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**WEST STEVENAGE CONSORTIUM TO SUBMIT UNILATERAL UNDERTAKING TO
SECRETARY OF STATE**

The West Stevenage Consortium confirmed today that it is close to finalising a new unilateral undertaking to submit to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in respect of its application for 3,600 homes at West Stevenage.

In October 2005, the Secretary of State announced that he was minded to approve the Consortium's application for 3,600 homes at West Stevenage subject to amendments to the planning obligation to provide greater certainty over the delivery of infrastructure and community facilities to support the development. The new Unilateral Undertaking responds to this request for a revised planning obligation.

The range of community facilities contained in the initial obligation was described by the Inspector as "welcomed both for their contribution to sustainable development and as an exemplar of community planning", a point acknowledged by the Secretary of State. The infrastructure and facilities in the new planning obligation remains essentially unchanged, delivering circa £60m of secured community facilities by means of privately funded infrastructure investment. The total value of privately funded infrastructure provided by the development is circa £200m.

The level of planning obligation per housing unit on the West Stevenage development is comparable to the level of tariff (or 'roof tax') sought on major developments in Milton Keynes.

Over the past year the Consortium has worked with the three local authorities involved in the plans - Stevenage Borough Council, North Hertfordshire District Council and Hertfordshire County Council - and has responded to their concerns. The Consortium is confident that the new planning obligation achieves the greater certainty in the delivery of the infrastructure and facilities that the Secretary of State requires.

The new planning obligation takes the form of a Unilateral Undertaking as it has not been possible to reach an agreement with all parties due to a number of outstanding technical legal issues, ruling out a Section 106 agreement.

The issue of affordable housing is dealt with separately and has already been agreed. The Consortium entered into a binding legal agreement with Stevenage Borough Council and North Hertfordshire District Council last year over the provision of affordable housing. In total, the development will provide 990 affordable homes for people in housing need in these two local authority areas.

Andrew Dutton, the Project Director for the West Stevenage Consortium, commented:

“We are confident that the new Unilateral Undertaking remains an exemplar of community planning and have worked hard to ensure that it achieves the required certainty over the delivery of the infrastructure and investment that support the application for 3,600 homes”.

The Secretary of State will now make a decision on the 3,600 application.

ENDS

Notes:

A unilateral undertaking is a legal agreement that sets out developer obligations to provide infrastructure and community facilities to support a planned development and is agreed and signed by all landowners, but not all of the Local Authorities involved in a development.

A Section 106 agreement performs the same function as a unilateral undertaking but is agreed and signed by all parties involved in a development.

The main items covered in the Unilateral Undertaking include the following:

- 3 primary schools and a secondary school
- a fire station
- an ambulance station
- a health centre
- a cemetery
- high frequency bus services with free use for all new residents for a six month period
- widening the southbound off-slip at Junction 8 of the A1(M)
- signalling the off-slip roads at Junction 7 of the A1(M)
- a sports hall, a multi use games area, three sports pavilions, school sports changing rooms, sports pitches for cricket and football and all weather pitches for football and hockey
- a green waste composting site, recycling facilities

The Milton Keynes tariff (or ‘roof tax’) is around £19,000 per dwelling (at 2006 prices) and is proposed by the Government as a potential replacement for Section 106 agreements and Unilateral Undertakings. At West Stevenage, the comparable planning obligation including a proportion of privately funded infrastructure investment amounts to around £70 million.

The West Stevenage Consortium is made up of Taylor Woodrow Plc, Persimmon Plc, and the Garden Village Partnership. English Partnerships, the Government’s national regeneration agency, has an advisory role to the Consortium and owns part of the West Stevenage application site.

West Stevenage is designed to be a ‘leading edge’ mixed use urban extension to Britain’s first planned New Town, meeting high standards of sustainability, urban design and affordability. West Stevenage will

comprise three attractive and interlinked urban villages each with its own facilities and all set within a landscape framework that will minimise impact on the wider area.

The Consortium's website highlights West Stevenage's compliance with central Government policy, including:

- HOUSING DELIVERY - the ability of the site to deliver on the Government's commitment to a step-change in the delivery of new housing in the East of England through its Sustainable Communities Plan. The site's potential to deliver 1,375 affordable homes for people in housing need in the East of England, such as those on housing waiting lists, the elderly, those with special needs and key workers.
- SUSTAINABILITY - core sustainability objectives and targets that respond directly to the Sustainable Communities Plan.
- INFRASTRUCTURE DELIVERY – the West Stevenage plans will deliver the required infrastructure to support the development; transport and highways, community facilities and services.
- URBAN REGENERATION - the delivery of wider urban regeneration objectives for Stevenage town centre

The website can be viewed at www.weststevenage.co.uk.

The Examination in Public in to the East of England Plan was held between November 2005 and March 2006. This was conducted by an Independent Panel appointed by the Secretary of State.

The Independent Panel report in to the East of England Plan was published on 22nd June 2006 and recommends that a minimum of 5,000 homes be provided at West Stevenage in the period up to 2021. It also calls for a strategic review of the Green Belt in order to allow for the continued growth of Stevenage beyond 2021. In IC 111 the report states that "...the range of facilities and the measures proposed to ensure provision ...should, I consider, be welcomed both for their contribution to sustainable development and as an exemplar of community planning".

Development at West Stevenage has also been endorsed in the adopted Hertfordshire County Structure Plan, the Stevenage Local Plan and by the Inspector's report on the Consortium's planning applications.

For further information, please contact Emma Jordan on 020 7529 1733 or 07740 651 507.