

4.68 These sites are not considered to have ‘a reasonable prospect’ of being used for employment purposes over the course of the Plan period, and are therefore not being afforded long-term protection, in accordance with national policy.

4.7.4 Exceptional Circumstances

4.69 In order to support the proposed site allocations alterations may be required to the District’s Green Belt boundary. The NPPF requires that exceptional circumstances are demonstrated to justify any alteration to the Green Belt boundary, whether this is to remove or create areas of Green Belt. There is no clear definition of what amounts to exceptional circumstances, but case law is clear that any justification must be responsive to local conditions and take into account a range of factors.

4.70 As indicated in Section 4.1, the FEMA authorities jointly commissioned and are signed-up to the West Essex and East Hertfordshire Assessment of Employment Needs (Hardisty Jones Associates, October 2017), which provides an informed basis for future plan making across the Area. The study included a proposed distribution of employment land across the FEMA which takes into account local circumstances including constraints and land availability. It is intended that the support for the findings of the study is reflected in a further MoU.

4.71 The SSM sets out a clear strategy to minimise the use of Green Belt land for development. Paragraph 4.26 of the SSM sets out a sequential approach in which non-Green Belt land is prioritised for development over land within the Green Belt; within this Green Belt sites on land of least value are preferred over sites on land of most value to the Green Belt.

4.72 Table 4.3 shows that there is insufficient suitable land located within settlements and outside the Green Belt to meet the employment requirement of the District within the Plan period. In order to meet the development requirement identified, and achieve sustainable forms of development in and around existing settlements, alterations to the Green Belt boundaries are necessary.

4.73 The site allocations proposed in the Local Plan Submission Version will require alterations to the Green Belt boundary in North Weald Bassett and Waltham Abbey. In addition, since SR-0006-N is located within the area identified for release to support the Latton Priory Garden Community, this site will also benefit from removal from the Green Belt.

4.74 In arriving at the proposed site allocations consideration has been given to where there is likely to be demand for employment land in the future, the suitability of individual sites to accommodate development and their deliverability over the Plan period. The sites proposed for allocation therefore represent the minimum land take required from the Green Belt to enable the Council to meet the District’s employment requirement through a strategy that is both sustainable and deliverable. Such an approach accords with the requirements of national policy.