- The landscape has been assessed as medium sensitivity and medium capacity however its elevated position on a plateau and its proximity to Panshanger Historic Park and Garden and associated Repton landscape, the potential listed mess room will have to be taken into account in the masterplanning.
- No viable minerals within the Homes and Communities Agency portion of the site. No evidence has been submitted from Mariposa with regards to this.

Accessibility and Infrastructure issues

- Accessible location but size of site results in eastern end being more distant from facilities. Should land in East Herts come forward this part of the site would be accessible to new neighbourhood facility. The Emerging Core Strategy proposed a convenience shop at eastern end, links to cycle and footpath network, contribution to public transport and links to Panshanger Park. Several bus stops exist within 400 metres of the site.
- Infrastructure - site adjoins Springmead School which has potential for an additional 1 form-of-entry, contributions will be required to mitigate impact on highway.

Deliverability issues

- Site in two separate ownerships who will need to work together as site needs to be comprehensively developed in particular to address access and structural landscape belt. A masterplan for the site would be required.

Conclusions

With an estimated capacity of 700 dwellings the site is capable of making a significant contribution to the Objective Assessment of Need, affordable housing, and the provision for Gypsy and Traveller pitches. There are also opportunities to provide a link between Welwyn Garden City and Panshanger Park which would deliver a strategic objective. However its redevelopment would result in the loss of a valued facility which is likely to be designated of regional significance. The site is considered to be finely balanced.