



LOCAL PLAN PUBLICATION STAGE REPRESENTATION FORM

**North Hertfordshire Proposed Submission Local Plan**

Please return this form to North Hertfordshire District Council either by email to : [local.plans@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:local.plans@north-herts.gov.uk) or by post to: Strategic Planning and Projects Group, NHDC, PO Box 480, M33 0DE

The deadline for receipt of representations is **30 November 2016**. Late representations will not be considered.

*This form has two parts-*

**Part A** – Personal Details

**Part B** – Your Representation(s). Please fill in a separate sheet for each representation you wish to make.

**Part A**

**1. Personal Details**

**2. Agent Details**

*\*If an agent is appointed, please complete only the Title, Name and organisation boxes below but complete the full contact details the agent in 2.*

Title	Mr	
First Name	David	
Last Name	Ames	
Job Title (Where relevant)	Head of Strategic Planning	
Organisation (Where relevant)	Letchworth GC Heritage Foundation	
Address Line 1	Foundation House	
Line 2	Icknield Way	
Line3	Letchworth Garden City	
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## **Part B - Please use a separate sheet for each representation**

It is recommended that you read the Guidance Notes provided for an explanation of the terms used in this form.

**Name or Organisation:** Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation

3. To which part of the Local Plan does this representation relate?

Paragraph(s)  Policy  Site

4. Do you Consider the Local Plan is:

*(Please tick as appropriate)*

i) Legally Compliant	Yes	<input type="text" value="X"/>	No	<input type="text"/>
ii) Sound	Yes	<input type="text"/>	No	<input type="text" value="X"/>

If No, which of the Soundness tests does it fail?

Positively prepared	<input type="text"/>
Justified	X <input type="text"/>
Effective	X <input type="text"/>
Consistent with National Policy	<input type="text"/>

iii) Complies with the Duty to co-operate	Yes	<input type="text" value="X"/>	No	<input type="text"/>
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5. Please give details of why you consider the Local Plan not legally compliant or is unsound or fails to comply with the duty to co-operate. Please be as precise as possible.  
If you wish to support the legal compliance or soundness of the Local Plan or its compliance with the duty to co-operate, please also use this box to set out your comments.

We support the aspirations of this policy, but are of the view that there is disparity in the wording, which requires clarification.

The Heritage Foundation owns the freehold of Letchworth Garden City. We directly rack rent approximately 50% of the retail units and apartments above shops and the remainder is held on ground leases who rent these units, subject covenants of leases with us as freeholders. This freehold ownership includes sites identified as LG19, 20 and 21 (pgs 186 and 187 of the Plan).

Policy SP4 highlights a need for 38,100 sq m of additional 'A' class uses. In the breakdown 7,000 sq m of this is indicated to be town centre uses, which in using the definition in the NPPF includes uses which are not 'A' class, such as hotels, museums, leisure facilities and offices.

The allocations LG19, 20 and 21 refer to main town centre uses, but not specifically retail. We agree with the Submission Plan where it states there is no immediate need for additional retail floorspace until 2021 (para 13.219) and we also accept the background paper where it indicates that the existing vacant floorspace can make a significant contribution (para 19).



However, the Council should be aware that some of the format of the existing shops may not be a suitable to meet current market expectations and needs and therefore there should be a focus on qualitative and quantitative measures.

With respect to the provision of additional retail floorspace within Letchworth Garden City, this should be considered against the current position where the primary retail area does have some vacant units and these are often difficult to let for retail purposes. Although other uses such as those within Class A3 have proved to be more successful, there is a clear issue regarding retail trends and habits of customers, which questions the requirement for additional retail floorspace at this scale within the plan period.

The existing Town Centre Strategy (2007) is out of date for Letchworth. Policy SP4 refers to the need for up to date Town Centre Strategies and we support this requirement. However, Letchworth Garden City Town Centre Strategy was adopted in 2007 with the greater amount of proprietary work being undertaken prior to this. At this time, the retail environment differed dramatically to the current situation. This is linked to changes in trends in terms of the way that we purchase items and retail habits.

As such, it our view that alternative approaches, as well as retail, are required to ensure that our town centres are vibrant and interesting places, whilst demonstrating the level of vitality needed for businesses to succeed.

LG19, 20 and 21 include proposed new development sites at The Wynd, Gernon Road and Arena Parade respectively. Policy SP4 states that across the district 38,100 sq m 'A' Class floorspace is required. Para 13.219 refers to retail floorspace, but the heading on the table for 13.220 states 'Mixed Use', which would not meet the requirements of Policy SP4.

This confusion is in our view unhelpful and we consider that if the requirement for re-development of these sites is for retail use, to meet SP4, this could discourage investment in our town centres and prohibit other associated activities, including main town centre uses as defined by the NPPF.

Policy SP4 is precise about the amount of floorspace needed and where this should be provided, however in the background paper they indicate that projections at 2026 and beyond should 'be treated with caution and should only be used as a broad guide'.

The current Letchworth Garden City Town Centre Strategy incorporates development proposals which may not be viable or deliverable in the plan period. This is demonstrated by re-development proposals in the Wynd, which largely met the provisions of the Town Centre Strategy, despite receiving detailed planning permission and being part way through the Compulsory Purchase Order process, in 2011 and 2012 was found not to be deliverable and the scheme was subsequently withdrawn. Similarly, a further allocated site in the Town Centre Strategy incorporates a major redevelopment, known as the Arena, was also found not to be viable.

Therefore, the Wynd and Arena sites should be read in the context that previous major development schemes were not found to be viable. With the possibility of a further diminishment of retail needs, this may continue to be the case. These sites have current buildings and businesses in situ, which could make development proposals difficult to achieve, without recourse to compulsory purchase and we have no current proposals for these schemes. Therefore, although there may be scope for longer term re-development, there would have to be a significant improvement in market conditions for these to take place. This therefore questions whether these are 'viable and deliverable' in the plan period.



It is our view that the Gernon Road site (para 13.220), which is owned by the Heritage Foundation, District and County Councils could be considered a peripheral site in the town centre and is likely to be unattractive for a retail development, but could be suitable for other main town centre uses. It is noted that the background paper concludes in Appendix 2 that this should not be allocated for retail purposes.

The boundaries of the development sites shown in the Inset Plan for Letchworth also include the land allocated for re-development. This includes components which have already been developed and should therefore be excluded. For example, the Arena allocation include the former Post Office on Broadway, which has already been converted and is not available for re-development and the Wynd allocation includes St Michael's House, which is subject to current proposals for housing.

In our view, these various contradictions indicate that there is an urgent need for the Letchworth Town Centre Strategy to be reviewed and updated and this exercise should run in parallel to the Local Plan process, with the aim that this is adopted within 12 months of the adoption of this plan. As well as looking at retail need and future development sites in detail, key elements such as potential retail frontages also require review. This is particularly pertinent with proposed frontage changes included in the background paper.

As a major landowner in Letchworth Garden City Town, we would be happy to support this exercise and to link it to our own research and marketing information, as part of a review of our strategy for the town centre, included in our Five Year Plan for 2017, provided as a background paper.

We welcome the opportunity for Letchworth's town centre to meet wider needs and we have undertaken significant investment into arts and cultural activity, including a new theatre, community museum and studio/gallery, as well as continued investment into our cinema.

It is therefore submitted that at para 13.220 of the Submission Plan, this should refer to the accompanying table as 'Indicative Retail Allocations and Site Specific Criteria'. This in our view will enable further discussion through a new Letchworth Town Centre Strategy and not discourage investment into these sites for alternative uses.

Finally, in the policy or accompanying text, we believe that there should be recognition of the role of out of town retail and its impact on our town centres. In the case of Letchworth, we have an out of town Retail Park and also nearby in Biggleswade a large out of town Retail Park has recently opened. It is our view that these have an impact on the vibrancy and vitality of the town centre, which should be included in the Plan.

In conclusion, with respect to Policy SP4 and the proposed 'Retail' allocations in the Letchworth section of the Submission Plan, there is uncertainty if the identified sites are solely required for retail purposes or main town centre uses, due to the wording of the accompanying text (13.219 and 13.220). It is considered that these retail allocations are not necessary and could preclude investment for alternative proposals should they come forward. The Council's advisors confirm that there is sufficient provision up to 2021, within existing town centre units. They also indicate that predictions beyond this period are difficult and there is a questionable weight that can be applied to them.

Of the sites suggested, the Gernon Road site is not considered suitable for retail development, but could potentially accommodate other main town centre uses. The Wynd and Arena could be considered for future re-development, but as landowners, we can confirm that there are serious issues over viability and there are a series of barriers that would need to be addressed if this is to proceed, including securing ownership of the whole site and re-developing existing buildings

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and businesses. There are issues of clarity about whether retail or main town centre uses are being sought and the need to have an up to date Letchworth Garden City Town Centre Strategy.

As such, we consider that the Plan should be re-worded to provide more clarity over what will be sought and that the sites identified should be highlighted as indicative opportunities.

*(Continue on a separate sheet if necessary)*

6. Please set out what modification (s) you consider necessary to make the Local Plan legally compliant or sound, having regard to the test you have identified at question 5 above where this relates to soundness. *(NB Please note that any non-compliance with the duty to co-operate is incapable of modification at examination).* You will need to say why this modification will make the Local Plan legally compliant or sound. It will be helpful if you are able to put forward your suggested revised wording of any policy or text. Please be as precise as possible.

Proposed additional paragraph (after 4.48):

*'The indicative allocation of sites LG19, LG20 & LG21 will not prejudice other re-development proposals, which would be of benefit to the vibrancy and vitality of the town centre'. And*

*'The Letchworth Garden City Town Centre Strategy will be reviewed within 12 months of the adoption of this plan, which working with landowners, the Business Improvement District and other key stakeholders will consider frontages and if future growth is required, how this may be accommodated.'*

*(Continue on a separate sheet if necessary)*

**Please note** your representation should cover concisely all the information, evidence and supporting information necessary to support/justify the representation and the suggested modification, as there will not normally be a subsequent opportunity to make further representations based on the original representation at publication stage.

**After this stage, further submissions will only be at the request of the Inspector, based on the matters and issues he/she identifies for examination.**

7. If your representation is seeking a modification, do you consider it necessary to participate at the oral part of the examination?

☐

**No**, I do not wish to participate at the oral examination.

☒

**Yes**, I wish to participate at the oral examination

8. If you wish to participate at the oral part of the examination, please outline why you consider this to be necessary:

As the main landowner and landlord in Letchworth GC Town Centre, we wish to ensure that we are properly represented at any oral examination regarding the town centre and retail policies. This will ensure that the views of the organisation are properly represented and that we can make an important contribution regarding the capability of any proposals with current market conditions and ownership restrictions.

**Please note** the inspector will determine the most appropriate procedure to adopt to hear those who have indicated that they wish to participate at the oral part of the examination.

9. Do you wish to be notified when the Local Plan is submitted?

☒

**Yes**, I do wish to be notified

☐

**No**, I do not wish to be notified

10. Signature:

David Ames

Date:

29<sup>th</sup> Nov 2016

**Background Paper:**

**Letchworth GC Heritage Foundation 5 Year Plan (2016-21)**